

## ROUND THE TABLE.

We present to the readers of *THE VARSITY* a choice specimen of the result of the spelling-reform mania upon the masses. It is quite unique in its way, and though intended to be serious, is as good a burlesque upon the system as any we could devise. The original is in our possession and can be seen in the sanctum "Tuesdays and Thursdays, on presentation of a visiting card." The post-card reads as follows:—

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REVERSE.  
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We have been prejudiced against spelling-reform, but this post-card convinces us that it is a necessity—so far as the communication on the post-card is concerned.

A mutual acquaintance was the grist of the conversational mill the other day, and with our usual freedom we were canvassing his peculiarities. The second actor in the colloquy seemed to think the subject of debate finally disposed of, when he remarked, "Oh! but he's an insufferable snob." Now, even after the almost divine effort of Thackeray to clear up the momentous question, What constitutes a snob? I confess that a slight haziness still darkened my faculties. Such a confession would have been too humiliating, so I sagely nodded my entire acquiescence and retreated in good order. When I found myself alone I began to reflect, and now make the public partner of my newly acquired wisdom. Of course I have consulted all authorities and merely profess to give a diagnosis corrected, as it were, for our latitude and longitude.

The man who, dazzled by the glamour of a high-sounding name, deliberately expresses his preference for tough chicken to good corn-beef, is a snob. The man who will wear to his own discomfort a trim pointed abortion of a boot, rather than a comfortable broad-heeled, thick-soled cowhide, the handiwork perchance of the humblest disciple of St. Crispin, is a snob. The man who is painfully aware that his comrade's dress is shabby and proposes to take the back street, because, you know, it is less crowded, is a snob. The man who in conversation will inflict on his listener a polysyllabic horse-mounted word, where a modest monosyllable would suffice, is a snob. The man who reads and talks about a book for which he cares nothing, because it is the proper caper, you know, is a snob. The man who will listen to a broad story with grinning face, then recollects that he is a pillar of sanctity, and upturns his gaze and reads you a moral lesson, is a snob, the snob hypocritical, the worst of the tribe. The man who—

"But," I hear you interrupting, "you might prolong your list *ad nauseam* and yet not give me clearly to understand how I may detect the snob. Can you give me no succinct description?" Not the easiest thing in the world, but I am bound to try. Shortly, egotism is the essence of snobbery. The all-important question with John Thomas, the snob, is how John Thomas doing this will look to the world. He fancies himself the centre-piece of the universe. Growing out of this egotism is a keen appreciation that everything John Thomas does must be done with *an air*, to attract the desired notice. The true snob is always playing a part, and is conscious that it is a part. Naturalness is the extreme opposite of snobbery—be natural is the best safe-guard for the snobically inclined. The snob must evince no interest in anything beyond the cut of a coat, the flavour of a cigar, &c., &c., in short, in anything that is not connected with his exquisite personality. The snob must have no trace of sentiment or affection—that is vulgar; must know as little as possible—learning is a bore; must show no enthusiasm—that is low. A snob is selfishness incarnate—a developed—On second thoughts I forbear.

For some months a genuine live specimen of the native American usually called *Yankee*, has been the unwitting subject of my observation, indeed, I may say, my minute observation. To my great delight his character is gradually unfolding itself, and I shall report progress regularly. All that a bird's-eye view of his exterior reveals is—a tall, lank figure, an active springiness in all his movements, a rather meagre face with strongly marked features, not so sharp, however, as caricatures would lead you to suppose, hard gray eyes,

with nothing filmy about them. The most significant feature about his face is the forehead, which is not what is styled spacious, but is slightly convex, and is curiously wrinkled by two deep parallel lines that run up into the centre from the base of the eyebrows—lines betokening intense thought? He speaks but little, and that not in the nasal drawl that the stage *Yankee* has stamped on the down-easter. He does not chew tobacco and does not use slang on all occasions. At first these purely negative characteristics, upsetting as they did all my preconceived notions, inspired in me deep mistrust that my swan was but a goose after all.

The conflict between science and tradition was never waged with such determination as in these days; and many are fearing that the outcome will doom all poetry and art, for the chemist analyzes his wife's tears, the Linnaeus will botanize upon his mother's grave. And hear Keats:

"There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:  
We know her woof, her texture; she is given  
In the dull catalogue of common things,  
Philosophy will clip an angel's wings,  
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,  
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine,—  
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made  
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade."

But while the imaginings of noble minds are greater for all time than mere facts are, as such, the advance of science is as grand as the entranced poet's dream; and, indeed, poets and artists keep pace with the scientific *renaissance*. They even forestall some of its greatest wonders. I heard a freshman in the Library yesterday ask for Victor Hugo's "Chants of a *Corpuscle*."

Though it seems to be thought the proper thing to speak of *Puck* with a certain tone of disparagement, one finds no little difficulty in elbowing his way to the copy in the Society reading room. I do not wish to claim for *Puck* more consideration than what may be accorded to the light *vers de société* of the day, and the bright gossip of clever men; but why should you, sir, who are consumed with laughter when telling how awfully good that thing in *Punch* was, don't you know—why should you be half ashamed to own that you've read last week's *Puck* too?

We will say nothing now of the weight of either in the world of politics, though in neither case is that a thing to be made light of. I once admitted (in an argument) that the best things in *Punch* are better than the best in *Puck*; and sometimes I am not sure that I wouldn't do so again. It would depend on who the other man was.

*Punch*, of course, is under the disadvantage of being considered, rightly or not, the head and front of English wit and humour; and it's a fact that your Englishman laughs before you have begun to repeat to him one of its jokes. The humorous intention suffices; it does not often, indeed, go beyond being an intention. *Puck*, on the other hand, is merely the work of a few New York journalists, and some other penmen. Burnand is not to be compared with Bunner. The latter has lately won his spurs as a novelist, and his "Airs from Arcady and Elsewhere" are as graceful and charming as the deftest verses of Dobson and Lang. His more ideal lyrics and sonnets are commended by the fairest of critics for the depth of feeling under their grace. It may be, indeed, that lightness of touch is becoming a disease in Literature (printed with the capital L, and pronounced with bated breath); but it is certainly the life of journals such as we are speaking of. And the present writers for *Punch* seem absolutely unfitted to be gifted with that airy cleverness of thought and expression which I may be allowed to call the Puckesque.

Wit and humor, it has been well said, are born of sober parents. *Punch*, in a land where an aristocracy is not yet an anomaly, may, perhaps, rest on its fathers,—and Thackeray, Hood, Leech, Cruickshank, are not names that will be forgotten. In these later days, however,—not taking into account, of course, Du Maurier's delightful work,—its wit and humor seem to come of a rather dull parentage. "I suppose you have lots of jokes in here," remarked Gilbert, coming into the *Punch* sanctum one day. "Oh, yes," said Burnand, rubbing his hands together cheerfully, "Oceans of 'em, —oceans of 'em, old man!" "I say," said Gilbert, with the air of one who has a felicitous thought, "why don't you print one or two?"

"Do you remember," asked the ingenious man, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, "these verses from *L'Allegro*,—

"Then to the well-trod stage anon,  
If Johnson's learned sock be on?'"

On learning that our remembrance of them had not faded, "I was thinking," he said, "that if they were known to the dealer in 'gents' furnishings' down town who entraps us all into reading his rigmorale advertisements by having his name printed without a capital, they might be put to a use undreamt of by Milton, when he penned them."

HHH.