ROUND THE TABLE.

LUCRETIUS AND THE DOCTRINE OF NATURAL SELECTION.

I have not seen it anywhere noticed. though it may have been, that the germs of the now famous doctrine of natural selection or the survival of the fittest, as the result of certain advantages possessed by the surviving creature over its fellows in the sharp struggle for life, are to be found in the writings (Book V.) of the poet Lucretius. He therein states that, in the long course of the ages, nature had given birth to other creatures than those found existing in our present world, but that they had been weeled out because of certain structural and constitutional disadvantages of birth; whereas the existing ones survive because they were stronger or swifter or more cunning. He also adds that even some of the weaker creatures were continued in existence owing to their possessing certain qualities of use to creatures higher than themselves, and who therefore protected them, as in the case of sheep by men.

I quote the passages referred to from Creech's not very literal poetical translation. Speaking of the long series of the ages, our poet sings :

* But more ; these years must numerous kinds deface ;

They could not all preserve their feeble race : For those we see remain and bear their young, Craft, strength, and swiftness hath preserved so long.

Many their profit and their use commends,

Those species man preserves, kind man defends.

Wild beasts' and lions' race their native rage Preserves secure through all-devouring age.

But those to whom kind nature gave no force, No courage, strength, or swiftness to the

course, Thus doomed by chance, they lived an easy

prey To all, and thus their kinds did soon decay.'

Or, as he had said before,

'A thousand such in vain arose from earth.'

Whether the law of variation, coupled with that of natural selection, be an adequate account of the various phenomena of life, I am far from undertaking to affirm. But I thought that this reference might be interesting to those whose attention hal not been directed to it, as serving to bridge over and unite the past with the present, and to show that there are few things (and thoughts) absolutely new under the sun.

J. A. Allen.

[Our guest appears to have forgotten the address by Professor Tyndall at Belfast, in which Lucretius' forecast of the theory was mentioned.—ED. C. M.]

LABOUR, PRODUCTIVE AND NON-PRODUCTIVE.

F. B. R. calls my little contribution to the Table of the October Monthly superficial and fallacious,' 'unwise and fallacious,' (fallacious, you see, is the favourite) ' not to say nonsensical.' No doubt F. B. R. knows all about it, and I bow at once to that decision. When I said that a wife might be all that was excellent and admirable, and all that was beautiful and lovable.' I certainly thought that I was not niggardly. That, however, it seems, did not satisfy F. B. R. We must have 'holiest and most reverend,' 'charmed circle' and 'sacred work,' 'noblest creature in the glorious universe,' and man made by her 'more angel and less worm.' With all my heart, only I had not all those fine words and ideas at command. Still, I think that wives will like my estimation best. F. B. R. says that 'that their influence is almost infinitely far reaching in its effects for good or evil' (for good or evil). Now, I said nothing about evil. Ani this evil, we are told, may affect 'the character and happiness of her husband, of herself, of her children, of her servants, of her friends, of all that come within the charmed circle. Far reaching indeed ! O, fortunati nimium, for whom this influence is for good and not for evil!

I thought, I confess, that it was a purely 'economic' question, that of the payment of a wife's debts by her husband. I thought that the labour which paid