

ROUND THE TABLE.

CARLYLE APPRAISED.

SOME time ago there appeared in one of the Reviews an article by Mr. Payn on 'Sham Admiration in Literature,' wherein some good illustrations are given of the way in which many readers, through mere imitation, or because it is the fashion, express admiration for what are called Standard Works, often without having read them, and always without having any well-considered reasons for their approbation. Something of this kind is noticeable just now in the deluge of eulogy which is being poured out in prose and verse on the works and life of Thomas Carlyle. Few of those who are so profuse in the use of such terms as 'Sage,' 'Philosopher,' 'Prophet,' and what not, seem to have considered what are the chief characteristics of his works. A Philosopher is one who has a system of laws or principles by which he can explain all kinds of phenomena. A Prophet is one who foretells truly the coming of future events. There does not seem to be in any of Carlyle's writings sufficient grounds for conferring on him either title. His philosophy is of too heterogeneous and contradictory a character to enable him or any one to account for social phenomena, and his predictions have not so far been verified, as witness, 'Shooting Niagara and after.' The Parliaments elected by the mass of English householders ('mostly fools') have grappled successfully with many antiquated abuses that have come down to them from heroic times, such as the Irish Church, Purchase in the Army, Land Tenure, and others. The one distinguishing feature of Carlyle's works, which shines conspicuously from the first to the last is, Enmity to free institutions and equal rights. His early pedagogic experiences seem to have tinged his views of human nature; he regarded the human race as a set of boys requiring to be coerced into order by arbitrary discipline and some kind of tawse, the highest virtue on their part being submission to the na-

tural born hero or king. Unfortunately his philosophy did not enable him to point out any tribunal or agency for ascertaining the qualifications of such a leader.

His 'Reminiscences' may be taken as in some sort an epitome of his works. In the chapter on Edward Irving there is the old indefinable charm of style, making the most homely incidents glow with interest, and leading the reader on page after page in a kind of fascination to the end; but there is in the rest of the work such an exhibition of bile, spitefulness, and overweening self-esteem as never was made before by a literary man. Mr. J. S. Mill is spoken of as 'Poor Mill,' and his 'Review,' which was the first to attack established dogmas on Church and State, is described as 'Hide bound' (was there ever such a palpable misjudgment?) Mr. Mill himself, as an editor, is 'Sawdust to the mast-head.' Harriet Martineau is 'Full of Nigger fanaticisms and admiration for her brother James, a Socinian (not a Unitarian) preacher of due quality.' Wilberforce is also a 'Nigger Philanthropist.' If Carlyle's philosophy had been anything worthy of the name he would have known that slavery worked its greatest mischief on the slave-owners, and that those whom he sneers at as 'Nigger Philanthropists' were in a still more conspicuous degree white philanthropists. During the many years in which Carlyle resided in London, the Dissenters waged a constant war with the arrogance and intolerance of the Established Church. There was almost continually some question at issue, Church rates, Test Acts, Parish burials. One would have expected that Carlyle, with his strict Presbyterian bringing up, would have felt keen sympathy and interest in the struggles of the Dissenters; but he never contributed a single line on their behalf. It may be urged in his defence that his attention was absorbed in his works; that he was too earnest in denouncing shams in general to find time to attack any particular sham; but the answer is, that when his absolutist feel-