

For Emerson, Birrell has no great liking. Carlyle, with his clear, straight-forward way of saying what he wanted to say, is much more to his mind. This is what he has to say of him: "Attracted toward Emerson everybody must be, but there are many who have never been able to get quit of an uneasy fear as to his staying power. He has seemed to some of us a little thin and vague." He hardly succeeds in inspiring confidence in himself as a great author, but is "more like a clever invalid who says, and is encouraged by his friends to say, brilliant things, but of whom it would be cruel to expect prolonged mental exercise."

In the year 1887 Birrell published his longest piece of work—the "Life of Charlotte Brontë." J. A. Noble, speaking of it in the *Academician*, says that it "contains little matter for discussion and much for enjoyment." Reading it, we can but agree with this. It is a charming combination of biography and literary criticism, both written cunningly by a man who knows. The writer shows in it good narrative power, a wise sense of proportion, and an insight into the influence of the events of the authoress's life on her own character and on her novels. On finishing it, one cannot help hoping that Birrell will soon again turn his attention to biography.

1893 saw the publication of another collection of lectures and papers under the title of "*Res Judicatæ*." This might make us expect something very different from Birrell's earlier writings, something even solemn and heavy, but apart from the fact that some of the essays are long—that is, long for Birrell—you soon discover that you have met your old friend again; that you have been ushered into his study just as before, where he greets you in his former hearty way, gives you an easy chair, there in that cosy corner, where you may watch the slanting rays of the afternoon sun stealing in through the little stained-glass window, and touching the comfortable backs of those calf-bound volumes in the bookcase opposite you, from which he takes one every now and then, to turn up a favourite passage or illustrate some point.