

18 th century Essayists

18 th century has been remarkable for the development and growth of prose in English literature. It is for this reason that the whole of this century is known as the age of Prose. Various branches of Prose such as essay, novel, criticism, travel literature etc achieved new heights during this period. As far as essay as a branch of Prose is concerned, it was during the first half of 18 th century (The Age of Pope) that essays came to acquire a systematic and regular growth. The greatest essayists of this phase were Richard Steel and Joseph Addison.

The names of Richard Steel (1672-1729) and Joseph Addison (1672-1719) are always associated on account of their collaboration in the publication of periodical essays. Steel spent a carefree and dissipated life in his early days but by 1700 he began taking interest in things morally serious. In 1701 he published an edifying treatise 'The Christian Hero'. Then he turned to periodical essays and started 'The Tatler'. Its first number appeared on April 12, 1709. For 'The Tatler' ~~had~~ ^{for} Steel received frequent collaboration of Addison. 'The Tatler' appeared three times a week and each number consisted of several letters dated from the different coffee-houses of London. In the first volume steel declared the purpose of 'The Tatler' in the following words "The general purpose of this paper is to expose the false art of life . . . and to recommend a general simplicity in our discourse, and our behaviour." 'The Tatler' proved a moral monitor of the time and it did much to inculcate good morals among the people of his age.

Joseph Addison was famous in his days