

with Portia, he makes no effort to please her. He makes no recital of his virtues, and shows nothing of the open gallantry of Morocco. He deliberately repeats the conditions of his oath so as to be sure there is no mistake and at once sets himself to choose. Perhaps in giving this Spanish prince the name of Arragon, Shakespeare meant to give the audience a hint of his proud and *arrogant* character, which is shown in his speech. He dismisses the leaden casket in a word, as beneath his dignity; and the inscription, "who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath"; does not appeal to him, for it is not a part of his selfish nature to give or hazard for others. The inscription on the golden casket moves him to an expression of scorn for the "many men,"—"the fool multitude," the "common spirits," and "barbarous multitudes," whom he held in contempt. But the silver casket with its bait of *deserts* appeals at once to his selfish pride, and he is moved to eloquence at the thought of his own deservings. His speech on "*merit*" has a splendid ring about it, even if the sentiment is commonplace, until we discover that his idea of "*merit*" is not that of character, but merely that of noble birth. If he, Arragon, were allowed to set things right, his first task would be to pull down the "low peasantry" who have risen by real merit, and set up "the true seed of honour"—who but the proud Arragon himself?—in their place. And so Arragon chooses the silver casket, and in so doing he too makes it clear that it is not Portia that he worships, but his selfish idea of his own deserts.

Arragon had taken an oath that if he should fail, he would, "without more speech" immediately be gone; but when he chooses wrongly he at once begins to find fault with the conditions:

"Did I deserve no more than a fool's head?
Are my deserts no better?"

This calls forth a rebuke from Portia, who reminds him that he who makes a mistake is not a fit person to sit in judgment upon his own misfortunes. And when he takes his leave, her opinion of his "*merits*" is shown by her stinging comment:

"O, these *deliberate* fools! When they do choose,
They have the wisdom by their wit to lose."