

vocabulary, or the spending of a few pleasant hours be not the sole motive of reading, but if on the other hand the truth be that this profitable exercise is intended, that we may be able to rise from our books feeling ourselves better, both in head and heart than when we sat down to them, there certainly is no better way of satisfying such requirements than by sinking to the very bottom of the literary stream, and gathering there the moral treasures that have been deposited in the wake of Time and of Genius.

Such considerations may be termed a digression, but I feel that they have spontaneously arisen from the very nature of our subject. Feeling then that the moral side of Shakespeare is by no means the least valuable in his productions, I now turn more confidently to the direct topic of discussion, namely the moral of the Merchant of Venice. And here arises the question; what then really is the lesson taught by a study of this exquisite comedy? The query is not so easily answered, as when put in connection with any other play of Shakespeare. However, it has its answer, and this answer, according to a noted German critic, is concisely contained in that old Latin proverb which runs *summum jus, summa injuria*. In short, from the Merchant of Venice may be inferred the truth (paradoxical though it may appear,) that as the refreshing breeze which gently wafts the trader's ship from land to land, may in the course of time develop into a destructive and merchant-marring hurricane, so also the greatest right when rashly pushed to an extreme, may be transformed into the greatest wrong.

In the comedy we are now considering this principle has a triple

demonstration, each of which will be explained in turn. For this purpose, it will be necessary to briefly recall some of the incidents of the play, since it is from the inferences to be drawn from the story itself, rather than from any set sentences, that there is to be derived the evidence contained in this article. Let us begin with the main plot which in substance is as follows:

Bassanio was a young Venetian, who, however commendable his other qualities, was subject to that common but pernicious practice of living in a manner, which from a pecuniary standpoint, was decidedly above his means. At the time we speak of, this young gentleman was deeply in love; and with a knowledge of this fact in mind there is but little fear that the reader will be disposed to hold him strictly responsible for any eccentric or trivial indiscretion we may be obliged to recount. The object of our lover's affection was a noble lady, Portia of Belmont, whose far-famed beauty was equalled only by the dazzling brilliancy of her social position and intellectual accomplishments. In the midst of a score of other wooers, Bassanio nestled in the good graces of his peerless mistress, but unfortunately had not the wherewithal to press his suit to a successful termination. Under these circumstances he applied for pecuniary aid to his devoted friend Antonio, a wealthy merchant whose liberality was even in excess of his riches. The latter was eagerly desirous of supplying the "ripe want of a friend," but as his entire capital was invested in cargoes consigned to distant ports, he had not the means of directly exercising his generosity. However, he decided to overcome this difficulty by borrowing the money,