

ON A SET OF "ROUNDELS" OR, OLD ENGLISH
FRUIT TRENCHERS; *temp. xvith Cent.*

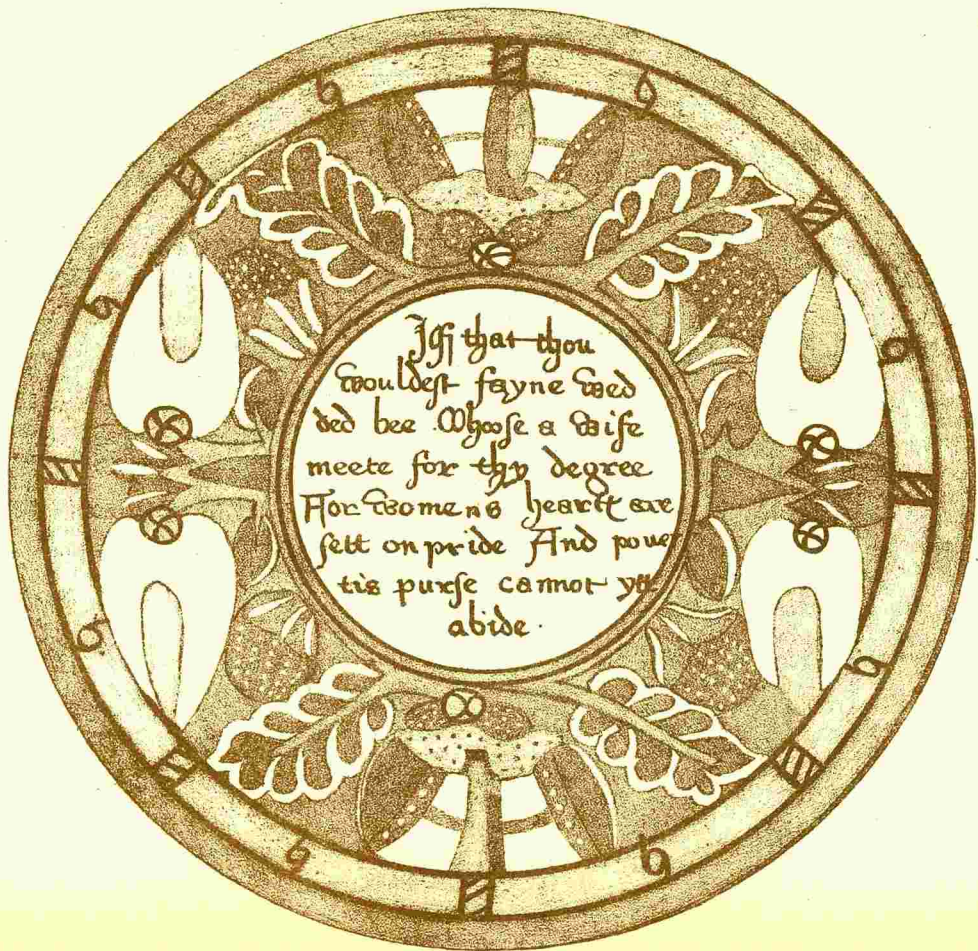
COMMUNICATED BY
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The set of Old English Fruit Trenchers, or as they are sometimes called "Roundels," which are here described, were purchased by the Rev. James Beck, of Bildeston, at Clare, in this county, in the month of June last.

They are small circular discs of lime or some other light wood, $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter, quite plain on one side, but on the other ornamented with wreaths of scroll work of Arabic design intermingled with conventional fruit and flowers, painted in water colours. These wreaths are surrounded by a gilt border and in turn enclose a Distich or Poesie written, apparently with a reed pen, in old English characters.

The Trenchers which are 10 in number are contained in a wooden box, made expressly for them, and which, when the set was complete, held 12. The box itself has at one time been decorated also, but the ravages of time have left scarcely any traces of the decoration.

The Distichs or Doggerel Rhymes are all different, each verse conveying in barbarous and mis-spelt language, some moral aphorism or advice against greed, gluttony, miserly tendencies, family differences, vain hopes, etc., which are quaint in their way, but not always very polite



If that thou
wouldest fayne wed
ded bee. Whose a wife
meets for thy degree
For womens heartt are
sett on pride And pouer
tis purse cannot yett
abide.

to the fair sex and sometimes not very intelligible in their meaning, they read as follows from 1 to 10, whilst the two last verses are taken from a similar set in the possession of Mr. Edward Frewin, of Brickwall, Northam, Sussex.

I.

*Though hungrie meales bee put in pot.
Yet conscience clean kept w^hout spot
Doth keepe the corpes in quiet rest.
Than hee that thousands hath in chest.*

II.

*Thou gapest after deade menns shoes.
But bare foote thou art like to goe.
Content thy selfe and doe not muse
For fortune saithe ytt must bee soo.*

III.

*Judge not yll of thy spouse, I y^e advise.
Itt hath benn spoken by them that are wise.
That one Judge aboue in tyme to come.
Shall Judge y^e whole world bothe father & Sonne.*

IV.

*If that Dianas bird thou bee.
And stile haste kept thy chatetic. (sic)
Seeke not to thrale thy virgins lyffe.
In mariage with a cruell wyfe.*

V.

*Thow hopest for mariges more than three.
Leaue off thy hope ytt will not bee.
Thy mucke will breede thy heart suche care.
That death will come or thou beware.*

VI.

*A quiet lyfe surmounteth golde.
Though goodes great store thy cofers holde.
Yet rather death I doe beeseche.
Than mooste maister to weare noo breeche.*

VII.

*Hard is thy hape yf thou dooste not thriue.
Thy fortune ys to haue wyues fyue.
And euery one better than other.
God send the good lucke I wishe the noo other.*

VIII.

*Thy goods well got by knowledge skile.
Will healpe thy hungrie bagges to fyll.
But riches gayned by falshoods drift.
Will run awaie as streams full swift.*

IX.

*If that thou wouldest fayne wedded bee.
Choose a wife meete for thy degree
For womens hearts are sett on pride.
And pouertis purse cannott ytt abide.*

X.

*Thy fortune is full longe to lyue.
For nature doth longe lyfe the give.
But once a weeke thou wilt bee sicke.
And haue a sullen agewes fytt.*

XI.

*Content thyselfe wyth thyn estat
And send no poore wight from y^r gate
For why this counsell I the give
To learne to dyee and dyee to lyue.*

XII.

*What needes such cares oppresse thy thought
For fortune faith y^r hap is nought
A shrowe thy Chaunce js for to keepe,
But better a Shrowe saie than a sheepe.*

There has been some controversey at times, as to the use made by our forefathers of Roundels, but there can be but little doubt that they were employed in the double capacity of desert plate and doyley. It is usually supposed that the plain side was used to place the fruit or sweetmeat on, but the damaged condition and the scratched appearance of the faces of a large number suggest that in many cases those who used them were careless which side of the trencher was uppermost.

There is a passage in "The Art of Englishé Poesie," published by one Sutttenham in 1589, and which is cited by a correspondent in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1797, which refers to Roundels and which seems to set at rest all doubt as to the use to which they were put.

It runs thus

"There be also another like epigrams that were sent usually for New Yeaere's gifts or to be printed or put upon banketting dishes of sugar plate or of March paines etc they were called Nenia or Apophoreta and never contained above one verse or two at the most but the shorter the better. We call them poesies and do paint them now-a-dayes upon the back sides of our fruit trenchers of wood or use them as devices in rings and arms."

Most Roundels seem to be of the date of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and the lid of the box is frequently decorated in an effective manner with the Tudor Royal Arms, enclosed in a shield and supported on either side by the letters E.R.

The set here described is of the type most frequently met with. Similar ones, more or less complete, being in the possession of Augustus W. Franks, Esq., F.R.S., of Mr. Edwin Frewin, Brickwall Northam, of Mrs. Braithwaite, of Mr. Jervoise, Idoworth Park, Hants., of the Curators of the Colchester Museum, and of other persons. In fact the great similarity in design and character of writing, taken with the fact that the verses are the same, almost lead one to the conclusion that all these Roundels were from one factory. Mr. Frewin's set is complete and the box is richly decorated and bears the Tudor arms with the cypher E.R. before referred to. Queen Elizabeth visited Brickwall, and tradition assigns this set of Roundels to her possession.

Mrs. Bird, of Upton-upon-Severn, has a very curious set of Fruit Trenchers, rectangular in form, $5\frac{3}{4}$ by $4\frac{1}{2}$, and kept in a box in the form of a book, one end sliding out to allow of their insertion. This set is very complete and in an almost perfect state of preservation. It is decorated with scriptural texts and verses in compartments, the surrounding arabesques being mixed with representations of many old fashioned flowers from an English country garden.

A set in the Doucean Museum, at Goodrich Court, is very similar to Mr. Beck's, and the Box being ornamented with the badge of the rose and crown, has led

to its being supposed to be of the reign of Henry VIII.

Mr. Henry Griffith, of Brighton, has a most interesting set, where the various flowers and fruit of an English garden are tastily portrayed, being arranged in bouquets. The verses in this set differ somewhat from those generally seen, the character of the writing is more like black letter, and the rhymes though less easy to interpret are quainter.

A most interesting set of Roundels belonging to Col. Sykes, is described by Mr. Akerman in vol. xxxiv. of the *Archæologia*. This set is of the time of James I. and is composed of 10 pieces, each painted in the centre with a different figure, such as the soldier, the courtier, the merchant, the divine, the widow, the batchelor, the lawyer, etc. Each figure is enclosed in a circle, round the outer edge of which runs a verse, on the character ascribed to the type of person portrayed. These verses, which are extremely curious, are supposed to have been composed by Sir John Davis, and are printed as from his pen in a rare book, entitled "The xii Wonders of the World, set and composed for the Violl de Gambo the lute and the voyce, to sing the verse, etc. composed by John Maynard, Lutenist at the most famous schoole of St. Julian's in Hartfordshire." *folio* London 1611."

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