

Reflections in westminster abbey, by joseph addison

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William Thackeray said of Joseph Addison that he "deserved as much love and esteem as can be justly claimed by any of our infirm and erring race." Thomas Macaulay described Addison's periodical essays as "perhaps the finest in the English language." And Samuel Johnson characterized Addison's prose as "the model of the middle style; on grave subjects not formal, on light occasions not groveling." Keep Johnson's observation in mind as you read "Reflections in Westminster Abbey," which originally appeared in issue 26 of *The Spectator*, March 30, 1711. Addison died on June 17, 1719.

He was buried in the north aisle of the Henry VII Chapel in Westminster Abbey. A century later a statue was erected in his honor in "the poetical quarter"--now known as Poet's Corner. When I am in a serious humor, I very often walk by myself in Westminster Abbey; where the gloominess of the place and the use to which it is applied, with the solemnity of the building and the condition of the people who lie in it, are apt to fill the mind with a kind of melancholy, or rather thoughtfulness, that is not disagreeable.

I yesterday passed a whole afternoon in the churchyard, the cloisters, and the church, amusing myself with the tombstones and inscriptions that I met with in those several regions of the dead. Most of them recorded nothing else of the buried person but that he was born upon one day and died upon another; the whole history of his life being comprehended in those two circumstances that are common to all mankind.

I could not but look upon these registers of existence, whether of brass or marble, as a kind of satire upon the departed persons who had left no other memorial of them but that they were born and that they died. They put me in mind of several persons mentioned in the battles of heroic poems, who

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have sounding names given them for no other reason but that they may be killed, and are celebrated for nothing but being knocked on the head. The life of these men is finely described in Holy Writ by " the Path of an Arrow," which is immediately closed up and lost.