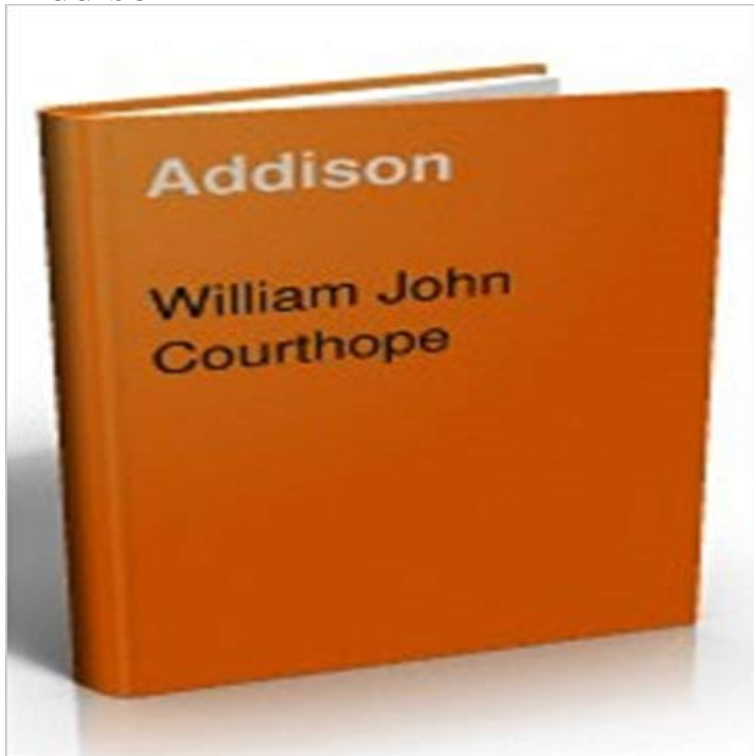


# Addison



Of the four English men of letters whose writings most fully embody the spirit of the eighteenth century, the one who provides the biographer with the scantiest materials is Addison. In his *Journal to Stella*, his social verses, and his letters to his friends, we have a vivid picture of those relations with women and that protracted suffering which invest with such tragic interest the history of Swift. Pope, by the publication of his own correspondence, has enabled us, in a way that he never intended, to understand the strange moral twist which distorted a nature by no means devoid of noble instincts. Johnson was fortunate in the companionship of perhaps the best biographer who ever lived. But of the real life and character of Addison scarcely any contemporary record remains. The formal narrative prefixed to his works by Tickell is, by that writers own admission, little more than a bibliography. Steele, who might have told us more than any man about his boyhood and his manner of life in London, had become estranged from his old friend before his death. No writer [Pg 2] has taken the trouble to preserve any account of the wit and wisdom that enlivened the little senate at Buttons. His own letters are, as a rule, compositions as finished as his papers in the *Spectator*. Those features in his character which excite the greatest interest have been delineated by the hand of an enemy who possessed an unrivalled power of satirical portrait-painting, and was restrained by no regard for truth from creating in the public mind such impressions about others as might serve to heighten the favourable opinion of himself. This absence of dramatic incident in Addisons life would lead us naturally to conclude that he was deficient in the energy and passion which cause a powerful nature to leave a mark upon its age. Yet such a judgment would certainly be erroneous. Shy and reserved as he was, the

unanimous verdict of his most illustrious contemporaries is decisive as to the respect and admiration which he excited among them. The man who could exert so potent an influence over the mercurial Steele, who could fascinate the haughty and cynical intellect of Swift, whose conversation, by the admission of his satirist Pope, had in it something more charming than that of any other man; of whom it was said that he might have been chosen king if he wished it; such a man, though to the coarse perception of Mandeville he might have seemed no more than a parson in a tye-wig, can hardly have been deficient in force of character.

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