

**THE BRONTËS;
FACT AND FICTION**

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The Brontës; fact and fiction by Angus M. MacKay

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ANGUS M. MACKAY

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By ANGUS M. MACKAY, B.A. ♀

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UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA

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PREFACE

THE nucleus of the longer essay in this little volume is an article in the *Westminster Review* of October 1895, which is now out of print. I enlarge it and republish it at the solicitation of some of those who read it in its original form, and with the desire to set at rest a vexed question of Brontë bibliography. An attempt to apply the methods of the "higher criticism" to a modern book is novel and may prove not uninteresting.

Let me hasten to say that I make no charge of dishonesty against Dr. William Wright. I concern myself with the credi-

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bility of the book, not with the motives or character of its author. In the seventeenth century, long before the key to Egyptian hieroglyphics was discovered, Kircher professed to give translations of Egyptian stelæ ; he was enthusiastic, he was honest, he had spent years in studying the subject, nothing could be laid to his charge except, perhaps, a little unconscious self-deception—and yet his translations bore not the slightest resemblance to the true meaning of the originals. So Dr. Wright has, I am informed, been diligent in inquiry, and I do not accuse him of bad faith ; but I am convinced that his volume is unreliable almost from cover to cover.

It may, perhaps, be thought that the matter is here dealt with in too great detail. It may be asked, Why break a fly

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upon the wheel? But it must be remembered that Dr. Wright's book has passed through several editions, it was received with a chorus of approval by the critics, and its narratives have been widely accepted as history: only a very thorough exposure of its unreliability can extirpate the errors which it has sown broadcast. But I have no doubt that the facts set forth in the following pages will carry complete conviction with them, and that those who possess *The Brontës in Ireland* will henceforth merely treasure it for what it is—one of the curiosities of nineteenth-century literature.

The other essay in this little book—which is here printed first—deals mainly with the secret tragedy in Charlotte Brontë's life which had so remarkable

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an effect in quickening and directing her genius. Circumstances have made it necessary to treat the matter now with perfect frankness, but I trust I have said nothing which is not compatible with entire reverence for one of the noblest and most gifted of women.

ANGUS M. MacKAY.

ABERDEEN, *April* 1897.

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