

you had a rag of principle left, you would fling the book into the fire." Next an essay on the "Via Media," full of humorous scorn for half tone principles, and lastly a biographical sketch of Falstaff, which however is not Birrell's, the reason given for including the latter being this unique one that "in order to enjoy the pleasure of reading your own books over and over again, it is essential that they should be written either wholly or in part by somebody else."

In April, 1897, Birrell published another series of *Obiter Dicta* containing essays on John Milton, Alexander Pope, Dr. Johnson, Charles Lamb, "The Office of Literature," and one or two other shorter papers.

In the first four he is concerned almost entirely with the characters, lives and personal influence of the authors. He is very fond of presenting the personality of a writer, and succeeds admirably in doing so. After reading one of his short sketches you feel on almost as familiar terms with your author as after reading a more elaborate life.

He is always sympathetic and anxious to make you see the best side. Even poor Pope, with his petty vanity and his frail body, he handles kindly, though justly, so that you agree with him when he concludes his essay thus: "As for the man, he was ever eager and interested in life. Beneath all his faults—for which he had more excuse than a whole congregation of the righteous need ever hope to muster for their own shortcomings—we recognize humanity, and we forgive much to humanity, knowing how much need there is for humanity to forgive us. Indifference, known by its hard heart and callous temper, is the only unpardonable sin. Pope never committed it. He had much to put up with. We have much to put up with—in him. He has given enormous pleasure to generations of men and will continue to do so. We can never give him any pleasure. The best we can do is to smile pleasantly as we replace him upon his shelf, and say, as we truthfully may: 'There was a great deal of human nature in Alexander Pope.'"