

**SIR ROGER DE
COVERLEY AND THE
SPECTATOR'S CLUB**

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Sir Roger de Coverley and the Spectator's Club by Richard Steele & Joseph Addison

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RICHARD STEELE & JOSEPH ADDISON

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Photo: Walker & Cocherell, Clifford's Inn, E.C.

JOSEPH ADDISON.

*From the Portrait by Michael Dahl,
in the National Portrait Gallery.*

Sir Roger de Coverley
and
The Spectator's Club

By
Richard Steele and Joseph Addison

Introduction by
HENRY MORLEY

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INTRODUCTION

RICHARD STEELE and JOSEPH ADDISON were almost of the same age. They were both born in the year 1672—Steele, a lawyer's son, in Dublin, about the 12th of March (1671, old style); Addison in a Wiltshire parsonage on the following 1st of May. Steele had already lost both father and mother, and was very friendless, when he was sent to Charterhouse School as a boy on the foundation. There he first met Joseph Addison.

Addison came of a clerical family; his father, Lancelot, had been a poor clergyman. His grandfather had held a poor living in Westmoreland. His mother was a clergyman's daughter. An uncle became Bishop of Bristol when that see gave the title of Bishop with an income of £400 a year. Addison's father, however, was an able man, and had a friend in Joseph Williamson, afterwards Sir Joseph, and a Secretary of State, who gave him the living of Milston, in Wiltshire, worth £120 a year. On this he had married, and the firstborn of the marriage was gratefully named Joseph, after the patron who had made marriage possible. The same patron continued his good offices, and Lancelot Addison had become Dean of Lichfield when he sent his son Joseph to the Charterhouse.

Steele and Addison as schoolboys were alike in deep-seated religious feeling, and in the possession of that genius which has made their names still pleasant in our ears. They differed greatly in external accidents of character. Steele, with an Irish warmth of kindness, was frank, social, forgetful of himself; Addison was reserved, shy, and, except in free intercourse with a few intimate friends, embarrassed by self-consciousness. These were mere differences of temperament that made each

friend more delightful to the other; the bond that held them friends for life came of their likeness in essentials.

At different dates, Addison and Steele went from school to different colleges at Oxford. Addison distinguished himself by scholarship, and excelled in writing Latin verse. He wrote also some pieces of English verse which Dryden printed in a volume of his "Miscellanies," and he sent, in 1695, to King William, through Lord Somers, a paper of verses on the capture of Namur. In 1697, Addison sent to the other chief among Whig statesmen, Charles Montagu, who was himself a wit and scholar, some Latin verses on the Peace of Ryswick. In 1698, Somers and Montagu drew Addison from preparation for the Church by offering him a travelling allowance of £300 a year to enable him to prepare himself for diplomatic service, and he had received a first appointment when the death of King William put an end to Addison's allowance, and to public occupation for the time. Addison, however, continued his travels, probably as companion or tutor to a young gentleman. Before his return to England his father died, and a little money came to him that enabled him to pay, with interest, his college debts. After Addison's return to England, Charles Montagu, remembering how the promising young Whig had been drawn aside, by promise of old Whigs, from the career for which he had been intended, took an early opportunity of helping Addison to recover his foothold on the path he had been asked to choose. At Montagu's suggestion, Godolphin invited Addison to write a poem on the Battle of Blenheim, gave him at once a small office of £200 a year as a Commissioner of Appeal in the Excise, and promised more. The poem written upon such invitation was "*The Campaign*," and upon its success Addison obtained further advancement.

Steele, at a time of public danger, had left college to enlist as a private in the Coldstream Guards, and had been made secretary to the colonel of the regiment, Lord Cates, who gave him an ensign's commission. As a guardsman, Steele had published, in 1701, his "*Christian Hero: an Argument proving that no Principles but*

those of Religion are sufficient to make a Great Man." He had then written three lively comedies, free from the immorality and profaneness which then distinguished pieces written for the stage, and with earnestness at the heart of them all. Steele had rejoined his friend Addison when Addison returned to London from his travels, and even then, as he tells us, Steele had expressed to Addison a wish that they might some time or other publish a work, written by them both, which should bear the name of "The Monument" in memory of their friendship. "The Spectator" is that Monument.

Early in 1706 Addison was made Under-Secretary of State to Sir Charles Hedges. He remained in that office, at the end of the year, under Marlborough's son-in-law, the Earl of Sunderland, who became thenceforth Addison's especial patron. Addison wrote also in that year, for the unsuccessful opera of "Rosamond," a libretto, in which he found occasion for more celebration of the glory of the Duke of Marlborough. Steele, after short union with a wife who died soon after marriage, was married in 1707 to a friend of his first wife's. Swift was, in those days, among his friends. Defoe's "Review," started on the 19th of February, 1704, was a political journal that had a supplement dealing with minor morals in a wholesome and diverting way. Steele seems to have thought this notion worth fuller development, and on the 12th of April, 1709, he began, under the name of "The Tatler," a penny paper, which appeared three times a week until its close on the 2nd of January, 1711.

The design of "The Tatler" was wholly Steele's invention. Addison was going to Ireland as chief secretary to Lord Wharton when the paper was about to appear, and only guessed its authorship from a passage in one of its earliest numbers. Addison sent a paper or two from Ireland, but complete success had been secured by Steele, and eighty numbers had appeared, when Addison returned to town, and was drawn by his friend into full collaboration in a form of writing that, for the first time, gave play to his best powers. Steele, in his generous way,

claimed as his own chief praise that, by the invention of this form of periodical essay addressed to the main body of English readers, he had given Addison to the world. But for this, Addison's sensitive reserve would have restricted him to the accepted forms of work that then allowed little room for the exquisite humour and the play of refined thought that charmed, in his talk, the private friends with whom alone he was at ease. Steele dropped "The Tatler" only for the bold purpose of reproducing it, as a daily penny paper, under the name of "The Spectator." He had been encouraged by success, and was confident in power of producing a daily essay with his friend Addison's help. "The Tatler" ended in 1711, on the 2nd of January. The first number of "The Spectator" appeared on the 1st of March, the two friends being then a little under forty years of age.

When "The Tatler" began its course, Swift had just been amusing the town in the character of Bickerstaff, a genuine astrologer, with his Prediction of the Death of Partridge the Almanac Maker, and the letter in which he professed to describe to a Person of Quality the "Fulfilment of the Prediction." Steele, taking up the joke, took up with it the name of Bickerstaff, and he was then led to develop the Astrologer into the constant figure of his "Tatler" paper.

To provide a corresponding centre of life for the new series, he sketched the plan of the Spectator Club, which he and Addison, with occasional help from friends, proceeded to develop, as is here set forth,

H. M.

SIR ROGER DE COVERLEY

AND

THE SPECTATOR'S CLUB

OF CLUBS IN GENERAL

*—Tigris agit rabidâ cum tigrida pacem
Perpetuam, sævis inter se convenit ursis.*

JUV., Sat. xv. 163.

Tiger with tiger, bear with bear you'll find
In leagues offensive and defensive joined.

TATE

MAN is said to be a sociable animal, and as an instance of it we may observe that we take all occasions and pretences of forming ourselves into those little nocturnal assemblies which are commonly known by the name of clubs. When a set of men find themselves agree in any particular, though never so trivial, they establish themselves into a kind of fraternity, and meet once or twice a week upon the account of such a fantastic resemblance. I know a considerable market-town, in which there was a club of fat men, that