

18th Century Periodicals

Eighteenth century saw the rise of journalism. Essays started appearing in the periodicals deriving materials from the manners of the time. Addison and Steele revolutionised the art of essay writing through the Tatler. It was started in 1709 by Steele. Addison contributed to it. It was after the eighty first number that he became a regular contributor. Tatler published news, essays, letters, stories and dramatic criticism. January 02, 1711 saw the death of Tatler. A new periodical the Spectator followed in March the same year. One of the ingredients of this periodical was the essays which were a grand success in the Tatler. The success of this periodical must be attributed to the sobriety and moderation shown by the writers, humour and the general moralising tone. The essayists of the Spectator and

Tatler aimed at two purposes - (i) entertainment and (ii) improvement of morals and manners of contemporary society. The style of the writers were conversational and the women too used to read them on Sundays. They formed excellent reading in family circles. In their essays Addison and Steele dealt with "more immediate and passing scenes of life", with "temporary and local matters" even before the Tatler there were two papers or periodicals namely 'Athenian Mercury' of John Dunton and Defoe's 'Review'. Daniel Defoe has rightly been called the 'Father' of English Newspaper. He himself wrote all the things. The aim of these journals was mainly political but they also dealt with moral and social topics. Anyway, Addison and Steele became very popular through the periodicals - As a consequent

nce a host of imitations of the Tatler came up. Those imitations are no longer remembered with the exception of Swift's 'The Examiner', which was started with a purely political end in view. This periodical was a political journal. The next periodical which must find a mention is Dr. Johnson's Rambler which appeared twice a week. With the change of the man the style also underwent a change. The easy flow, the sparkle and the humour of Addison took its leave. In the hands of Johnson the essay became more serious and style heavy and periodic. At the time of the Rambler Dr. Johnson was a less known man, rather was comparatively an unknown man. Though a number of periodicals had sprung up after the Tatler, Spectator and the Guardian, the Rambler ranks first among classical periodicals after the ~~the~~ Guardian. A few years

later Johnson contributed to the Universal Chronicle, a series of papers called the Gilder. In the interval between the Rem- bler and the Gilder Johnson had contributed a great deal to Hawkesworth's Adventure.

The main purpose of the essay writers for the periodicals was to bring about an overall improvement in manners and mo- rals. The trend of the essays in the Spectator can be dedu- ced from the following state- ment of the author "The great and only end of these speculat- ions is to banish vice and ignorance out of the territo- ries of Great Britain". In the words of A.C. Rickett :-

"It is the first attempt ma- de by journalism to give for- m and consistency to public opinion the first serious effort made, in fact, to organise public opinion by clarifying and systematising the infinite discussions that went on at-

the clubs and coffee-houses Spectator became very popular and exerted great influence. It even got place in English literature. It has been said that "the Spectator made a mark in English literature, and fixed a form which was adopted with servile fidelity by many periodicals till the end of the century." It is in the Tattler and the Spectator that we see the beginning of the "genial intimacy of the writer with the reader, which was to find so rare a following at a later time in Elia, in Hazlitt and in Thackeray." Goldsmith started a paper named 'The Bee' which ran only for few weeks. 'The Traveller' appeared in 1764. At this time he was on intimate terms with Johnson's inner circle. In 1760 he contributed ~~to~~ anonymously to Newbery's daily paper 'Public Ledger', a series of

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paper purported to have been written by a Chinese visitor to London. It is said that after Addison it was Goldsmith who captured and revived the secret of the illustrious essayists of Queen Anne's time.

The end.

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