

Sir Roger at church – Joseph Addison



Introduction:

In the Coverley Essays, Sir Roger has been characterized vividly by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Sir Roger is presented in these essays as kind, generous, lovable, and sometimes as a peculiar person. But in the hand of Joseph Addison, Sir Roger's character is conveyed ironically. For that reason he sometimes seems odd. Although he is gentle and mild and lovable to people, he has some eccentricities and oddities.

Joseph Addison's essay "Sir Roger at Church" is about a unique individual named Sir Roger. Addison begins the essay by saying that the observance of Sunday as a holy day keeps mankind civilized and polished. On Sundays people are at their very best. They appear clean and talk to other people on boring topics. Just like a merchant discusses exchange rates, the Parish people discuss the affairs of the parish.

Sir Roger has spent a lot of money on the church and continues to do so. Most of the parishioners are his tenants and he has a degree of control over them. Sir Roger employs a singer to help them sing their hymns in church properly. This has dramatically improved the services at the church.

However Roger has many peculiarities. He often falls asleep during the service, but would not allow anyone else to sleep while the service is going on. Another habit of his is to continue singing even when everyone else has stopped. He also continues saying Amen multiple times if he is satisfied with his piety. While everybody else kneels in the church, he stands to count the number of people to find out who is absent. The chaplain of the church has no issues with Sir Roger as he provides money for the improvement of the church.

Yet in the nearby village, things are not that smooth. The parson (priest) and the squire (similar to a landlord like Sir Roger) have many differences of opinion and hence the squire does not come to church. He also prevents his tenants from going to church or contributing any money to it. Neither the parson, nor the squire is ready to settle their issues. Addison says that these kinds of feuds affect the ordinary people in parishes in the countryside.

Humanity: Sir Roger is a man of humanity and has a large heart. Moreover, he is mild. He loves not only the servants of his house but also the people who live around him. In the essay "Sir Roger at Church" we see that he is asking about the condition of the people who are absent in the church. It suggests that he is very kind-hearted and generous for whom he is very aware of others.

Lover of religion: He is a true lover of religion. He is a regular churchgoer and encourages others to come to the church. His mind is set for religious purposes and he does a lot of jobs for religion. In the essay "Sir Roger at Church", we see that he has decorated and beautified the

church on his own accord and at his own expense so that the country people would be encouraged to come to the church enthusiastically. In this essay he says,

“My friend sir Roger, being a good churchman, has beautified the inside of his church with several texts of his own choosing. He has likewise given a handsome pulpit-cloth, and railed in the communion-table at his own expense.”

Sir Roger has authoritative power both in-home and church. In the church, one can see that he keeps his authoritative power. In the essay “Sir Roger at Church”, the author says,

“As Sir Roger is landlord to the whole congregation, he keeps them in good order, and will suffer no body to sleep in it.”

Even if he sees anybody is nodding, whether it is in the middle of the congregation or not, he walks to that person or sends his servants to him to make him alert. Moreover, he appoints the clergymen for the church on his own accord and suggests them to follow the instructions of different professors for sermons.

In summing up, it can be said that despite being a man of great honor, Sir Roger is regarded as a humorist and sometimes eccentric because of having some oddities or peculiarities in him. However, the ultimate aim of Addison was not to show his humorous expressions to make up laugh only, rather make up correct for our follies and absurdities. But the main intention of Mr. Spectator was to correct the society, to reform every corner of life by presenting the character, Sir Roger.

Addison’s Prose Style :- Addison is one of the greatest prose stylists in English literary history. He was the pioneer of a style that was very simple, lucid, natural, moderate, free from extravagant expression, and called ‘middle style’.

The most striking feature of Addison’s style is clearness and lucidity of expression. There is no complexity or obscurity or difficulty in his expression. Even, his long sentences are not difficult to understand. We can guess the meaning of his long sentences very clearly at the very first reading.

Addison has also used short sentences when situation demands. For example, ‘As soon as the sermon is finished, nobody presumes to stir till Sir Roger is gone out of the Church.’

Humor is one of the most notable qualities of Addison’s style. His humor is mainly ironical and satirical and sometimes funny. It is not harsh or bitter but gentle and mild with a view of correcting the society. Addison’s style is not highly figurative. Fanciful similes and metaphors are not found in his writings. Rather, when he thinks that his use of figurative language would be more useful and effective, only then he uses them. Addison uses many allusions, anecdotes, references.