ROUND THE TABLE.

There was published in London a year after the poet's death a collection bearing the title "Anecdotes of Lord Byron." Amid much that is amusing and doubtless trustworthy, have crept in many incidents, most certainly unauthentic, and which attempt to implicate certain enemies of the *raconteur* in charges which, read with knowledge of their falsehood, reflect all the dishonour on the source that inspired them. The following is a most glaring and malicious example of those blind charges and insinuations so frequently made against the pure character of Shelley, and which found such willing credence where the fact of belief arose from mere desire fanned by a whirlwind of hatred. The story relates of a pleasure trip to Sicily, that Byron is asserted to have made in company with Shelley and others. A gale is said to have arisen, during which the captain lost all hope of saving the vessel or even the lives of passengers. The noble Lord accepted his coming fate with the greatest composure, and his conduct is contorted into contrast with that of his slandered contemporary.

"Percy Shelley, who heretofore made no secret of his infidelity, and whose spirits we thought no danger could ever appal, appeared to have lost all energy, and the horrors of approaching death made him weep like a child. Those names, which he never before pronounced but in ridicule, he now called upon in moving accents of serious prayer, and implored the protection of that Being whose existence he affected to disbelieve. Thus

'Conscience does make cowards of us all.'

The breakers were seen immediately ahead of them, and the sight of beauty so disconcerted Shelley that he fell at Byron's feet in a state of insensibility. "His Lordship looked down upon him, and ejaculated, 'Poor fellow!'" The vessel, owing doubtless to Shelley's prayer, miraculously escaped, and Percy Bysshe was moved in a state of stupor to his bed.

"In the course of time Shelley had recovered from his fits of fear, and came from his cabin like a spectre from the tomb. His Lordship repeated, as he shook him by the hand,

"'Cowards die many times before their death,
The valiant never taste of death but once.'"

"Ah!" exclaimed the reclaimed infidel, "I have tasted so much of the bitterness of death that I shall in future entertain doubts of my own creed." A glass of rum and water, warm, raised his drooping spirits, and in twenty-four hours he was the same free-thinking, thankless dog as ever.

* * *

How far may the writer—poet or prosaist—weave into his work his own personal experiences? Without the infusion of personal pain or passion there can be, it would seem, no true poetry. The more nearly the poet attains to the realism of actual life, the greater is the human interest of his work and the more certain is he to stir the hearts and attract the sympathy of others. We delight in a writer in measure as he voices for us the emotions which are common to all in their degree, but to which only the few can give adequate and fitting expression. The poet charms us by setting our most secret thoughts to music. And this he can do, only by voicing forth the songs, mirthful or melancholy, which sing themselves in the hidden depths of his own spirit.

* * *

And yet, there must be about all expression of passion, when addressed to the public ear, the suspicion at least of affectation. True, there are emotions the very nature of which urges him who feels them to speak them out to others. But with men's deepest and purest feelings this is often not the case. The man who sets himself to put his emotions in writing must have lost, to some extent, the first keenness of the sensations he describes. He has turned, in fact, from the emotions themselves to the description of the emotions. He has taken a stand, as it were, outside of himself and views himself and his feelings as he expects the world to view them.

The more real the poet's feeling,—the stronger his passion, the tenderer his love, the purer his pathos—the more will he shrink from displaying it openly to the work-day world. Deeply as our poets have at times penetrated into the hidden places of their own hearts, laying them open to our view, there must have been, for them, as for all men, secret doors which none but themselves might open, and they in solitude and silence. The world's best poetry never has been—never will be—written.

* * *

The German Editor is a man of fine sensibilities. Accordingly, when the following little ode was handed in by its frenzied author, he it was who suggested that the title which now heads it might be more acceptable to ears polite than the bold English of the original:

AN DEN TEUFEL.

Come on, old chap! Good-bye to Care,—
She's a wrinkled old hag at best;
With her toothless gums and her tattered hair
Too long has she vexed my rest.
So, arm-in-arm o'er this scene below,
Where the sinners are quick and the saints are slow,
Where the saints are slow und the sinners are quick,—
We'll jaunt,—you and I, Old Nick!

I can't say I love you, old boy. You know
We once were the worst of friends;
But it's all on chance, in life's mad dance,
Who your partner may be, depends.
I might have had better; or worse, and—there!
The devil is better than Doubt or Care;
And devils are scanty and saints are thick,
So I've got a rare friend, Old Nick!

I think of sweet eyes as soft as May,
As blue as the foam-tossed sea;
But what reck I, since I know that they
Will lighten no more for me.
So if they are smiling, on whom, or where,
The devil may know and the devil may care;
Though spirit be weary, though soul be sick—
Come on! Off we go, Old Nick!

* * *

It is the consideration of such effusions as this—ventured the Critic, loftily—that compels one to agree in a measure with Locke's opinion of the course to be pursued with budding poets:

"If he have a poetic vein, it is to me the strangest thing in the world that the father should desire or suffer it to be cherished or improved. Methinks the parents should labour to have it stifled and suppressed as much as may be; and I know not what reason a father can have to wish his son a poet, who does not desire to have him bid defiance to all other callings and business. . . . Poetry and gaming, which usually go together, are alike in this, too, that they seldom bring any advantage but to those who have nothing else to live on."

* * *

Concerning the authorship of the great works hitherto known as Shakespeare's there seems likely to arise a controversy similar to that which since the publication of Wolf's celebrated Prolegomena has more or less fiercely raged concerning the authorship of the Iliad and Odyssey. Not only has Ignatius Donnelly, or, as Mr. Swinburne irreverently styles him, Dr. Athanasius Dogberry, startled (and amused) the li erary world by the promulgation of his Baconian Cryptogram, but a gentleman named Wigston has "gone him one better" and published (in Boston, if our memory fail us not) a book in which he asserts and endeavours to prove that the Shakespearean plays are the work and production of a society of learned Rosicrucians, of which, according to Mr. Wigston, both Shakespeare and Bacon were members. This forms in some sort a parallel to the Rhapsodists of old, to whom by some are attributed and parcelled out the Homeric poems. The arguments, however, by which Mr. Wigston supports his position would seem to be of that light and airy species which approaches nearly to speculative theorizing. But the question is one which bids fair to increase in interest and discussion, despite the indignation of a majority of literary men.

* * *

Speaking of Bacon reminds us, irrelevantly enough, of an anecdote which has been related of him as a judge. He was sitting on the case of the criminal Hogg, convicted of a felony. The culprit begged his lordship not to pass sentence of death upon him, because hog and bacon were so near of kin to each other. Lord Bacon replied: "My friend, you and I cannot be kindred unless you be hanged, for hog is not *bacon* until it is hung."