

SHAKESPEARE AND THE DRINK QUESTION.

To justify a writer in dealing with the drink question, it is not necessary that he be a fanatic, an enthusiast, or a "crank." All schools of thought, all classes of thinkers, are nearly unanimous in the opinion that this question is one of the first importance. Some brave pioneers like Father Mathew, Gough and Cruickshank, have been for many years pointing out the growing danger to a more or less deaf and indifferent public. What we owe to the unselfish devotion and moral courage of these men, the present generation will never know. Politicians as well as preachers, judicial and medical authorities, have been slowly falling into line on the question, and, last, and most important of all, the preponderating class of moderate drinkers have been fain to admit, however reluctantly, that there is less and less to be urged in defence of the alcohol habit, and that more and more powerful grow the many arguments against it. But as such a gigantic curse as "international drunkenness" is proved to be, did not grow, like Jonah's gourd, in a night, so it cannot be destroyed in a day. It has been the result of evolution of thought, of habit, of a real or fancied necessity, of ignorance of physiology, and of evil example for generations. Whatever amount of culpability can be charged against the powerful sections interested to-day in the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, it would have been impossible for them to have worked

the mischief they have without the support of public opinion, an opinion built up atom by atom like a coral reef, fed from multitudinous sources, and bound together by adherent influences contributed from the four corners of the earth.

It is not the purpose, however, to here analyze the sources of this sentiment save in one direction, beginning with the safe assertion that its strength and tenacity are due less to the men who make our laws than to those who write our songs, the influence of poetry, and of dramatic poetry in particular, has been in this respect for the last three hundred years (at least among the English speaking nations) an influence for evil of insidious character and frightful force. It has been the enchanter's spell, deceiving men's eyes with the glamor of perverted genius, filling men's hearts with deceptive pleasure, and debauching their judgment with the sophistry of a special pleader, powerful enough to "destroy both body and soul in hell." Of course this is not meant as a charge of malice prepense against poets generally. It is simply a statement of the lamentable and unfortunate truth that the generations who have wanted an excuse for the "sin that doth so easily beset us," have found ample satisfying encouragement in the songs, plays, and novels too, of the brightest wits of the last three centuries, from Ben Jonson to Swinburne, from Ford and Mas-singer to Burns and Browning. To put the matter into Hellenic