

In this book the authors discussed are Richardson, Gibbon, Cowper, Borrow, Cardinal Newman, Matthew Arnold, Hazlitt, Lamb and Sainte-Beuve.

I wish I could show you—those of you who may not know Birrell's work—something of the charm of these essays. They are written in such a kindly, large-hearted spirit. These men have given them pleasure and he is not ungrateful. He is more than willing to accord honour to whom honour is due, and if he prefers for the most part to write of those he likes and admires, who shall blame him?

The little printer, Richardson, he stoutly defends, complaining that he does not receive full justice now that "the taint of afternoon tea still clings to him," that "The facts—the harmless, nay, I will say the attractive facts—that he preferred the society of ladies to that of his own sex and liked to be surrounded by these surely not strange creatures, in his gardens and grottoes, are still remembered against him." We are annoyed at Richardson, he says, "because he violates a tradition, and if you violate traditions, and disturb people's notions as to what it is becoming for you to be, to do or to suffer, you have to pay for it."

But it is "the delightful, the bewitching, the never-sufficient-to-be-praised George Borrow" whom Birrell loves best—with the love one gives to a winsome but spoilt and wilful child—and of him he writes in his most delightful style. He is, to use his own phrase, a "born Borrowian." Hear what he says, referring to Borrow's attack on the good Sir Walter: "The fact is, there is no use blinking it, mankind cannot afford to quarrel with George Borrow, and will not do so. It is bad enough what he did, but when we remember that whatever he had done we must have forgiven him all the same, it is just possible to thank Heaven (feebly) that it was no worse. He might have robbed a church!"

Again, "For invalids and delicate persons leading retired lives, there are no books like Borrow's. Lassitude and languor, horrid hags, simply pick up their trailing skirts and scuttle out of the room into which he enters. A single chapter of Borrow is air and exercise and, indeed, the exercise is