

considers worthy of the highest admiration. A strong moral character in an author and the evidence of it in his work never fail to win recognition and praise from him. I do not mean that he cannot judge a book entirely on its merits of conception and style without reference to its morality. He would be a poor critic if that were so. But that his highest praise is only given when he writes of one in whom nobility of character unites with literary genius. "A noble passage," he says, "ought to do more for a reader than compel his admiration or win his assent; it should leave him a little better than it found him, with a warmer heart and more elevated mind."

Borrow and Cellini are charming, but Milton is noble and great; Fielding he admits to be a more gifted novelist than Richardson, but the latter has more of his respect. The stern self-control of Charlotte Brontë's life appeals to him, making him speak as kindly as possible of all her work; but the petty selfish vanity of Marie Bashkirtseff certainly detracts from the literary pleasure he might otherwise have found in her autobiography. Though he does not say it in words, the reader must feel that in Birrell's opinion the moral tone imparted to a book by its author is certainly a matter to be taken into consideration in a literary criticism of its worth.