

The School Houses

1. ADDISON (1672-1719).

Among the famous coffee houses which sprang up like mushrooms in London during the early part of the eighteenth century, ‘Button’s’ is a name well-known in English Literature. It was a favourite meeting place for the poet and essayist, Joseph Addison, and several other men notable in Palmer’s day for their literary and, artistic works. Here they would sit for hours enjoying leisurely discussions and the excellent coffee served by their host.

The leading spirit of the group, Addison, was, as may be imagined from his writings, a gentleman of culture. Save for his last few years, which were marked by political and literary troubles, his life was tranquil and pleasant. He was born, the son of a country rector, at Milston, in Wiltshire, in 1672. He passed a happy and studious youth and entered Oxford, where he ‘became noted for the charm of his verse. His whole career was assured by the publication of his poem, ‘The Campaign,’ celebrating Marlborough’s victory at Blenheim. This won him much popular and political favour and from then on Addison held many offices, the most important being that of Secretary of State in 1717.

It is not, however, for his statesmanship, nor even for his poetry, so famous in its day, that Addison is still loved. It was rather in his essays that he reached his highest powers.

A school friend of Addison’s, Richard Steele, had sensed that the keener interest shown by the age in such things as politics, general news and society, had prepared the way for a newspaper, which would discuss just these items. So in 1709 he inaugurated ‘The Tatler,’ with which Palmer may have been familiar. Addison soon became a contributor and after the ‘Tatler’ was discontinued in 1711, he and Steele jointly started another journal, the ‘Spectator.’

The combination of editors could not have been better. Steele was an Irishman, brilliant but impulsive, with a head full of ideas. Addison had a much calmer disposition, with the ability to develop gracefully and wisely the ideas and characters suggested by Steele. The ‘Spectator,’ which contained no news, but only light and often gently satirical essays, told of the imaginary members of a club who discussed all kinds of subjects, from training young ladies in the use of fans, to an appreciation of Milton; Charming characters were introduced, notably the courteous, well-loved country gentleman, Sir Roger de Coverley.

Addison’s style has always been greatly admired and praised. Samuel Johnson wrote :
“Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar, but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the study of Addison!” This may seem excessive, but Addison deserves high honour and distinction for his services in redeeming literature from” the fanaticism of the Puritans and from the bombast and licence of the Restoration period.

Boys of Addison House are- drawn from the parishes of Stanford-le-Hope, Corringham, Fobbing and Pitsea and their House colour is Cambridge blue.

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