

THE HUMORIST AT THE BREAKFAST TABLE.



"How is the real estate market? I can not really state. I notice, however, that all the way up Yonge Street the land rises. By the way, why do the speculators continually increase the price of their lots?"

"Because," said the law student, who has lately been reading 'Progress and Poverty,' "the value of land increases with the growth of population, and consequently the community is taxed to pay unearned increment to the monopolists."

"Adam Smith says—," began the Scotchman, when I, somewhat impatiently, I fear, cut him short, foreseeing that if once they got into a discussion on political economy a first-class joke would be nipped in the bud.

"The reason is that they want to take a rise out of the purchaser. See?"

"Humph," said the Scotchman, "canna ye talk sensibly mon, an' no fash us wi' sic eediotic trash."

"Talk sensibly? Why, cert! Here goes. The course of Gen. Boulanger must be considered exceedingly reprehensible and fraught with possibilities of disaster to the public welfare. Portents of reaction point to a recrudescence of politico-social elements calculated to imperil the harmonious progression which has latterly appeared to culminate. When we consider the imminent juxtaposition in which hostile though perhaps latent forces are at times placed, and the constitutional difficulties which present grave entanglements, the future is pregnant with developments that can only be avoided by a statesman-like moderation but too rare in those whose short-lived popularity depends upon a *tour de force*. Boulanger is the product of intellectual petrification in an age of social effervescence."

"Just so," said a middle-aged, reflective looking personage, who had hitherto taken little part in the conversation. "Very well put. I entirely agree with you."

"Its jist my opeenion," said the Scotchman.

"It's all right, I s'pose," remarked the law student, "but I really don't exactly see what you're driving at."

"No? Neither do I," I replied, "nor does anybody else, I imagine. I don't suppose there are half a dozen people in Toronto, able editors included, who could tell you who Boulanger is or what he wants to do, or give an intelligent reason for condemning or approving his course. All the same, the newspapers have 'sensible'—that is to say, dull and ponderous—articles upon him, and the public no doubt take them for gospel. Some of you seem to object to my flippant style of discourse. Well, I can talk editorial to you by the yard about reciprocity and retaliation, coercion in Ireland, the prospects of a general European war, the lost Ten Tribes, or in fact any subject you like to mention. But to expect me to know anything more than the general run of writers do upon these subjects is too much."

"He's got the joke on you this time," said smart Aleck to the Scotchman.

"Who wrote Shakespere? Alas! vainly do we cypher a solution. If 'twas not Bacon it might have Ben Jonson. Eh?"

"Chest——" began smart Aleck, who had his mouth full of hash, a portion of which fortunately went down the wrong way, so that his impertinent interruption terminated in a retributive fit of coughing.

"I have been reading some French novels lately. It must be very easy to write a French novel. The ingredients are very simple. Take a jealous, middle-aged husband, a handsome young wife, a gentlemanly, idle masher and a sprightly grisette, add *portecocheres*, *concierges*, *fiacres* and *gens d'armes* ad. lib., mix well, flavor with false sentiment and turgid rhetoric, sprinkle with essence de Boulevards, and there you have it. Have you ever read a French novel?" I asked, turning to the Scotchman.

"Na, na!" he replied, emphatically.

"Oh, you reprobate! It's about the worst of the lot. I didn't think that you had the shamelessness to own up to reading Zola's productions. By the way, how do you think his earlier volumes compare with his '*La Terre*' (latter) one?"

These jokes, I'm afraid, were lost on the audience. Ours is not a literary crowd.

"Is them French novels anything like May Agnes Fleming's stories?" asked the saleslady. "She is just splendid. She must make a lot of money writing for the *Telegram*."

"Miss Fleming has for some years been laboring under the disadvantage of deadness, consequently she may be presumed to be indifferent to pecuniary considerations. The Frenchman and the Fleming, I may remark, are essentially different in their national characteristics."

"Why have we no Canadian fictionists except partisan editors? I don't know. Perhaps the impossibility of competing with authors who won't stay dead, but keep on writing for years after their decease, may partly account for it. It isn't for want of subjects. There is the Priestman tragedy in Parkdale, for instance. What a thrilling detective story could be founded on that mysterious affair. There would be a chance, too, of introducing an entirely new character in fiction—the detective who doesn't detect. The detective of the novels always displays preternatural sagacity and succeeds in bringing the criminal to justice, whereas the detective of real life is usually a wooden-headed chump. I mean to write a novel one of these days. When? Well, just as soon as I can get enough ads. for the cover and fly leaves to secure the cost of publication. I may not be able to emulate Rider Haggard in blood-curdling sensations, but the scene will be laid in a locality that ought to satisfy the popular demand for gore. Where is it? Why, the Gore of Hamilton! That ought to fetch 'em."

"Another cup of tea, if you please. Thanks. Some say that we drink too much tea, but our landlady looks so well after our health that we only get it fortnightly."

"Oh, how can you say so, sir," said the landlady, indignantly. "I am sure you have it every morning and evening."

"It is fortnightly all the same. Don't you see—*two-weekly*."

There was a moment of silence and then a hearty round of applause.

IF the car-strikers in Chicago carry on much more, the police will make them carrion for the undertakers to carry off.

MRS. GULLY says the way bread is rising goes against her grain. She wouldn't mind an extra mill or two; but who ever heard of scents in that kind of flower?

THE convicts in Kingston Penitentiary are allowed the free use of razors. They might be tempted to use them freely, if the guards offered them much chin.