

ROUND THE TABLE.

'REMINISCENCES,' BY CARLYLE.

I ASK permission to offer a few words in defence of Carlyle's 'Reminiscences' and their publication by Mr. Froude, from the general condemnation which appears to have been passed on them. The idea seems to have arisen that Carlyle was an ill-natured man, with a bad word for all and sundry. Let any one read the book from end to end, and he will find this very far indeed from being the case. True it is, no doubt, that Carlyle was ready enough to express contempt or dislike for what displeased him, and this he did in the Carlylese dialect, which gives it greater apparent force. You take up a paper and you find extracts from the 'Reminiscences,' which convey a partial idea of the general tenor of the book. You laugh at a caricature of Carlyle's matter and manner in *Punch*, or where not. Every jackass must have his kick at the dead lion. But we want to be something better than jackasses. We want to feel the same respect for Magnus Leo dead that we felt for him living. And I think we may. By far the greater part of the 'Reminiscences' consists of most loving, generous, untiring admiration of the character of Carlyle's father, of his wife, of Edward Irving. So far is this carried that it strikes you as just a little too perfunctory, just a little overdone. But, if the reader becomes sometimes rather wearied, Carlyle himself never wearies in this lavish pouring out of praise. Nearly the same may be said with respect to Jeffrey, and at almost equal length. The same in the case of Southey, of whom the laudation is unstinted; so much so as to be worthy of particular mention. Not much less of Wordsworth. And all through the book will be found minor instances of the same kind. Can this be the work of an ill-natured man? Then you may remark that, although Carlyle, unless he was more fortunate than the rest of us, must have met with disgraceful con-

duct or evil deeds, he never once, if my memory does not deceive me, speaks of anything of the kind. His censures are limited to personal and intellectual characteristics. Nor did he grumble at the tardy recognition of his powers, or at the small gains which they brought him. He takes that and the poverty, which was long his lot, very simply and philosophically.

I have not the least desire to misrepresent the fact. I think that this will be found to be a fair estimate of the 'Reminiscences,' taken generally. It would seem that Carlyle was moved by an irresistible impulse to set down the whole truth at all times. He did not write with honey and oil only, but had gall and vinegar at command when they were called for. And why not? If we want to hear of his great love and admiration for some persons, do we not also want to have our belief in his sincerity strengthened by his disgust—we will say disgust—at what turns his stomach in other persons? It is the same with inanimate things. If he chances to inhabit a house in which all the work has been scamped, his wrath is kindled in just the same way, and is expressed in the same pungent style.

What Carlyle says himself is this:— 'Perhaps nobody but myself will ever read this—but that is not infallibly certain—and, even in regard to myself, the one possible profit of such a thing is that it be not false or incorrect in any point, but correspond to the fact in all.'

May we not gratify ourselves then with the thought that we have in no wise lost a great man, as those who are only too ready to fasten their barbs on his memory would have us think, but have him still in his entirety. And may it not be that Mr. Froude, more especially as he knew the man, was wholly unprepared for the disapprobation with which the publication of the 'Reminiscences' has been visited?

D. F.