

## ROUND THE TABLE.

A short comment on the remarkable novel, "The Story of an African Farm," by Olive Schreiner, which has been reviewed in unstinted terms of praise in England, may not be out of place in the columns of The Table. We have called it remarkable. It is so in more ways than one. In the first place, it is not constructed according to the unwritten yet accepted canons of the modern novel. Its plan may best be explained in the author's own words.

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"Human life may be painted according to two methods. There is the stage method. According to that each character is duly marshalled at first, and ticketed; we know with an immutable certainty that at the right crises each one will reappear and act his part, and, when the curtain falls, all will stand before it bowing. There is a sense of satisfaction in this, and of completeness. But there is another method, the method of the life we all lead. Here nothing can be prophesied. There is a strange coming and going of feet. Men appear, act and re-act upon each other, and pass away. When the crisis comes, the man who would fit it does not return. When the curtain falls no one is ready. When the footlights are brightest, they are blown out; and what the name of the play is no one knows. If there sits a spectator who knows, he sits so high that the players in the gaslight cannot hear his breathing. Life may be painted according to either method; but the methods are different. The canons of criticism that bear upon the one cut cruelly upon the other."

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It is the latter method which the author has chosen; and it seems to bring the experience of her characters into wonderful sympathy with our own every-day existence. In the preface she is at pains to forestall criticism by confessing her subject to be one "removed from the rounds of English daily life." But she takes needless trouble. As we read, we forget where the scene is laid and all the details of the story's setting: our interest is absorbed in the happenings of the soul-life which is placed before our view.

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The story is allegorical of the everlasting search for truth. Waldo and Lyndall, boy and girl, have the seeds of genius in them, and the first perception of this comes home to the reader's heart with ineffable pathos, as he realizes the almost certain impossibility of development. From merest childhood their cry is Ajax' cry for light. With no help from the commonplace, often cruel, characters about them, they fight their own battles, enduring all the pain of childhood and ignorance, yet ever leaving the darkness behind them and struggling into the light of truth. But as they emerge from childhood the ferment ceases, and life becomes calmer for them, though the inward impulse is unabated. Lyndall prevails on her guardian, a dense, superstitious Boer-woman, to let her go away to school. She goes and, having learnt much, learns also love. She resolves, however, to make love merely an episode in her life, as indeed it is to many, in order to devote herself to her search for truth and to its application. But death comes and puts an end to love and aspiration, and she dies in her youth, firmly, as she has lived.

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The other, grown a man, goes out into the world to seek his fortune, and finds no help. He comes back to hear of the death of the one he has always loved.

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There is a hopelessness about the book, which is not altogether sad, being surmounted by the strength of the two main characters. The latter are world-types. Wherever man or woman, in the solitude of nature or the solitude of crowds, has wrestled with the problems of life, cherished an aspiration for higher things than eating, drinking and sleeping, and broken loose from the superstitions with which men seek to excuse their sins, the parts of Waldo and Lyndall have been enacted.

The other characters are interestingly and sharply drawn, though commonplace. The key of the story is the cruelty of circumstance. Another modern novelist has said that we work half our own destiny, and circumstances do the other half. We feel, as we close the book, that there has been a striving, but that fate has frowned.

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We have decided to publish the following letter, which has been left upon the table, though we rather fear the author is making fun of us:

To the Table-Editor, (if there is such a person).

DEAR SIR,—In Hawthorne's charming "Mosses from an Old Manse," I read not long since, an entrancing sketch entitled, "A Select Party," in which the Man of Fancy entertains in truly regal style, at his Castle in the Air, a Select Party of imaginary characters, such as the Poet of the Future, The Oldest Inhabitant, the Patriot, and others. The first thought that struck me was that I had read something of the sort before, and then in a moment "Round the Table" came to my mind. Now what I would suggest is that you would persuade some of these interesting personages to drop in and occasionally express themselves in your little star-framed paragraphs. I feel convinced that the Oldest Inhabitant would get on splendidly with the Ingenious Man; the Table-Poet and the Poet of the Future could air their art theories in Platonic dialogues, for I am sure that no professional jealousy would mar such ideal natures; while the Weather-Clerk could not be out of place in such a cloudy company. With these additions the Table could boast a *Dramatis Personæ* that would put Shakspeare to shame. Or if you cannot prevail upon any of the Select Party to visit you, why not send your Down Town Reporter off to the Castle in the Air to write up that lordly mansion? His picturesque and lucid style would lend a peculiar charm to the description.

Yours whimsically,  
MAN OF FANCY.

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The Politician is in a most perverse and pugnacious humour. He cannot be restrained in conversation, and the publication to the world of his meditations through THE VARSITY'S columns was the only feasible method in his opinion for the salvation of his country and Alma Mater. To this end he formulated a platform which should guide the feet of the Great and Only Seventh Party. In his manuscript he soared to such an infinite extent above party ties, and ribbons blue and red, that with an unflinching and honest honesty, he averred "that if Sir John should cringe at my toes on bended knee, and make supplication that the cup might be taken out of his hands, and that the bitter intoxicating beverage of fame might pass from his mouth to mine, in his face would I dash it unsipped by untarnished lips."

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Thus the Jeremiad continued in ingenuous withering protest. But the most stirring appeal was sounded some twenty reams beyond this portion of the address, evincing, and who shall deny it, the most consummate skill in constructive statesmanship. His proposition is to the effect that a Federal Progress Party be formed with coalition government. Their accustomed pose towards the Jesuit question during their and its existence should be . . . We can proceed no further. We recognize the fact that THE VARSITY also must not rise and fall on political wavelets, nor from shocks of shallow and shoal,—treading with firm heart and light feet the storm-strewn path of probity. In deference to the political preference of our constituents, we surreptitiously stole the manuscript from our worthy publisher, who was engaged with muffled heart and stifled smile in setting up matter that would have filled our columns for a month of Saturdays.

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Having decided thus completely to ignore all politics we thought to fill our available space with eulogies of Coquelin. We intended to lament the meagre attendance at his magnificent performances, and to probe the reasons for his poor reception. But politics again are visibly involved, for do not M. Coquelin and the majority of Canadian Jesuits speak French? Alas! that it should be so.