

**SIR ROGER DE
COVERLEY: ESSAYS
FROM THE "SPECTATOR"**

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Sir Roger de Coverley: Essays from the "Spectator" by David Salmon

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DAVID SALMON

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COVERLEY: ESSAYS
FROM THE "SPECTATOR"**

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SIR ROGER DE COVERLEY:

ESSAYS FROM THE "SPECTATOR."

WITH NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

DAVID SALMON.

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INTRODUCTION.

JOSEPH ADDISON was born at Milston, near Amesbury, in Wiltshire, on May 1, 1672. His father was the Rev. Lancelot Addison's Addison, D.D.,¹ rector of Milston; his mother Jane, parents. daughter of Dr. Nathaniel Gulston, and sister of William Gulston, Bishop of Bristol. Lancelot's abilities were above the average; he wrote with fluency and point; and he held the political views fashionable with his order, when the right divine of kings to govern wrong was the doctrine favoured at Court. Therefore, though he had only a living of 120*l.* a year when he took unto himself a wife, he could look forward with some confidence to rising in his profession. And promotion was not long in coming. In 1675 he was made a Prebendary of Salisbury and Chaplain in Ordinary to the king; in 1683 he became Dean of Lichfield; next year he was collated to the Archdeaconry of Coventry; and after the Revolution he might have been a bishop but for the tenacity with which he clung to his High-Church principles.

The first school which Joseph Addison attended was at Amesbury, the second at Salisbury, and the third at Lichfield. Addison's From Lichfield he was sent to London to the schools. Charterhouse, then considered inferior to Westminster alone of all the schools in England. The master was a fine scholar, and under him Addison acquired an unusually

¹ Lancelot Addison was not a Doctor of Divinity when Joseph was born. It was in 1675 that he was made doctor.

wide acquaintance with classical authors, especially with the Latin poets, and acquired also more than a knack of Latin verse-making.

At the Charterhouse began the lifelong friendship between Addison and Steele. RICHARD STEELE, whose father was an Irish attorney, was born in Dublin in 1672. He was probably born in March; we know that he was christened on the 12th of that month. Before little Dick was five he lost his father; and in the "Tatler" we have a very touching account of his mother's grief and his own insensibility to the calamity which had befallen him. He says:—

"The first sense of sorrow I ever knew was upon the death of my father, at which time I was not quite five years of age; but was rather amazed at what all the house meant, than possessed with a real understanding why nobody was willing to play with me. I remember I went into the room where his body lay, and my mother sat weeping alone by it. I had my battledore in my hand, and fell a beating the coffin, and calling 'Papa;' for, I know not how, I had some slight idea that he was locked up there. My mother caught me in her arms, and transported beyond all patience of the silent grief she was before in, she almost smothered me in her embrace, and told me in a flood of tears papa could not hear me, and would play with me no more, for they were going to put him under ground, whence he could never come to us again. She was a very beautiful woman, of a noble spirit, and there was a dignity in her grief amidst all the wildness of her transport, which, methought, struck me with an instinct of sorrow which, before I was sensible of what it was to grieve, seized my very soul, and has made pity the weakness of my heart ever since."¹

On November 17, 1684, Steele was nominated to the Charterhouse by the Duke of Ormond, probably through the influence of his uncle, Henry Gascoigne, who was the Duke's confidential agent. There is no account of the lad's school-life, except the purely conjectural account given by Thackeray:—

Steele at
the Char-
terhouse.

¹ "Tatler," No. 181.

"I am afraid no good report could be given by his masters and ushers of that thick-set, square-faced, black-eyed, soft-hearted little Irish boy. He was very idle. He was whipped deservedly a great number of times. Though he had very good parts of his own, he got other boys to do his lessons for him, and only took just as much trouble as should enable him to scuffle through his exercises, and by good fortune escape the flogging-block. . . . Besides being very kind, lazy, and good-natured, this boy went invariably into debt with the tart-woman; ran out of bounds, and entered into pecuniary, or rather promissory engagements with the neighbouring lollipop-vendors and piemen; exhibited an early fondness and capacity for drinking mum and sack, and borrowed from all his comrades who had money to lend."¹

In 1687 Addison proceeded to Oxford, carrying thither "a classical taste and a stock of learning which would have done Addison at honour to a Master of Arts."² He was entered at Oxford. Queen's College, where he had resided for about two years, when a Latin poem of his on the accession of King William happened to fall into the hands of Dr. Lancaster, afterwards Provost of Queen's, who was so struck with the excellence of the versification that he procured for the writer election into Magdalen College as a demy.³ Addison took his Master's degree in 1693; he was elected probationary fellow in 1697, and full fellow next year.

At Oxford Addison cultivated poetry and criticism with care and diligence. His Latin verses were greatly admired.

Addison's early writings. Dr. Johnson says they are "entitled to particular praise," and Boileau (who was very sparing of compliments) said that from them he "conceived an opinion of the English genius for poetry." At that time Dryden was autocrat of the republic of letters. He stood in

¹ "The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century."

² Macaulay.

³ "Demy, a term by which that Society [Magdalen College] denominates those who are elsewhere called *scholars*—young men who partake of the founder's benefaction, and succeed in their order to vacant fellowships."—*Dr. Johnson*.

a position of solitary grandeur, beyond the reach of cavil or of envy, and literary aspirants naturally tried to win a smile from him. Addison complimented him on his translations in a poem which the veteran inserted in "Tonson's Miscellany" (1693). Next year's "Miscellany" contained Addison's own version of the greater part of the Fourth Georgic (that on Bees); it also contained his "Account of the Greatest English Poets"—

"A short account of all the Muse-possessed,
That down from Chaucer's days to Dryden's times,
Have spent their noble rage in British rhymes."

This is merely the work of a clever young man, who has not fully mastered his subject, nor attained unto independent judgment. According to Pope (whose testimony, however, is not worth much), Addison had not read Spenser when he wrote, and his criticisms are mere echoes of the criticisms of the French classical school. Shakespeare is not mentioned: Dryden and Congreve are the great dramatists. As for Chaucer,

"Age has rusted what the poet writ,
Worn out his language and obscured his wit;
In vain he jests in his unpolished strain,
And tries to make his readers laugh in vain."

Spenser "amused a barbarous age,"

"But now the mystic tale that pleased of yore
Can charm an understanding age no more."

In 1697 appeared Dryden's translation of Virgil, for which Addison wrote an Essay on the Georgics and the arguments to most of the books of the *Æneid*. Dryden was profuse in praises of the "most ingenious Mr. Addison of Oxford." "After his Bees," said the old man, "my later swarm is scarcely worth hiving." Probably through Dryden or Ton-