

THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM

For a long time we have combatted an urge to print something regarding Joseph Addison and his work. Addison was an Englishman; he was born in 1672, died in 1719. It is impossible in a short article to do more than to draw our readers' attention to the literary work of this great man and to inspire them with a desire to read for themselves. He was a man eminent for his humanity—for his good nature and his broad and intelligent sympathies. He was ever looking for the good and the pure—he saw what he looked for, too.

During his life he was a contributor to the *Spectator*, a publication of his day, and when the *Spectator* ceased publication he became a contributor to the *Guardian*. For the latter periodical Addison contributed fifty-three essays—all of great merit. Addison was a collaborator of Steele in the creation of the literary character known as Sir Roger de Coverly; in fact, Sir Roger's existence was due chiefly to Addison.

It is said that a literary education too often makes merely "good talkers" of men on ideas which are not their own. They adorn and publish ideas which are provided them by other men.

Addison was not "one of these." He was both a poetic soul and a philosopher in one. Position alone did not impress Addison with the worth or merit of his fellows. He believed that too often "vice was concealed by riches," also that "virtue was often concealed by poverty." He knew that success was often mistaken for merit. He knew that "outward appearances" were as impressive in his day, and as misleading, as they are in ours. His was the task of bringing these facts to the readers of his time—a task done with fidelity.

Now we come to the place where we wish to present Addison both as a profound believer in an Almighty Power and as a poet. To us it seems that only a truly great mind could touch upon the Twenty-Third Psalm of David as did Addison. How this Psalm must have appealed to Addison! He is represented in his steadfast devotion to God Almighty when he writes of that something which sustains "the soul when it is hovering in the last moments of its separation, when it is just entering on another state of existence to converse with scenes, and objects, and companions that are altogether new." He then refers to the great pastoral Psalm in question, and we are pleased at this point to give it in the original:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of

death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Virtue and temperance at all times and in all things bring solace to the mind of man, whether he be wealthy as regards worldly chattels or in the throes of poverty and nearing the hour of death. Naturally he looks for something beyond himself, and more powerful, when his soul shall be tested, and what is more natural than for him to lean more and more upon the great promise of the Twenty-third Psalm?

This great psalm meant something beyond the ordinary to the soul of Addison. It meant salvation, and it had a poetic appeal to which his very soul responded. Addison, in writing of this great psalm says: "As the poetry is very exquisite, I shall present my reader with the following translation of it:"

"The Lord my pasture shall prepare,
And feed me with a shepherd's care;
His presence shall my wants supply,
And guard me with a watchful eye;
My noonday walks He shall attend,
And all my midnight hours defend.

"When in sultry glebe I faint,
Or on the thirsty mountain pant;
To fertile vales and dewy meads
My weary, wand'ring steps He leads;
Where peaceful rivers, soft and slow,
Amid the verdant landscape flow.

"Though in the paths of death I tread,
With gloomy horrors overspread,
My steadfast heart shall fear no ill,
For Thou, O Lord, art with me still;
Thy friendly crook shall give me aid,
And guide me through the dreadful shade.

"Though in a bare and rugged way,
Through devious, lonely wilds I stray,
Thy bounty shall my pains beguile:
The barren wilderness shall smile
With sudden greens and herbage crowned,
And streams shall murmur all around."

To us it seems that man at times approaches close to Divinity—especially one who can make such a beautiful and poetic translation of the above psalm. We have learned much from Addison, as have generations of mankind before our day. There is truth, philosophy and poetry in the works of Addison, and we believe that the student who devotes time to them will be the better therefor.

So often is it true that man goes out of his way to help others and they heed him not. They say the world is getting better—wiser, probably, but better? In the way of literature the present generation in taste and in work is not on par with the demands of a century ago. Read Addison.