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E- Study Material  
UG Paper - I

## RICHARD STEELE AS A PERSONAL WRITER

Steele had a varied and rather an unfortunate career, due largely to his own ardent disposition. Like Addison he was educated at the Charterhouse, and then proceeded to Oxford, leaving without taking a degree. His next exploit was to enter the army as a cadet then he took to politics became a Member of Parliament and wrote for the Whigs. Steele however, was too impetuous to be a successful politician and he was expelled from the House of Commons. He became a Tory quarrelled with Addison on private and public



2

Grounds issued a number of periodicals and died ten years after his fellow-exile. Steele wrote some prose comedies which are the best of his work, The Funeral, The Flying Dutchman, The Tender Husband, and The Conscious Lovers. They follow in general scheme the Restoration comedies, but are without the grossness and impudence of their models. Indeed Steele one importance as a dramatist rests on his foundation of the sentimental comedy avowedly moral and pious in aim and tone. In places his plays are lively and reflect much of Steele's amiability of temper. It is as a miscellaneous essayist that Steele finds his place in literature. He was a man fertile in ideas but he lacked the application that is always so necessary to carry those ideas to fruition. Thus he often sowed in order that other men might reap. He started The Tatler in 1709, The Spectator in 1711 and several other short-lived periodicals.



cicals, such as The Guardian, The Englishman, The Reader and The Plebeian. After the rupture with Addison the loss of the latter's steady influence was acutely felt and nothing that Steele attempted may stability. Steele's working alliance with Addison was so close and so constant that the comparison between them is almost inevitable. Of the two writers some critics assert that Steele is the worthier. In versatility and in originality he is at least Addison's equal. His humour is broader and less restrained of Goldsmith. His pathos is more about is that is reminiscent of Goldsmith. His pathos is more attractive and more humane. But Steele's very virtues are only his weakness: sublimed they are emotional not intellectual of the heart and not of the head. He is incapable of irony, he lacks penetration and power, and much of his moralizing is cheap and obvious.



He lacks Addison's care and suave  
 ironic insight he is reckless in  
 style and inconsequent in method.  
 That so in the final estimate  
 as the greater artist he fails.  
 The aim of Steele's essays was  
 frankly didactic he desired to  
 bring about a reformation of  
 contemporary society manners and  
 is notable for his consistent  
 advocacy of womanly virtue and  
 the ideal of the gentleman  
 of courtesy, chivalry and good  
 taste. His essays on children  
 are charming and he is full of  
 human sympathy. The passage  
 given illustrates Steele's easy  
 style the unconstrained sent-  
 ences the fresh and almost  
 colloquial vocabulary and the  
 sentimentality to which he is  
 prone.