

thinking the terms only a joke is quite clear. And with Antonio he succeeds; for Antonio, like Othello,

"Is of a free and open nature
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so."

What Bassanio thinks of the terms may be gathered from what he says about them. The merchant expresses his willingness to seal the bond, and Bassanio breaks in with

"You shall not seal to such a bond for me,
I'll rather dwell in my necessity."

His scruples are pooh poohed by Antonio and battered by Shylock with ridicule and argument, and the business is settled. But Bassanio is not satisfied. To him "seeming" and "being" are not the same thing—see his speech in the Casket Scene—and his apprehension of treachery on the Jew's part is shown by his concluding remark,

"I like not fair terms and a villain's mind."

And so in answer to the first question, I should say, "No;" and therefore "No" to the second. But as to the second, I don't feel quite sure that I have managed to think of exactly what the querist was thinking of when the question was written. This is a common experience with me: I warned REVIEW readers long ago that I was apt to be "unco' dour i' th' uptak" with regard to the exact import of questions, unless they were so worded that only one meaning could be got out of them.

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The other Merchant query comes from St. John:

"A truth-loving child reads Portia's speech to Lorenzo (Act III., Scene 4):

"I have toward heaven breathed a secret vow,
To live in prayer and contemplation, etc."

The child lays down the book and says, "Portia did not seem to mind whether what she said was true or not."

How would you treat the objection?"

I beg to be excused from answering this question. If I knew the truth-loving child, and if I had the living childish face before me, some kindly spirit might inspire me to say something which would not offend an ingenuous child's respect for absolute truth, and which at the same time would leave room for the belief that Portia was a charming and amiable and noble woman. With only a blank sheet of paper before me, there are no signs of the inspiring presence of such a spirit. But I have no doubt that long before now the child's teacher has treated the objection in a quite satisfactory way, and with greater delicacy and better tact and judgment than I could bring to bear upon it.

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I suppose Portia felt it necessary to give Lorenzo some reason for her departure, and equally necessary not to give the true one, so what could the poor woman do but lie? Shakespeare's women are not rag dolls, stuffed with superfine moral sawdust. They are real women, made of flesh and blood, and furnished with all the charming inconsistencies and incongruities of womanly nature. Portia was

"Feminine to her inmost heart, and feminine to her
tender feet."

And feminine also in her failings, as all real women are. For real women do tell lies—at times.

The Wife of Bath assures us that

"Half so boldely can there no man
Sweren and lien as a woman can."

A man would not blurt it out in that brutal way. See how Byron does it:

"The charming creatures lie with such a grace,
There's nothing so becoming to the face."

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If "lie" seems too harsh a word for Portia's peccadillo, the reader may substitute "fib" or "temporary tergiversation," or any other big or little dab of verbal whitewash that suits him. Portia herself, I feel sure, would not have hesitated to call it a lie. She tells Nerissa, in this same scene, that she is going to "tell quaint lies," and I have no doubt she kept her word. These lies are to be told in her assumed character as a young man, but the lie to Lorenzo is told by the Lady of Belmont, and so is that other lie to Bassanio when she says:

"There's something tells me (but it is not love)
I would not lose you."

No woman was ever more passionately in love with a man than Portia was with Bassanio when she said this, and every one of the string of jerky and broken sentences in her speech shows it. Of course Bassanio knows she is lying. He had never read "The Gentle Shepherd," but we may be sure he acted on the advice given in these lines from it:

"When maidens innocently young
Say often what they never mean,
Ne'er mind their pretty lying tongue
But tent the language o' their e'en."

It was all very well for Miranda to say to Ferdinand:

"I am your wife if you will marry me,"

but Portia could not be as frank as that with Bassanio. Miranda was not a society lady like Portia, and she knew nothing of the restraints which social conventionality lays upon a maiden's tongue under such circumstances. And besides, Portia was hampered by the conditions of her father's will. So, in this case as in the other, what could the poor woman do but lie?