

## ROUND THE TABLE.

"We measure too much by this cursed decimal system," the German Editor broke the silence one evening by exclaiming. We waited respectfully for him to continue; for, though what his Teutonic Highness says rarely counts for much, we imagined dimly that this time he meant more than he had said. He soon explained himself, "Ten cents, one dime; ten dimes, one dollar. Everything—men, maidens, books, brains and beauty—all are measured; all bought and sold by that." He puffed vengefully for a time at his pipe and went on. "I walked one day with a farmer—a rich farmer—down a long lane on one of the prettiest farms in Western Ontario. The day was perfect; the air was clear; the blue sky flecked with clouds of purest white; and when at last a sudden turn brought us upon the rustic bridge that spans the river and gave to our sight its picturesque windings, I stood entranced." We looked up wonderingly, for the phlegmatic Teuton is not often thus outspoken. He went on. "The spot was pure poetry. Trees bordered the stream; the low pines bent above it and gazed in pretty vanity upon their own fair images in the water. Below us in the clear cut shadow of the hedge, we could see the tiny trout gliding swiftly back and forth in the gladness of youth and summer-tide. All was quietness; except for the quick chirping of the birds in the branches behind us, and the far-away chattering of a squirrel in the tall butternut-tree down stream. I lingered as long as my prosaic host would let me; then we wandered on. A turn in the road brought a change. Before us, about a hundred yards apart, were two bridges—railway bridges; emblems of dust and heat and hurry and iconoclastic civilization. They jarred upon me; yet the image of beauty was too fresh in my heart to be thus easily destroyed. Again we paused, leaning this time upon the quaint old fence that skirts an irregular field of waving green; and again I looked and admired. To our left lay the thin patch of bush, bordering the river which we had just left, and bounding the field on one side; to our right the road wound picturesquely out of sight; here and there, in the fence-corners, yellow wild flowers were gleaming. In the field, at a little distance, I caught sight of a patch of wild grass, of a reddish brown colour, fine and very beautiful; I called my companion's attention to it. 'Well, Dutchy,' he drawled—I didn't like him to call me 'Dutchy' in the first place—'them things may seem mighty nice to fellers like you that don't know nothin' about 'em; I'm danged if I wouldn't rather have one head of timothy than the whole blame lot!'" Puff-puff! "I left there that night," continued the Teuton, solemnly; "I haven't gone back since."

The Foreign Editor was much perturbed. He had been reading Molière's *Don Juan* and he wanted to know why it is that we sympathize with villainy when it is bound in respectable octavo while when it appears in the sensational column of the *Daily* we hound it to the gallows. "Why," he said, "if any man were convicted of half the misdeeds perpetrated by Molière's hero, he would be undoubtedly lynched, and yet because *Don Juan* moves in a drama we cheer him on and feel bitterly aggrieved when he meets his doom, which in our more sober moments we must confess to be only too well deserved."

"Then again," he went on, "there is 'Reineke Fuchs,' a low thieving blackguard if ever there was one, who if he were to return to earth would occupy a social position no more elevated than that of a loathsome regular patron of the police-court, and yet as we read of his career we congratulate him on every successful swindle and rejoice whenever he gets out of a new scrape, however unscrupulous the means employed. I think it's abominable, and it makes me feel like the most abandoned wretch that ever breathed," he concluded pathetically.

The ever-ready Ingenious Man begged to suggest that perhaps this fellow-feeling was not for the wickedness but for the cleverness displayed, and explained, as soon as the Foreign

Editor had bowed his acknowledgments of the implied compliment, "that Reynard does not practice on the finer nature of his victims but on their greed and ignorance. He is really the most honest person in the story for he never attempts to deceive himself as to his own character, which cannot be said of most other villains."

The Down Town Reporter took up the discussion in his own cynical way, and stated his belief that we sympathized with *Don Juan* and with Reynard simply because we were told by the name of the piece that these gentlemen were the heroes. If Shakespeare had entitled his dramas "*Lear*" and "*Othello*" respectively "*Edmund*" and "*Iago*," our reporter believes that these men who are now the objects of universal hatred and contempt would be looked upon as the most interestingly ill-used individuals.

The Ingenious Man was about to claim these examples as supporting his case, when he was interrupted by the Table Poet's remarking, with rather doubtful taste, that he thought the company would save a great deal of trouble if they would read J. A. Froude's "*Short Essays on Great Subjects*," where they would find the subject of debate exhaustively treated. The Ingenious Man he maliciously advised to ventilate his ideas in a treatise which he thought would look well with some such title as a "*Critique on Crime and Criminals Consisting of Coruscations from the Cranium of a Crank*."

This ill-natured suggestion of the Poet's leads us to refer to the almost universal craze for alliteration which seems to have taken possession of the present generation, and most of all of the daily press. Every book, from the volume of sermons to the lightest novelette, must have an alliterative title. Whenever we hear that a new edition of *Worcester* or *Webster* is announced we shudder lest one of these mighty authorities should succumb to the evil tendency and decorate itself with some such appellative as "*Webster's Wealthy Wallet of Words* being a Dictionary of Definition, Derivation and Description" (by conscientious introspection the Dictionary might find even a more flowery name for itself).

In Toronto the *Mail*, with the enterprise which characterizes it in every department, has far outdistanced all its rivals in this race. The spectacle of the Flippantly Flexible, French-Fighting Fictionist Facetiously Fabricating Funnily Far-fetched Fancies is an apparition at which all alliterative artists are awfully agast.

The evident ill-temper of the Poet led to questions which at length elicited that he had been reading Goethe's "*Autobiography*," and that the whole current of his nature had been violently disturbed by the description of the poetical club of which Goethe was a member in his youth, where the work of all the other contributors was, to the future poet, obviously faulty, while nevertheless the excellencies of his own efforts did not meet with any special recognition from his companions. Long brooding over this passage, fraught as it is with deep philosophical significance, had led our Poet to the belief that he ought to resign. By persuasion, however, he was induced to continue in office on the understanding that he should not be obliged to write spring poetry.

The Ingenious Man has a quaint habit of clothing his speculations on the most abstruse subjects in homely figures. His treatment of the question of life lends quite a unique flavour to that somewhat hackneyed subject. "Life," he says, "is a patchwork quilt, stitched on the background of eternity and padded out with the rags of time. Strange colours we introduce! Here a dash of scarlet passion, there a scrap of pure white faith, then brown doubt and pale green *ennui*. Most of us, though, have to fall back on the dull drab of work to fill out the spaces, and thank God for it, for it rests the tired eyes."

Our Philosopher forgets the bright verdancy of youth which occupies a considerable portion of most of our crazy-quilts.