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Advisors of the age of reason: The periodical essays of Steele, Addison, Johnson, and Goldsmith

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ADVISORS OF THE AGE OF REASON:
THE PERIODICAL ESSAYS OF STEELE,
ADDISON, JOHNSON, AND GOLDSMITH

by
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Introduction

The periodical essay of the eighteenth century invited men of the Age of Reason to pour into it their talent and thought; it was a form in which they could make their points briefly and effectively; it was flexible, and was eventually familiar enough to be well-received. The form itself reflected the common-sense practicality, restraint and moderation that the periodical writers were advocating. In one balanced, comparatively short piece of writing, a thought was developed--in an easy, quiet and painless manner--that could be driven home in later essays over a long period of time. If a writer had a pet idea or philosophy, he was given a medium for fixing it firmly in his reader's mind by repeating his thought at irregular intervals. The moral issues with which periodical writers dealt had a "cumulative" impact in being stressed in a number of papers; the periodical essay differed from a newspaper in that the newspaper was concerned with matters of the moment brought as soon as possible before the public, and the essay could proceed on a more leisurely course. Both media used the same format and had essentially the same audience--the middle and upper middle classes were

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periodical essay dealt with matters that were contemporary but not immediate--with manners and morals, with tendencies of the time rather than actual events.

1"

Although Richard Steele devoted a small section of The Tatler to current news, he abandoned the plan as a regular feature after the eightieth number. The periodical essay took the 'long view,' dealt with the needs of men to improve themselves gradually; it may have seemed to center on trivial matters in comparison with the great import of current events, but its end, and therefore its method, was entirely different from that of the newspaper. The aim of the literary periodical of the eighteenth century was admittedly the analysis and criticism of the contemporary life--for a reformatory purpose; men needed to have an instruction and an example in order to know how to act, and that example was provided by the periodicals. In his first Tatler,¹ Steele states blandly that his paper will serve those who are public-spirited enough to "neglect their own affairs and look into actions of state," men who are "persons of strong zeal and weak intellect," and will instruct those politic persons "what to think." Addison,² in his statement of purpose in The Spectator, No. 10, is even more explicit: "to the end that their virtue and discretion may not be short, transient intermittent starts of thought, I have resolved to refresh their memories from day to day, till I have recovered them out of that desperate state of vice and folly into which the age is fallen."

1. Richard Steele, The Tatler, in The British Essayists, ed. James Ferguson, forty-five volumes (London, 1819), I, 11

2. Joseph Addison, The Spectator, ed. G. G. Smith, in Everyman's Library, No. 164, (London, 1907), I, 38.

Addison was echoing the thoughts of a number of thinkers of his age; the beginnings of the eighteenth century saw a desire for reform in many areas of living, "for a purer and simpler morality, for gentler manners, for... dignified self-respect,"³ a new civilization, in effect. The periodical writers were following a powerful tendency of the eighteenth century, "the reaction against the moral license of Restoration society which came with the rise of the middle class to prominence and affluence."⁴ The tendency toward moralization and satire may have been influenced too by a disgust with its opposite force, the immense self-satisfaction of men of the time. Englishmen in the early years of the century had ample reasons for being satisfied with their lot; England had emerged in these years as a victorious power, commerce was expanding, the middled class was wealthy and growing--the mainstay of an apparently stable society. When men of the Age of Reason looked back on the conflicts and controversies of the seventeenth century, their reliance on "good sense" and moderation seemed to be justified. Lord Shaftesbury, in his Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, published in 1711, expressed the prevailing concept of "order" as the basis and end of human

3. Harold Routh, "Steele and Addison," Chapter 2 of The Cambridge History of English Literature, ed. A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller. (Cambridge, England, 1913), IX, 30

4. See Introduction to The English Familiar Essay, ed. W. F. Bryan and R. S. Crane (Boston, 1916), p. xxx

action:

The sum of philosophy is to learn what is just in society and beautiful in nature and the order of the world....The taste of beauty and the relish of what is decent, just, and amiable, perfects the character of the gentleman and the philosopher.⁵

This glib and rather vague ideal--self-perfection by the improvement of taste--was which eighteenth century men could work confidently, taking well- believe that the world was not becoming a better place for intelligent human beings; men had only to raise themselves by conscious efforts toward self-improvement. The periodical writers echoed, to some extent, the complacency of the times, the sense of security and calm, but also tried to correct the faults that were products of this complacency. Of their readers, they demanded sane, level-headed actions, backed by the dictates of reason and common sense.

Eighteenth-century writers, and particularly the periodical essayists, showed the same concern for order, reason, and good sense in their writing. Reacting against the passion and complexity of the seventeenth-century metaphysical school, they strove for clearness, for correctness, and for a balanced style that would underline their rational persuasions. Their principal aim was to be understood, and the lucidity and symmetry which their prose attained is a result of conscious effort to fix a standard of clarity. One chief

⁵. quoted in Harold Nicolson, "Complacency," (Joseph Addison), The Age of Reason, in The Mainstream of the Modern World, I (Garden City, New York, 1960), p. 151

contribution that the periodical writers made to English literature was the colloquial manner they adopted in order to appeal to a wider public; they required that a piece of prose or poetry be "interesting, agreeable, and above all comprehensible." ⁶ The periodical essay was designed to reach the always expanding and powerful middle classes, and to interest them in the forming of manners and morals that would fit them for the new age.

The belief in the perfectibility of man and the clear, reasoned prose in which this belief was proclaimed were inspired by the effect of scientific discovery and research on the period. Newtonian science had induced men to accept the fact that the natural order was explainable, that man and nature operated under fixed laws, and that all human endeavor was equally ordered and subject to rules that, if they were not understood at the present time, would be grasped eventually. Thus, the best writing was that which strove for a mathematical clearness and precision. Of course, writers could not succumb completely to such an idea, but the 'scientific spirit' did influence a literary genre that in its best examples is justifiably famous for its clear, balanced, familiar and very readable prose.

6. Ibid., 150

Life in and around eighteenth-century London provided much material for criticism and satirization; one great value of the literary periodicals is the full picture of the times that they give. The essayists concentrated on social conditions and customs in the city, which had a population at the time of about 600,000, and on the (usually) petty vices and idiosyncrasies of urban individuals. In the eighteenth century, there was still considerable difficulty in travel and communication for those who lived in the country, so the periodicals had for most of their "material" and audience the ladies and gentlemen of the metropolis. The daily life of these people was "sedentary and artificial to a degree hardly credible to modern readers."⁷ They seemed to have little to do besides dressing themselves and attending various amusements of the city; their interest in fashion and fashionable manners was excessive. The fascination of the upper classes with ornament--in speech, manners, and dress--was subject to increasing ridicule by the advocates of sense and moderation, and with good reason. Both men and women used a great amount of cosmetics, and were perfumed and powdered to the hilt. Dress of both sexes was characterized by frills and bright colors. A man of fashion would begin his ornamentation with the furbelow--a huge, ruffled, encumbering headpiece described in

7. See Introduction to Selections from The Tatler, The Spectator, and Their Successors, ed. Walter Graham (New York, 1928), p. 11

The Tatler, No. 29, as a monstrosity worn only to please the ladies. In this ridiculous headgear as in many of the trappings of eighteenth-century gallantry, a man was compelled to "violate his reason and principles," succumb to the demands of fashion, "appealing to custom for an excuse."⁸

The elaborate headpieces and enormous hats of the women paralleled the excesses in men's dress. This extravagance in style carried through all the dress of both sexes; the cost of clothing and accessories was high, and many of the gallants owed their tailors more than they could pay.

Other favorite objects for satire and ridicule were the amusements, often in doubtful taste, that Londoners were fond of, such as animal-baiting, cock-fights--"the eighteenth century loved such shows and cared very little for the cruelty involved"⁹--boxing and wrestling matches and various 'rough sports' at fairs. Gambling, on cards, horses, lotteries, cock fights, etc., was a vice to which all classes were partial. Card playing in particular was universally popular and was indulged in by many ladies and gentlemen almost to the exclusion of other interests (like work). The more serious vices--duelling, ~~sexual immorality, and drinking--were not ignored~~ by the periodical writers; the aim of the essayists was to correct these vices and to raise moral standards.

The chief outlets for the periodicals and the soil in

8. Steele, op. cit., I, 224.

9. Rosamond Bayne-Powell, Eighteenth-Century London Life (London, 1937), p. 168

which the ideas introduced in the essays took root were the coffee houses, the intellectual and social centers of the eighteenth century. Coffee had been brought into England about the middle of the preceding century and by the early 1700's had become an institution. Coffee houses were the chief gathering places for men of letters and were the natural centers for the dissemination of ideas and information. Each coffee house had its own clientele, and discussion was on topics of interest and import to the particular trade or social group that "belonged" there. Will's, for example, was the resort of men of letters and of fashion; Old Slaughter's attracted literary men and artists; booksellers frequented the Chapter Coffee House; army officers met at Young Man's, and so forth. Circles were formed to mull over the matters of the day; the opinions of the coffee houses became the criteria for pronouncing judgment on ideas and events of the times. The give and take of conversation was an important feature of London life and influenced it in many ways. "If men were to enjoy daily intercourse, they had to respect each other's opinions and to cultivate self-suppression...the middle class, besides studying character, came to regard courtesy as a part of civilization."¹⁰ Men's ideas were molded and refined through contact with others' thoughts, and conversation became clearer and more polished.

10. Routh, op. cit., p. 35

The coffee houses had a direct effect on the literary style of the periodicals; because the papers were circulated and discussed in these centers, the writing needed to be as clear and colloquial as conversation. The coffee houses were an admirable part of eighteenth century city life, but other facets of the times were less pleasant. The unpleasant aspects of the century--the prevalence of violence and crime in the poorly-lighted London streets, the cruel punishments of criminals, the quackery of "medical" men, the extreme poverty of the lower classes--were not reflected to as great a degree as upper-class morals and manners, but it was in this atmosphere that the periodical essay developed and did more, perhaps, than any other institution toward improving social conditions. As the age cried out to be educated, to be instructed in sane living, the periodicals answered with their sage and reasoned advice. The best, most readable of these "advisors of the age" were Richard Steele's The Tatler, Joseph Addison's The Spectator, Samuel Johnson's The Rambler, and Oliver Goldsmith's collection of essays, The Citizen of the World.

Sir Richard Steele:

"It was Steele who led the way."¹¹ Although other periodicals, the most important of which were John Dunton's Athenian Mercury, and Daniel Defoe's Review and its branch-off, the Scandal Club, had preceded Steele's paper and had created many of the devices used in it, such as the character study and the question-and-answer method used in publishing letters from readers, The Tatler, when it took over these devices, transformed the periodical from a lightly entertaining collection of bits and pieces to a new literary kind. Steele himself wrote the bulk of the papers of The Tatler (the other chief contributor was Joseph Addison), and it bears the unmistakable impress of his personality.

Steele was well suited to advise and criticize his age; he was a gentleman of fashion and was subject to many of the vices and foibles of men of his class. He reflected, though, the new tendency toward criticism and standard-raising; ~~his awareness of weaknesses in himself and in his own surroundings~~ led him into the "missionary spirit" that, while it failed in his moralizing booklet, The Christian Hero, succeeded in his more sympathetic and palatable essays. His life was varied and full, and his powers of observation were strong enough to make him an able commentator on the age.

11. Ibid., p. 30

He was born into the family of an attorney in 1672, and although he was orphaned at an early age, was provided for by an uncle and was given a good education--first at the Charterhouse school, where he met and became friendly with Addison, and later at Christ Church, Oxford. He had a "native impulse" for an active life and left the college without a degree to join a gentlemen's regiment under the Duke of Ormond. Later, he became a captain in the Tower Guard and began to frequent Will's coffeehouse, where he was on good terms with the wits and men of letters. His name became better known when he published The Christian Hero, and his plays, The Funeral, The Lying Lover, and The Tender Husband. Possibly influenced by his lack of funds, he married in 1705 a woman of means, considerably older than himself, who died not many years later. During much of his life, Steele was in and out of debt, as he complains to his second wife, his "dear Prue," Mary Scurlock. Financial matters were the cause of many arguments in the Steele household; his tempestuous domestic life may have inspired the several papers of advice to husbands and wives on how to live together peaceably. His financial troubles were somewhat eased when he was appointed to write The London Gazette, the official newspaper of the nation. This post gave him three hundred pounds annually, and also entitled him to receive overseas news before any of the other papers--a privilege that helped him immensely in gaining an audience for The Tatler. In addition, while the Whigs

were in power, he was one of the commissioners of the Stamp Office, with a salary of another three hundred pounds a year. Still needing money, he began The Tatler; when the Tories grew powerful, he was relieved of his government duties and was able to give most of his time to helping Addison with The Spectator. Later, in several inferior periodicals, he became obsessed with airing his political views. Public affairs occupied most of his time for the next several years. In the latter part of his life, he wrote little of importance; in 1718, "Prue" died, whom he had loved in spite of their wrangling, and after her death, he lived only for his children and for the public welfare. He died on September 1, 1719, at the age of fifty-seven.

During his lifetime, Steele was not always free from the faults he ridicules in his writing. He admitted in his letters to his wife that he had taken too much to drink at times, he was often extravagant and continually in debt, and he was known for his "irregular" conduct in the army. In spite of his faults, or perhaps partly because of them, he appears in The Tatler and The Spectator to be a kind, perceptive, and truthful observer of life, well-qualified for admonishing his age; he shows a genuine concern for the weaknesses of men. He is aware of his own failings and appraises himself with an honest eye: his drawing of

the 'rake' in The Tatler No. 27 may be a partial self-portrait:

His desires run away with him through the strength and force of a lively imagination, which hurries him on to unlawful pleasures, before reason has power to come to his rescue. Thus, with all the good intentions in the world, this creature sins on against Heaven, himself, his friends, and his country, who all call for a better use of his talents.¹²

And in his concluding number, Steele explains why he wrote under a pseudonym:

...I considered that severity of manners was absolutely necessary to him who would censure others, and for that reason, and that only, chose to talk in a mask. I shall not carry my humility so far as to call myself a vicious man, but at the same time must confess my life is at best but pardonable.¹³

This honesty itself would recommend a man who desired to write essays for the purpose of reforming morals and manners of his time. But the good qualities of Steele, as revealed in his writing, do more to give his papers the freshness and charm that set a standard for all succeeding periodicals. It is his personality that made them so welcome at the eighteenth-century coffee houses and proves them still full of the vitality that modern readers appreciate. He is, first of all, original; among the later devices of the periodicals, there is hardly one which doesn't trace its beginnings to Steele. For example, he set the

12. Steele, op. cit., I, 209, 210.

13. Ibid., V, 284.

form and practice of character sketches studied from life; he was the first to censure gambling and duelling in periodicals, and the first to attack dramatic tastes of the age; he came close to discovering the short story and the domestic novel. He is witty, amiable, earnest yet cheerful and sympathetic in his advice; he is humane, practical, filled with a real concern for men's weaknesses and a real desire for correcting them.

His writing is natural, more colloquial than the studied grace of Addison's prose. He was obliged to write quickly, perhaps carelessly at times under the pressure of turning out three papers a week while leading his full life; he comes directly to the point he is interested in making, not having the time to work for an 'effect.' He writes as thoughts occur to him, in the manner and order of natural conversation. His pictures are realistic, drawn to the last fine point; his essays are rich in details that give his characters at least a physical reality. He describes a serving-girl who has made off with much of her mistress's finery:

...a short, thick, lively, hard-favoured wench of about twenty-nine years of age, her eyes small and bleared, her nose very broad at bottom, and turning up at the end, her mouth wide, and lips of an unusual thickness, two teeth out before, the rest black and uneven, the tip of her left ear being of a mouse color.... 14

There is more of this delectable creature, but this much should illustrate Steele's skill in portraiture.

The eighteenth century has often been charged with a too noticeable lack of emotion, but Richard Steele, with his warm human sympathy and genuine pity for the condition of weak men, seems to deny this accusation. His emotional nature led him to what may have been an excess of sentimentality in his plays, but in the periodical essays, the rapport that he establishes with his audience by expressing his feelings makes his satire more accepted and thus more effective.

Steele, in his dedication to Arthur Maynwaring, states "The general purpose of this paper is to expose the false acts of life, to pull off the disguises of cunning, vanity, and affectation, and to recommend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse, and our behavior."¹⁵ He proposes to effect an improvement in manners by instructing men "what to think." In his first essay, he gives the project and outline for his paper in the original and appealing idea of dividing his topics to correspond with various coffeehouses:

All accounts of gallantry, pleasure, and entertainment, shall be under the article of White's Chocolate-house; poetry, under that of Will's Coffee-house; Learning, under the title of Grecian; foreign and domestic news, you will have from Saint Jame's Coffee-house, and what else I have to offer on any other subject shall be dated from my own apartment.¹⁶

15. Ibid., I, 2

16. Ibid., I, 12

To round out the first number, he introduces the character of a "very pretty gentleman," lovelorn, lost, who has "most understanding when he is drunk, and is least in his senses when he is sober,"¹⁷ then gives a short critique of the play, Love For Love. He adds the section on foreign intelligence, and concludes with a note on John Partridge. The wits of Steele's time had been having a great deal of fun with Mr. Partidge, who had duped the public with a false almanac. Jonathan Swift, under the name of Isaac Bickerstaff, had issued his own almanac, predicting the death of Partidge, then affirmed his death in a later paper. When Mr. Partridge indignantly asserted that he wasn't dead, the wits backed up Swift in print, and the controversy raged for weeks. Since the name of Isaac Bickerstaff was now well-known by the public, Steele used his character to give the papers an added touch of familiarity and mature wisdom that would make a moral dissertation more effective. Bickerstaff, in this last section of the first Tatler, emphatically declares that Partidge is dead, and if the man had any shame, he would admit the fact, since although all his parts may perform their proper functions, "his art is gone, the man is gone."¹⁸ Steele adds a stern warning to other "dead" men to mend their manners, since he will from time to time publish bills of mortality, and those who are good for ne-

17. Ibid., I, 14

18. Ibid., I, 18

thing are liable to find themselves in the number of the deceased.

Bickerstaff is an aging gentleman who has seen much of life and who rules himself wisely, as a man of good sense and reasoned intelligence. He is pictured as a slightly eccentric old man, aided in his insights into characters by his guardian angel, Pacolet. Pacolet appears to Isaac in the guise of a venerable gentleman seated on a park bench; he makes himself useful in subsequent papers (he is introduced in No. 13) by revealing the characters and motivations of ladies and gentlemen of fashion, giving Mr. Bickerstaff fresh understandings. The aid of a supernatural voice gives Steele's advice added weight, besides making the character of Bickerstaff more mysterious.

Steele adds to the sympathy and familiarity of his principal "voice" by depicting him as the head of a family. One of the chief concerns of The Tatler is with the theme of domesticity; the relations of husbands and wives, and of parents and children are treated with earnestness and considerable depth of understanding. To give his counsels authority, Steele takes another voice, that of Jenny Dittaff, Isaac's half-sister, a sensible young woman of the middle class who is courted, marries, and sets up housekeeping in the course of the papers. She replaces her brother in writing several essays (first appearing in No. 33, in

which she gives her views on the false position that women are placed in); she is also seen through her brother's eyes, her character is developed, and some of his papers on her approach the nature of a short story. For instance, in Tatler No. 143, Jenny comes to visit her brother in a fine carriage, with an air of pride and accomplishment. Isaac, as becomes a concerned elder brother, admonishes her and when she has left, writes her husband:

I beg of you not to indulge her in this vanity, and desire you to consider, the world is so whimsical, that though it will value you for being happy, it will hate you for appearing so. The possession of wisdom and virtue, the only solid distinctions of life, is allowed much more easily than that of wealth and quality.¹⁹

This event is not the first occasion of Isaac's wise advice to his sister. Before her marriage (No. 79), he has lectured her and all married couples on the means of remaining content in the married state and of avoiding domestic quarrels. He tells her that a married couple is above trifling spats; "When two persons have so good an opinion of each other as to come together for life, they will not differ in matters of importance, because they think of each other with respect;"²⁰ what they have to guard against are the little causes for quarrels. He warns Jenny to be careful not to give or receive "little provocations."

19. Ibid., III, 317

20. Ibid., II, 289

Steele protests against the practice of contracting marriages by means of an "auction," whereby the highest bidder for a young lady is rewarded by the match (No. 199). He has Bickerstaff dispose of Jenny (no. 75) in a much more prudent and sensible fashion; he has found her a mate whose qualities will accord with her own, rather than giving her to a rich "fine gentleman," who might make her miserable. During her married life, Jenny is shown maturing in character, and she and her husband provide a number of illustrations for Steele's ideas on the married state. The series of papers, if it had been developed, could almost have been a domestic novel.

Holding up Sir Lancelot Addison as a model father, Steele arrives at a high standard of parental behavior--the father's duty is to educate his children in love and understanding. In No. 189, he praises the father to whom the sons can bring their problems and whom they would rather consult than any other person. Some men, he says, are hastened toward age by their children, but this father has so many comforts that he can "disappoint the injuries of time."²¹ He frequently expresses the idea that a child is best educated through expressions on the part of the parent of love and trust. In No. 60, he has Harry Wildair, a rake, stupified by a sudden gift from his father of a thousand pounds. When he writes to his father in amazement, he is

21. Ibid., IV, 225

answered by a check for three thousand pounds more. After a time spent trying to convince himself that he is not mad, he begins to reflect soberly on his birth, his expectations, and his responsibility, and finally reforms in order to be worthy of his father's trust.

Another main theme in Steele's periodical is the woman question (if there is such a thing); "Steele's forte is certainly the treatment of questions relating to the fair sex, and naturally a large number of the papers contain discussions covering almost every possible domestic topic, marriages, match-making, and etiquette."²² He makes his intention known in the first Tatler: "I resolve to have something which may be of entertainment to the fair sex, in honour of whom I have invented the title of this paper."²³ Steele treats women with more sympathy than the majority of writers up to his time; he shows a concern for their particular problems and has Jenny put in several good words for her sex in No. 33. Steele is not always kind to women in his papers; he ridicules feminine vanities and foibles just as he does those of men. In the "Willis's" section of Tatler No. 60, he gives an example of the best means for winning a woman's heart--by protesting love in a stream of utter nonsense: "run over, with a soft air, a multitude of

22. Willard Connely, Sir Richard Steele. (New York and London, 1934), p. 166

23. Steele, op. cit., p. 12

words, without meaning or connection." This method, he assures the reader, is sure to evoke a loving response from a young woman; "we may take it for granted, that he will be esteemed a very cold lover, who discovers to his mistress that he is in his senses."²⁴

Steele derides in several papers the female practice of spending hours before the mirror (though he mentions some men of his acquaintance who do the same thing), laughs at the "use of Delamira's fan" (No. 52), censures those unfeminine females who are addicted to sensationalism (those women who enjoy going to trials for murder or rape), advocates a more modest behavior on the part of women, and "reveals the jealousies and intrigues or more experienced matrons who look on marriage...as a game of skill or a masque of vanity."²⁵ But he has a great admiration for some members of the fair sex: he holds up a model for behavior in Lady Elizabeth Hastings, "Aspasia," who is always modest, yet free in her actions, conscious of goodness and innocence:

Yet though her mien carries much more invitation than command, to behold her is an immediate check to loose behavior; and to love her is a liberal education; for, it being the nature of all love to create an intimation of the beloved person in the lover, a regard for Aspasia naturally produces decency of manners, and good conduct of life, in her admirers.²⁶

24. Ibid., II, 161
25. Routh, op. cit., p. 42
26. Steele, op. cit., II, 84

Although the theme of domesticity, the place of women and children in a man's life, and the realm of home affections occupy a prominent place in Steele's periodical essays, he does not forget his self-appointed title, "The Censor of Great Britain." Two of his favorite objects for censure are gambling and duelling, both indulged in to a great extent by gentlemen of fashion. In a series of papers, Steele points out that the gambler makes a ridiculous figure: in Tatler No. 13, he shows him losing all his money and being reduced to tossing for pennies with the young boys to make enough to return to the fashionable gambling places. Steele is even more contemptuous of duellists; he almost drops entirely his intent of amusing while he teaches, and speaks with scorn of this "bastard knight-errantry." Several years before he began The Tatler, Steele had become involved, through no fault of his own, in a duel with a Captain Kelley. The Captain was wounded accidentally, and lay for several weeks between life and death. Although Mr. Kelley eventually recovered, Steele was distraught; he vowed he would never participate in any way in another duel, and thereafter took every opportunity to condemn duelling. These practices, and all the fashionable follies that were expected of a man of spirit, Steele denounces. In his paper No. 21, he describes a gentleman as a person known chiefly for his good judgment.

Steele illustrates his moral teachings in almost every

case by drawing a character to fit the moral. His characters often became caricatures, but the principle that he was trying to express was always clear enough in them to enable his reader to see the error or virtue "exposed."

The periodical essay on morals and manners developed out of the section "From My Own Apartment," becoming gradually longer as various departments were dropped. The news department was dropped permanently when the Gazette began to come out three times a week and The Tatler could no longer "scoop" the other papers with news, and when Steele had discovered that The Tatler could exist on its own merit. This discovery was a direct influence on the lengthening of essays in the paper, and contributed to the advent of the single-essay periodical.

Toward the end of the paper, Steele, a Whig, made excursions into political writing--against the Tory government. These attempts were not as successful as his other essays, and the paper diminished in effectiveness. The Tatler ceased abruptly on January 2, 1711, its end possibly influenced by Chancellor Harley's offer to keep Steele on as Stamp Commissioner only if he would give up his author-
 27
 ship of the paper.

Joseph Addison

Steele's ceasing work on The Tatler may have been influenced in part by his recognition that another writer was bringing to perfection the form which he (Steele) had brought to popularity. Joseph Addison, although he did not originate the form and method of his medium, explored to the fullest the possibilities which Steele had suggested.

When Addison contributed to The Tatler, the two friends found that their veins of humor ran parallel. A month after the paper ceased publication, "Addison and Steele met at a club and laid the keel for a fresh paper; non-political, that it might live; daily, that it might pay." The paper was to concentrate on reforming the morals and manners of society, to "enliven morality with wit," to keep, if possible from beoming embroiled in government controversies. The new paper must "look on, but must be neutral and discreet, merely a spectator--and so it was called." The character of the Spectator, as outlined in the first number, was designed to attract the readers of the now defunct Tatler; he was faintly reminiscent of the sage Mr. Bickerstaff, but was even more mysterious, a man who never spoke, but who poked his head into all the talkative parts of the town.

28. Ibid., p. 184

29. Ibid., p. 184

30. Addison, op. cit., I.

Although Steele wrote only slightly fewer papers for the new periodical than his friend (240 to Addison's 274), the "spirit of the Spectator" is Addison's; it is Addison's character that the Spectator assumes--that of a scholar, well-versed in classical literature, a curious though timid student of human nature, a sensitive observer of all that goes on around him. He describes himself and the Spectator:

I had not been long at the University, before I distinguished myself by a most profound silence: for during the space of eight years...I scarce uttered the Quantity of an hundred words; and indeed do not remember that I ever spoke three sentences together in my whole life...Thus I live in the world, rather as a Spectator of mankind than as one of the species; by which means I have made myself a speculative statesman, soldier, merchant, and artizan, without ever meddling with any practical part in life.³¹

Steele must assume this character when he writes, and it is harder to distinguish between their works in The Spectator than in The Tatler, except for the careful phrasing of Addison which marks all of his essays.

Steele and Addison provide a natural contrast to one another, both in their personalities and in their work. Both men were interested in reforming the manners and morals of the eighteenth century, but Steele wrote more from "outer" experience of the faults, foibles, and weaknesses he was satirizing in human beings, while Addison wrote from "inner" experience, drawing on his habit of

31. Ibid., I, 4, 5.

thought and introspection. His tone is calmer than Steele's, though he is less warm and sympathetic. His prose is more balanced and symmetrical, easier to follow, though perhaps less "natural." His essays attempt a conscious perfection of style that Steele may not have had time for. Addison mastered a literary manner finer than Steele's, though he may have been lacking in the kindness and sympathetic humanity of his contemporary. But though Steele did show a powerful sympathy and more "feeling" than Addison in his writing, and though the original conception of a reformatory series of essays was his, the credit for evolving the most widely-read periodical and the one of the highest quality must go to Addison. "...it may be said, in conclusion, that Steele was the more original and Addison the more effective...Addison...raised Steele's conception of an essay to a degree never yet surpassed."³² Steele is unequalled in his depiction of and advice to members of the domestic circle; he is most at home with matters having to do with the "personal" aspect of lives of eighteenth-century men and women. When the periodicals turned their attention to correcting manners and morals, Addison's cool sense and rational persuasions were perhaps regarded more seriously than Steele's cheerful, though sympathetic pictures.

32. Routh, op. cit., p.

Joseph Addison was born May 1, 1672, the same year as Steele, the son of Lancelot Addison, the father that Steele eulogizes in The Tatler. He had a successful school career, attended Amesbury, Salisbury, Lichfield, and The Charterhouse, where he and Steele became friends. In 1687, he entered Queen's College, Oxford, and attracted attention there by his classical scholarship; eventually, as a fellow of Magdalen college, he gained a wide reputation for his Latin poetry. He began to publish Latin poems, and in 1697, dedicated his poem on the Peace of Ryswick to Charles Montague, who obtained a 300-pound pension for him. With this money, he was supposed to qualify himself for a diplomatic service by traveling. He began his travels in 1699 with a trip to France; in Paris, he met and formed a friendship with Boileau. The next year, he toured Italy, noting the scenery as a backdrop for the writings and Seneca. He spent some time in Vienna, Hamburg, and Holland, then returned to London, to remain a year without employment. He became intimate with prominent Whigs, and after the Victory of Blenheim, wrote "The Campaign," glorifying the British Empire, and was rewarded with the Under-Secretaryship of State. He remained in this post until 1709, when he became secretary to Wharton, the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland. It was there that he first

recognized Steele's hand in The Tatler, and began to send him contributions. Addison held a post in Parliament for life (though he never spoke), and though he lost his secretaryship in 1711 with the fall of the Whigs, he remained in a comfortable financial position, never under the pressures that Steele found so difficult. He began The Spectator on March 1, 1711, and continued it through 555 numbers until December 6, 1712. In 1713, he brought out his play, Cato, which in spite of its dramatic weaknesses was a great success. He continued his contributions to various short-lived papers that attempted to imitate The Spectator; he advanced in a political career, aided by his marriage in 1716 to the Countess of Warwick. He became estranged from Steele in his last years because of Steele's (typical) failure to repay certain loans, and his last two papers (in The Whig) were severe replies to articles by Steele. Addison died June 17, 1719, as peacefully as he had lived.

"To the familiar ease of Steele, Addison added" in The Spectator "a polish never surpassed and rarely equalled."³³ The urbanity and elegance which he achieves without becoming ostentatious or abstruse is a result of a whole life spent in pursuit of a liberal education, in the fullest sense of the term. To his schooling, Addison added years of traveling and of acute observation of human practices. His prose is smooth without being superficial; his comparisons, examples

33. J. Scott Clark, A Study of English Prose Writers (New York, 1912), p. 88

and illustrations are all chosen to fulfill a specific purpose; his composition is thus more "studied" than Steele's (and to that extent, perhaps less natural). He writes with a simplicity and directness that most effectively strengthen his case for "reasonable action." He is nearly always calm, never shows the vindictiveness in his social satire that a writer like Swift does. He develops to perfection the method devised by Steele--to instruct amusing his readers. He has the power of sharply ridiculing without maligning a person, perhaps best shown in his character of Sir Roger de Coverly. The Roger de Coverly papers were suggested by Steele's portraiture of the Trumpet Club (Tatler No. 132) and the characters of the Spectator's club are first sketched by Steele in Spectator No. 2, but they are brought to their full realization by Addison. The members of the circle consist of Sir Roger, a country gentleman; Sir Andrew Freeport, a merchant; a lawyer who takes on much of the Spectator's character in his familiarity with the Ancients and in his quiet observation of the life around him; Captain Sentry, a retired soldier; and Will Honeycomb, the prototype of the "fop." These characters provide foils for the Spectator and furnish him with a wide variety of "types" through which he can see society:

The club of which I am a member is very luckily composed of such persons as are engaged in different ways of life and deputed as it were out of the most conspicuous classes of mankind: by this means I am furnished with the greatest variety of hints and materials, and know

everything that passes in the different quarters and divisions not only of this great city but of the whole kingdom.³⁴

Sir Roger de Coverley, as developed by Addison, is much more than a caricature; by the time the series of papers about him is completed, he emerges as a fairly well-developed character. His past history is given: he was afflicted (several years before the present paper) by an unrequited love for a widow, who eventually refused his offer of marriage and threw him into a profound melancholy. Being a rather stable and cheerful person by nature, he was able to bounce back, and though his dress suffers still--he wears old clothes, much-patched apparently he does not. Sir Roger makes no pretense to learning, desires to have a clergyman at his house who has not had much education, since he is "afraid of being insulted with Greek and Latin at his own table."³⁵ De Coverley is loved by all who know him, particularly by his servants, whom he treats with kindness and familiarity. He is respected by his neighbors, and assumes the natural leadership of the county, at the assizes, where he gives the time-honored judgment in a dispute, that "much might be said on both sides," and at church, where he provides his neighbors with a Christian example:

34. Addison, quoted in Clark, op. cit., p. 92

35. Addison, op. cit., I, 91

As Sir Roger is landlord to the whole congregation, he keeps them in very good order, and will suffer no body to sleep in it besides himself; for if by chance he has been surprized into a short nap at sermon, upon recovering out of it he stands up and looks about him, and if he sees any body else nodding, either wakes them himself, or sends his servant to them.³⁶

He also occasionally stands up in the middle of a sermon to count the congregation or to see if any of his tenants are missing. Addison is able to poke fun at Sir Roger (and the other characters) while still enabling the reader to like him. The reader shares the concern of the Spectator to keep Sir Roger from being the butt of the jokes of the wags at the theater (no. 335), and shares the sorrow of the club members when his death--of a cold caught at the county sessions--is reported (No. 517).

Addison's skill in portraiture surpasses that of Steele, who is able to describe physical features down to the last detail, but who never quite produces an actual living being. And Addison, for all his restraint and cool perfection, is not lacking in a sense of humor. His wry and subtle remarks on the Coverley circle show him full of a kindly humor and a good-natured sympathy that are comparable to the warmth of Steele.

The Coverley sequence and the proceedings of the club, though they provide for much of the life of The Spectator, are not the sole or even the principal interest of the paper.

36. Ibid., I, 110.

"The Spectator covered everything necessary to a proper social education, from what kind of hats ladies should wear to how to appreciate Milton."³⁷ A great number of Addison's papers are concerned with literary criticism-- not only of Milton's Paradise Lost, but also of such "new" discoveries as Chevy Chase and The Children in the Wood. In his literary criticism, Addison brings his classical education to the foreground. The standards that he sets up are those of classical antiquity: "Sometimes the pettiness of writers is reproved on the authority of Simonides (No. 209), Cicero (No. 243), Epictetus (No 355), or by the description of the Augustan Circle."³⁸ He advocated, in literature and in life, the reasoned simplicity, and the show of good sense in description and in action that had been attained by the classical age. In his fifth Spectator, Addison laughed at the then-fashionable Italian opera with its extravagances and absurdities. (such as the live birds brought in to sing in a background orange grove and the proposed project to produce a water fountain on stage: Addison suggests that this plan be postponed until summer so that theater-goers can be cooled off and refreshed).

"The Spectator covered practically the same ground as The Tatler"³⁹ in advocating clear-headed sensible action on

37. David Daiches, A Critical History of English Literature. (New York, 1960) Vol. II, p. 596.

38. Routh, op. cit., p. 61

39. Ibid., p. 60

the part of its readers. Sane action is recommended for all phases of life, not excluding love and courtship:

"Those marriages generally abound most with love and constancy that are preceded by a long courtship. The passion should strike root and gather strength before marriage be grafted⁴⁰ on to it." A man should think hard before he takes this important step, and should base his decision on more than outward beauty:

Good nature, and evenness of temper, will give you an easie companion for life; vertue and good sense, an agreeable friend; love and constancy, a good wife...A happy marriage has in it all the pleasures of friendship, all the enjoyments of sense, and reason, and indeed all the sweets of life.⁴¹

At this time, Addison was not married.

Addison, when he deals with domestic matters, is not nearly as effective or as sympathetic as Steele, and he falls far short of the prowess of his contemporary when he attempts to describe or advise women. Following the example of Steele, he brings women into his audience:

But there are none to whom this paper will be more useful, than to the female world. I have often thought that there has not been sufficient pains taken in finding out proper amusements for the fair ones...the right adjusting of their Hair [is] the principal employment of their lives.⁴²

Needless to say, such a beginning would hardly bring the women to his side; in the matters of home affections and domestic virtues, Steele's is the warmer voice.

40. Addison, op. cit., II, 39.

41. Ibid., II, 40, 41.

42. Ibid., I, 40

Where The Spectator excels is in the advance in thought over the earlier periodicals; "The moralists of the seventeenth century had drawn their wisdom from books, Bickerstaff had drawn his from experience; while Addison showed how to draw from both sources."⁴³ He tried to bring the best that he had gleaned from books and from his experience and to couch it in terms that could be understood by the middle-class readers of his time. He did not propound any new or original thoughts, but was a master at making the ideas that intrigued him understood by the average reader. In his series "On the Pleasures of the Imagination" (Nos. 411-421), he tried to show his reader how the aesthetic sense could be developed through contact with beautiful objects in nature, then in sculpture, in architecture, and finally in descriptive passages in literature. Addison probably did more than any writer up to his time to popularize the habit of reading.

His essays became more serious as the papers progressed, and ultimately he ventured into the field of religion; he preached, as others had done before him, on a "humanized Christianity," a faith that accorded well with his philosophy of good sense and moderation in action: "The duty of human beings is to be reconciled to their lot...to seek a sober happiness in the sense of doing right."⁴⁴ Addison

43. Routh, op. cit., p. 54

44. Ibid., p. 70

was "a lay preacher by temperament," whose prime interest was a didactic one.⁴⁵ He asserted in The Spectator "...the great and only end of these my speculations is to banish vice and ignorance out of the territories of Great Britain"; he believed that the principal needs of man were a clear judgment and a good conscience, backed up by a sane recognition of the "sensible" way to act in all situations: "...no thought can be valuable of which good sense is not the groundwork."⁴⁶

To a reader today, Addison's preaching on religion and the moral value of "good sense" seems flat and bloodless; it hasn't much meaning in a world that is more full of imminent danger than the comparatively "safe" eighteenth century. But for Addison's time, the moral ideals of respectable and reasonable behavior were goals that a man of fashion would find well worth striving for.

Samuel Johnson

Samuel Johnson was even more concerned with establishing standards of moral behavior. James Boswell states that Johnson considered (justly) that since a long interval had elapsed since the publication of The Tatler and The Spectator (the first Rambler appeared on March 20, 1750), "this form of instruction would, in some degree, have the advantage of novelty."⁴⁷ Boswell doesn't think the title, The Rambler, well-suited for Johnson's paper, a series of grave and moral discourses undertaken with "devout and conscientious sentiments."⁴⁸ The Rambler came out twice a week, every number but four written by Johnson despite his "constitutional indolence, his depression of spirit and his labour in carrying on his Dictionary."⁴⁹ Because it was almost entirely Johnson's work, the paper was often lacking in the variety that distinguished the other periodical papers, a fact which Boswell believes may account for its initial un-

47. Life of Samuel Johnson, ed. Edmund Fuller (New York, 1960) p. 62.

48. Ibid, p. 62.

49. Ibid, p. 63.

popularity. Its extremely didactic tone and the seriousness of its moral preachings may have been another cause for its first lack of success. But in spite of these "faults," The Rambler is valuable for the strength of its style and for the revelations of the man who dominated English life and letters to the extent that a period in English Literature is called "The Age of Johnson."

Samuel Johnson was born on September 18, 1709, the son of the magistrate of Lichfield. As a child, he anticipated the personality and temper of his later years: he was quick in grasping ideas, but 'slothful'; he often procrastinated in his studies, weighed down by a melancholy disposition. Early in childhood, he was afflicted with scrofula, which distorted his features and left his sight greatly impaired. He was a born scholar, as was Addison, but read widely rather than deeply. Boswell describes him as reading prodigiously, but in a desultory manner, as inclination directed him. He apparently had the ability to understand books immediately, and was not often inspired to finish them. His family fortunes declined, but he was enabled to enter Pembroke College, Oxford, with the help of a neighbor. He was, however, poor during all of his stay at the university, and Macaulay believes that his distress made him "reckless and ungovernable."⁵⁰ He left

50. Thomas Babington Macaulay, "The Life of Samuel Johnson," in Macaulay's Essays on Addison and Johnson, ed. A. G. New-comer (Chicago and New York, 1903) page 173.

without a degree in 1731, and spent several years in a struggle with poverty. He became, in these years, an incurable hypochondriac, eccentric and morbid: "the rays of heaven ... reached him refracted, dulled and discolored by the thick gloom which had settled on his soul."⁵¹

He remained for three years in the midland counties, where he met and fell in love with Mrs. Elizabeth Porter, a widow in whom no one but Johnson seemed to see anything remarkable. Macaulay describes her as short, coarse, and heavily painted, but says that Johnson found her graceful and accomplished; and the fact remains that he was devoted to her, and admired and respected her to the end of his days.

Back in London, his poverty caused him to develop habits that remained with him throughout his life: never neat, he became quite slovenly in appearance, and his greed and bad manners in eating hampered him in being accepted by society. But it is significant that in spite of his obvious faults and eccentricities, he was accepted, and even highly respected, by his contemporaries. He did have enemies, but those who understood him made efforts to overlook his fits of gloom and bad temper. After a year in London, he was able to obtain employment writing for Edward Cave's Gentleman's Magazine; in the same year, 1738, he published his poem "London," much admired by

51. Ibid, page 176.

eminent authors of the time, including Pope. His "Life of Richard Savage" increased his reputation, and in 1747, several booksellers engaged him to compile a dictionary of the English language (completed in 1755). His play, "Irene," though David Garrick made changes and played in it, was too heavy to be successful with a London audience and was withdrawn from the stage after nine days. About a year after "Irene," Johnson, while still working on the Dictionary, began to publish a series of papers on morals, manners, and literature, The Rambler, which succeeded in the thirty-sixth year after the last number of The Spectator, where all the other imitators of Addison had failed. Although its initial sale was small, it was enthusiastically admired by a few eminent men and when the papers were collected, the work became popular. In 1758, he published a second periodical, The Idler; and in the same year, wrote "Rasselas" to defray the funeral expenses of his mother. On his publishing of an edition of Shakespeare (1765), he was given an honorary doctorate by Oxford. From 1765 to 1775 he wrote nothing but three political tracts; but during this period, his tongue was active though his pen was not. Johnson elevated conversation to an art; his strong sense, wit, knowledge of literature and art, and his infinite store of anecdotes made him an active influence on English literature and on his society. In fact, Macaulay asserts, "he spoke better than he

wrote." ⁵² He gathered around him most of the notable figures of the time, in a group called first 'The Literary Club,' but afterwards known simply as 'The Club.' The group included such men as Sir Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, Oliver Goldsmith, Garrick -- and Boswell. ⁵³ In 1765 Johnson made friends with the Thrales, who were intrigued by his brilliant conversation and by his eccentricities and provided him with a home and comfort for most of his later life; his beloved "Tetty" had died in 1752, and his domestic life was a lonely one. He surrounded himself in the Thrale household with various decrepit, poverty-stricken old people, who dropped off one by one. He himself, despite mental and bodily afflictions, clung desperately to life and not until his last hours, did the "dark cloud" of his fear of death pass from him. But at the last, he grew calm, "spoke much of the mercy of God ... in this serene frame of mind he died on the thirteenth of December, 1784," ⁵⁴ and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Johnson's life and personality, more than his writings, make him a prominent figure in English literature. As a writer, he was a part, and a dominating part, of his age,

52. Ibid, page 208.

53. Boswell, op. cit., page 128, 129.

54. Macaulay, op. cit., page 229.

but as a man he is a figure that stands outside one particular age and speaks to all times. Michael Joyce describes him not as a great writer, but as "a great man, writing." It is not the "Great Moralist" -- the name that Boswell gives him in connection with The Rambler -- that is remembered, but Johnson the man, "that singular compound of the illustrious and the grotesque, of tenderness and truculence, of gaiety and black depression, of luminous good sense and rugged prejudice."⁵⁵⁵⁶

In his Rambler, however, most of the ideas that Johnson expressed in his later conversation are given, and his characteristic opinions and philosophy are expressed. The first number of The Rambler on March 20, 1750, began the second of the two great decades for English literary periodicals. ~~The paper followed the same pattern as The Spectator~~ and consisted of moral and critical essays, letters from fictitious correspondents, fables, character sketches, and lay sermons. Johnson took, too, Addison's purpose -- "to temper morality with wit, to enliven with with morality" -- but in his attempt to combine entertainment with instruction, he was not as successful as his predecessor. The high seriousness of his moral aim often got in the way of his humor.

55. Michael Joyce, Samuel Johnson, (London, New York, Toronto, 1955), p. vi.

56. Ibid, page vi.

Many of his papers reflect a strong pessimism that Addison, in spite of his cool seriousness, would never express. "The grave and often solemn cast of thinking," as described by Boswell, distinguishes The Rambler from the other literary periodicals. At their best, Johnson's essays have a quality of strength or 'tough-mindedness' that justify Boswell's descriptions of them as "bark and steel" for the mind. He had a keen understanding of the nature of human beings -- not in particular instances, but in a general and abstract sense -- and of the forces that motivate them. In Rambler No. 2 he says

the mind of man is never satisfied with the objects immediately before it, but is always breaking away from the present moment, and losing itself in schemes of future felicity... This quality of looking forward into futurity seems the unavoidable condition of a being, whose motions are gradual, and whose life is progressive... The natural flights of the human mind are not from pleasure to pleasure, but from hope to hope. 57

Johnson would not adhere to the philosophy that "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds"; he recognized, even in an age that was "enlightened," that evil is a present reality, and that man must cope with it. He advocated, for the most part, a stoical resignation, the furnishing of a mind with moral principles that will allow it to stand up under the evils that beset man:

57. Samuel Johnson, The Rambler, in The British Essayists, ed. James Ferguson, forty-five volumes, Vol. 19, (London, 1819) I, 6, 7, 8.

So large a part of human life passes in a state contrary to our natural desires, that one of the principal topicks of moral instruction is the art of bearing calamities, and such is the certainty of evil, that it is the duty of every man to furnish his mind with those principles that may enable him to act under it with decency and propriety. 58

We can never hope to banish pain or evil entirely by reason (Johnson's philosophy seems at this point to go counter to the prevailing thought of the eighteenth century):

The cure for the greatest part of human miseries is not radical, but palliative... the armies of pain send their arrows against us on every side, the choice is only between those which are more or less sharp, or tinged with poison of greater or less malignity; and the strongest armour which reason can supply, will only blunt their points, but cannot repel them. 59

The most important of the moral principles with which man should strengthen his mind is patience:

The great remedy which Heaven has put in our hands is patience, by which, though we cannot lessen the torments of the body, we can in a great measure preserve the peace of the mind, and shall suffer only the natural and genuine force of an evil, without heightening its acrimony, or prolonging its effects. 60

At its worst, Johnson's thought is mere "moralizing" of the kind that seemed to appeal to the eighteenth century, but which today is only repelling. The close of his Rambler No. 5, "A Meditation on the Spring," while

58. Ibid., I, 176

59. Ibid., I, 178

60. Ibid., I, 178

painting a nice picture, gives "young readers" advice that is as trite as it is vague. He calls on youth

to acquire, while their minds may be yet impressèd with new images, a love of innocent pleasures, and an ardour for useful knowledge; and to remember that a blighted spring makes a barren year, and that the vernal flowers, however beautiful and gay, are only intended by nature as preparatives to autumnal fruits.⁶¹

Although the bulk of Johnson's essays are full of a deep seriousness and are concerned chiefly with moral elevation, he does enliven the series with an occasional humorous piece. One example of humor that approaches that of The Tatler or The Spectator is Johnson's attempt to satirize his old friend Garrick, with whom he had come to London and who Johnson thought changed toward him when he (Garrick) became famous. Rambler No. 200, entitled "Asper's Complaint of the Insolence of Prospero," tells how "Asper" is subjected to various insults at Prospero's house culminating in his being asked to admire the Dresden china, but told to put it down, since "they who were accustomed to common dishes, seldom handled china with much care." Asper thinks he should be commended because he "did not dash his
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baubles to the ground." Another fairly successful attempt at humor is made in Rambler No. 12, in which a young serving-girl describes her futile efforts to find employment. This account reads almost like a short story,

⁶¹. Ibid., I, 27

⁶². quoted in G. S. Marr, The Periodical Essayists of the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1923), p. 124

though its point is again a moral one--the rudeness of the ladies and gentlemen who insult, ignore, or confuse the girl is censored; and the tale is provided with a happy ending.

The lighter papers, however, are few and far between; The Rambler has neither the variety nor the brightness of the earlier periodicals. In the best of its moral instruction, though, the periodical is notable for its strength of purpose and for the vigorous expression of that purpose. It succeeds in transmitting its philosophy principally by the "sheer dominating strength of the mind of Johnson."⁶³

In his literary criticism, Johnson tries to achieve a balance between two opposing views: first, that he should accept the standards of his time, the "classical" rules, and second, that he should assert his independence and judge for himself. In Nos. 86 and 88, he discusses Milton's heroic verse, and declares that Milton has "left our harsh cadences harsher," judging Milton by the standards that caused men of the Age of Reason to regard Pope's smooth couplets the epitome of correct poetic style. In Rambler No. 156, however, he argues with any servile following of "established" rules: "a writer should be able to distinguish that which is established because it is right from that which is right because it is established."⁶⁴

63. W. S. Graham, English Literary Periodicals (New York, 1930), p. 121

64. Johnson, op. cit., III,

The "balance" which Johnson tried to achieve is apparent in all facets of his thought and is present, too, in the manner in which he writes. He uses parallelism to excess and frequently clouds his thought with "doublets," two words, connected by 'and' that are close in meaning. William Hazlitt⁶⁵ states "Johnson wrote a kind of rhyming prose, in which he was as much compelled to finish the different clauses of his sentences, and to balance one period against another, as the writer of heroic verse is to keep to lines of ten syllables with similar terminations." Johnson, in the last number of The Rambler, writes,

I have laboured to refine our language to grammatical purity, and to clear it from colloquial barbarisms, licentious idioms, and irregular combinations. Something, perhaps, I have added to the elegance of its construction, and something to the harmony of its cadence.⁶⁶

He once described The Rambler as "pure wine," whereas his other works were wine and water. But he often becomes too intoxicated in The Rambler with his words and expressions: he is too fond of such words as "abscinded, adscititious, and equiponderant."⁶⁷ A reader is often so lost in the convolutions of his phrases that he forgets entirely the subject of the sentence. Boswell reports that Goldsmith told Johnson: "...if you were to make little fishes talk, they would talk like whales."⁶⁸ The "grammatical purity" that

65. quoted in Joyce, op. cit., p. 55

66. Johnson, op. cit., V

67. Joyce, op. cit., p. 54

68. Boswell, op. cit., p. 170

he attempted is better realized in the simplicity and directness of Goldsmith's prose, but at its best, Johnson's style is memorable for its force and vigor, its balance, and its perfect command of language.

In his last number, Johnson states that his chief purpose in The Rambler has been to inculcate wisdom and piety, but admits that the severity of his dictatorial instruction might drive his readers to more cheerful companions. A "more cheerful companion," when a reader has had enough of the strong diet of Johnson's little-relieved seriousness, is his friend and admirer, Oliver Goldsmith.

Oliver Goldsmith

Perhaps the most enjoyable of the periodical essayists is Oliver Goldsmith; although he wrote hastily, sometimes carelessly, he, among all the great periodical writers of the eighteenth century, seems closest to readers of modern times. His papers approach the familiar essays of the nineteenth century in their warmth and in their personal tone. Goldsmith's prose is graceful and pure, without being over-refined; he has a simple charm in his essays that makes them easy and pleasant to read. His writing is natural and homely, though never rough or harsh. He is the most versatile of the eighteenth century writers; Johnson, in the sentence he wrote on his friend's cenotaph in Westminster Abbey, expressed the thought of most of Goldsmith's readers: "There is hardly any form of literature that he did not touch; and whatever he touched, he adorned."⁶⁹

Oliver Goldsmith was born November 10, 1728, near Ballymahon, Ireland, the son of a curate and small farmer. His earliest schooling was received from an Irishman with a large stock of tales, who may have influenced Goldsmith's later facility in story-telling. Goldsmith's childhood

69. quoted in Clark, op. cit., p. 208

was far from happy; his features were harsh to ugliness, marred by smallpox. His natural sensitivity was increased by the ridicule of his schoolmates. He attended Trinity College, in Dublin, as a sizar, but neglected his studies. His education did not fit him for much and when he left school he tried his hand at five or six professions, succeeding at none. He obtained money to go to Leyden University, but left at the age of twenty-seven without taking a degree. With his smattering of knowledge, some clothes, and a flute, he wandered through Flanders, France, Switzerland and Italy, traveling mainly on foot. Macaulay states⁷⁰ that Goldsmith's tales of his travels are not to be trusted; he had not always a high regard for the truth in his stories about himself. In 1756, he ventured into London life, as a strolling player, a seller of drugs, a beggar, and finally, a translator. He agreed to write for The Monthly Review in 1757, and began to receive an "adequate salary." His essays for The Bee were published in 1759, and at about the same time, he agreed to submit two papers a week to The Public Ledger, and the "Chinese Philosopher" was born. The papers for The Public Ledger, 123 in all, were later collected and published under the title "The Citizen of the World." Once these works were before the

70. Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Life of Oliver Goldsmith," in Encyclopedia Britannica.

public, his reputation increased; eventually, he was introduced to Johnson, Reynolds and Burke, and became a member of the famous "Club" that gathered around Johnson. Although Goldsmith was successful, he was never prudent in managing his financial affairs and was often reduced to begging his landlady to let him stay on without paying the rent. Boswell relates the story of Johnson's intervention in a feud between Goldsmith and his landlady, when Johnson read part of The Vicar of Wakefield, pronounced it excellent, and had the young man sell part of it for enough money to satisfy his landlady's demands. In 1764, The Traveller was published and Goldsmith was acknowledged a "classic" writer. In 1770, he brought out "The Deserted Village," and followed it in 1773 with She Stoops to Conquer, the play that even today is regarded as one of the comic masterpieces of English literature. Goldsmith in his mature life was as sensitive as he had been in his youth; he wanted very much to be liked and admired by the men in the illustrious circle of which he was a member, and often tried too hard to match their "wit" in conversation. He felt his failures keenly. He was too candid to hold his tongue, and often revealed his feelings to his friends without any regard for prudence. Garrick described him as one who "wrote like an angel, but talked like poor Poll."⁷¹ He was vain, frivolous, careless; and he was an

71. Boswell, op. cit., p. 106.

incurable spendthrift: he was free with his earnings, bought fine clothes, gave huge dinner parties that he could not afford. His virtues outweighed his faults, however; there was much to love in him. He was kind, generous, and unselfish in his life, and showed the same kindness in his writings. His soft heart, his keen sympathy and sense of humor give his essays life and warmth.

There has been much speculation about the origins of Goldsmith's Chinese philosopher; the basic idea--that of a stranger viewing the quaint customs and habits of a people foreign to him--is not a new one, but the original model for Goldsmith's character is probably Horace Walpole's Chinaman in his pamphlet, "A Letter From Xo Ho, a Chinese philosopher at London to his friend, Lien Chi, at Peking."⁷² The pamphlet gave Goldsmith the suggestion that inspired one of the most interesting characters in English letters--the wise and simple Lien Chi Altangi, the judge of and commentator on fashions, morals, and manners of the men and women of eighteenth-century London.

Goldsmith's "Citizen of the World" could have been drawn from himself: the Chinese philosopher is a kind, good-natured and observant student of life, who is interested in and rather amazed at the strange habits and customs of fashionable Londoners. By having an "outsider" pronounce

72. Austin Dobson, Eighteenth Century Vignettes, first series (New York, 1892), p.116

judgment on society, Goldsmith was able to show an "objective" viewpoint on the morals and manners of his time. The method is similar to Addison's and Steele's "seeing" through a personality, but Goldsmith's character is given added humor in that the London fashions seem foreign and ridiculous to him, and thus ridiculous to the reader, who sees through his eyes.

Lien Chi Altangi is introduced in the first paper⁷³ by a merchant in Amsterdam to a merchant in London; the letter from Amsterdam states that the writer doesn't know too much about the Chinaman: "I am told he is a philosopher; I'm sure he is an honest man."⁷⁴ Lien Chi himself appears in the second paper; he writes to his friend at Amsterdam, greeting him with characteristic politeness and dignity: "May the wings of peace rest upon thy dwelling."⁷⁵ He is shown as a scholar; he doesn't care much for money. In this paper, too, he gives his first impressions of the British; he has been describing his rather rough ocean passage, and exclaims, "What a strange people am I got amongst, who have founded an empire on this unstable element!"⁷⁶ His first impression seems to be justified in his later adventures; the English seem stranger to him as he gains familiarity with their habits and customs. In the third paper,

⁷³ 73. Oliver Goldsmith, The Citizen of the World, in The British Essayists, Vol 45.

74. Ibid., p. 11, 12

75. Ibid., p. 12

76. Ibid., p. 13

Lien Chi writes to a friend of his youth: "I consider myself here as a newly created being introduced into a new world; every object strikes with wonder and surprise."⁷⁷

His wonder increases daily, causes him to shake his head continually in amazement; it is not often, however, an admiring wonder. The quality that distinguishes Lien Chi from Bickerstaff and the Spectator is his naiveté; his genuine surprise at the many strange habits of English men and women often accentuates the sarcasm.

His first sight of men and women arrayed with all the art of fashion fascinates him: "a fine gentleman, or a fine lady, here dressed up to fashion, seems scarcely to have a single limb that does not suffer some distortion from art."⁷⁸ He is especially interested in the peculiar headgear which adorns the pate of a well-dressed gentleman: "To appear wise, a man must borrow hair from the heads of all his neighbors, and clap it like a bush on his own."⁷⁹

Goldsmith ridicules more than the queer fashions of his time; his satire becomes stronger, though the humor is not lessened, in letter No. 20, where Lien Chi describes the wranglings of men of letters:

each looks upon his fellow as a rival,
not an assistant, in the same pursuit.
They calumniate, they injure, they despise,

77. Ibid., p. 16

78. Ibid., p. 17

79. Ibid., p. 17

they ridicule each other; if one man writes a book that pleases, others shall write books, to show that he might have given still greater pleasure, or should not have pleased. If one happens to hit on something new, there are numbers to assure the public, that all this was no novelty to them or the learned; that Cardanus, or Brunus, or some other author, too dull to be generally read, had anticipated the discovery. 80

Goldsmith jabs again at the writers of his time in his letter No. 51, "The Bookseller's Visit to the Chinese," which makes sarcastic reference to such eccentric styles as Sterne's. The bookseller shows the Chinese philosopher a work full of many "strokes of humor":

'Do you call these dashes of the pen strokes,' replied I, 'for I must confess I can see no other?'--'And pray, Sir,' returned he, 'what do you call them? Do you see any thing now a-days that is not filled with strokes--and dashes? --Sir, a well-placed dash makes half the wit of our writers of modern humour.' 81

His power of characterization is equal to Addison's in Sir Roger de Coverley. The Chinese Letters contain many descriptions of character, which, if surpassed by himself, were surpassed by no other writer of the time." 82

In No. 54, Beau Tibbs, one of the most famous characters in the set of papers, is introduced. He and The Man in Black are characters that come close to Addison's

80. Ibid, p. 75.

81. Ibid, p. 202

82. Leslie Stephan quoted in Clark, op. cit., p. 220.

Roger de Coverly. Beau Tibbs is described:

his hat was pinched up with peculiar smartness; his looks were pale, thin, and sharp; round his neck he wore a broad black riband, and in his bosom a buckle studded with glass; his coat was trimmed with tarnished twist; he wore by his side a sword, with a black hilt; and his stockings of silk, though newly washed, were grown yellow by long service. 83

His characterizations in The Citizen of the World anticipate to some extent the powers of portraiture that is fully developed in his later works. The Man in Black, Lien's friend, is a combination of some of those "Goldsmith family traits which were standards so successfully recalled in Dr. Primrose, Mr. Hardcastle and the clergyman of 'The Deserted Village.'" Goldsmith paints a man who professes distrust of human nature, but is charitable; who simulates harshness, but is a good friend.

Goldsmith's satire is never bitter; it amuses, probably, more than it teaches. His irony is mild, and even when he is most sarcastic, there is an air of pleasantry in his ridicule that makes all his readers smile. He handles the embodiments of follies and weaknesses tenderly; his unforced humor in describing them makes them seem amusing rather than despicable, and to this extent, he may be less effective in a reformatory sense, but he is enjoyable.

83. Goldsmith, op. cit., p. 214.

The essay periodical as a literary type lived and died in the eighteenth century; it was connected in a most intimate way with the society that produced it. Most of the faults and weaknesses, the habits and idiosyncrasies, the thought or lack of thought of men and women of eighteenth century London are revealed in the pages of the periodicals, and readers today are given something of the breath and life of the time. The essay periodical was appreciated too by the society which it describes: "It was discussed in the drawing rooms and in the coffee-houses with such a feeling of satisfaction that the form remained unquestioned for wellnigh a century."⁸⁴ Only in the last years of the century did men find they needed something more stirring than the "little moral essay, the didactic tale, and the imaginary 'characters' drawn for their improvement...And it was then that this particular form of the essay became extinct."⁸⁵

84. Marr, op. cit., p. 11

85. Ibid., p. 12

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