

that the Jews have been altogether outside the system of chivalry in which the modern conception of honour was largely found, is also touched on by Mr. Lecky. Apart from this, the occupations in which the Jews have been chiefly engaged have had a tendency to materialize and lower the character. The Church long taught that it was very wrong to borrow or lend money at interest, and, as this was a commercial necessity, the Jews were allowed a monopoly of it. Most of those qualities which are displeasing in the Jews can be explained, Mr. Lecky thinks, by circumstances such as these.

On the other hand, the Jews should be given credit for some remarkably good traits. They, as a race, Mr. Lecky pointed out, have been strikingly free from the lower and more degrading kinds of vices—those that most enfeeble a race. They are less addicted than Christian nations to intoxicating drinks. Their drinking laws are in accordance with advanced hygienic principles. That they are not lacking in moral elevation or tenderness is apparent from the very fact that they produced the Old Testament. They have shown devoted courage in the maintenance of their faith and before the persecutions which they have endured, the persecutions of other creeds dwindle, according to Mr. Lecky's opinion, almost into insignificance. They have always had a great reverence for learning and exceed the average of men in ability. Mr. Lecky quotes such names as Sprinza, Herne, Ricardo and D'Israeli in evidence of this. They have distinguished themselves especially in philology, mathematics, medicine, music and the histrionic art.

Mr. Lecky seems to think that the Jewish problem, if left alone, will solve itself. The defects of character which have grown up during centuries of persecution will gradually pass away. The old rigidity of creed and observance which completely severed the Jew from other people is being relaxed. The dissolution of old beliefs, which is so marked a characteristic of this latter half of the nineteenth century, has been, Mr. Lecky thinks, even more common among the Western Jews than among Christians, and as common among the women as among the men. Religious cynicism, negative, is common among the Jews. Mr. Lecky quotes Sheridan's remark about the blank page between the Old and the New Testament. Some of the most severe critics of the Old Testament have been Jews. Mr. Lecky instances Spinoza, Salvador, Kalisch, and Darmesteter. To be sure, the Oriental Jews are far more conservative, and have retained, to a far greater extent, their old ritual and fanaticism. But Mr. Lecky predicts, if Palestine is ever again to become a Jewish land, this will be effected only through the wealth and energy of the Western Jews, and it is not those Jews who are likely to inhabit it.

So much for the two sides of the discussion as it is being carried on in our own day. In the light of this discussion the old problem of Shakespearian critics, what Shakespeare meant in the presentation of Shylock becomes a question of modern interest. Did Shakespeare mean to represent in Shylock a fiend incarnate, a man of unmitigated villainy? Or did he aim at picturing a character with all the elements of goodness and greatness, but perverted and distorted from their original and natural condition? In other words was Shakespeare a representative of the intolerance of the age in which he lived or a protest against that intolerance? Of course one should be on one's guard against thinking that a moral must be tacked to everything a great man has written. But whatever may be said of Shakespeare in this respect, there certainly are ethical lessons of the highest import to be drawn from some of his plays, though, of course, no morals are thrust disagreeably and inartistically—as is the way with lesser artists—before us. The view most in favour now among critics seems to be that if there is a moral lesson contained in "The Merchant of Venice," it is a lesson against, rather than in favour, of intolerance. The old conception of Shylock as an out-and-out scoundrel has given place to the conception of him as rather the wreck of a great and in many respects noble nature. This is very decidedly the conception of the greatest living interpreter of Shakespeare on the stage—Henry Irving. It is wonderful how he works out this interpretation. From first to last you see before you a character for which you feel a mingled sorrow and admiration. You think of him as the Jew, taunted, despised by the Christians, even the best of them. It is particularly significant that even Antonio, a magnificent character, faultless in all other respects, is not superior to

the intolerance of the times against the Jews. You scarcely blame the Jews, though you feel a horror at the thing in itself, where he plots so diabolically to bring about Antonio's ruin and death. The tenderness of the Jew for his daughter is brought out very strongly by Irving in his acting. When he parts with the girl, on the night he is "bid forth to supper," he lingers long, holding her hand, and looking proudly and sadly at her as if a premonition of the fate that was to separate them had come to him. When he hears of her flight he is frantic with grief. In Irving's hands the grief for the loss of the ducats is subordinated wholly to and almost lost in the grief for the loss of the daughter. When in the presence of Christians the pride of the old man sustains him, but when alone with Tubal he falls upon the latter's shoulder and breaks into a paroxysm of sobbing. Irving makes a great deal, too, out of that one little sentence where reference is made to the ring which had been given to Shylock years ago by his wife and which Jessica had parted with for a monkey. It is some minutes before Shylock can speak when informed of this loss (this is one of the many instances of the effective use Irving makes of pauses), then in low, broken tones he murmurs, "It was my turquoise; I had it of Leah, when I was a bachelor." The one little sentence, as uttered by Irving, suggests a whole story, and a story of deepest pathos. One begins to think of what life had once meant to that now bowed and trembling old man; that he once was full of hope and love, and looked forward to a life of happy union with a congenial nature; one thinks of what the death of his wife must have meant to a man to whom, shut out from public houses and positions of trust, the family life was all in all; of the disappointment when Jessica failed in filial love or sympathy and deserted the old father for a gay Christian lover. In the trial scene itself the dignity and stern tenacity of purpose of the Jew have something commanding about them. In his desire to have his bond he seems to represent not so much the individual Jew, seeking revenge for personal slights or wrongs, as the stern representative and avenger of a race and religion long despised and persecuted. The splendid *tu quoque* argument, given in reply to the Duke's pharisaical, "How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering none?" is brought out by Irving with fine effect. One cannot help feeling that at any rate Shylock is more consistent with his principles—the principles of the Old Testament on which the Jew was trained, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth"—than are these Christians with the New Testament teachings of the common brotherhood of man and the law of mercy, which they are supposed to accept. The quiet scorn with which Shylock treats the weak and impulsive arguments of Bassanio and the would-be-witty taunts of Gratiano is very effective. He is simply impassive when Portia makes the speech on mercy. That his desire for revenge wholly superseded his usually reigning passion of avarice, is well brought out by Irving, especially when Bassanio says: "For thy three thousand ducats, here are six."

The Jew pauses a minute, looking quietly at Bassanio, then taps three successive times with his knife upon the glittering coins, then slowly and with emphasis on almost every word, replies: "If every ducat in six thousand ducats were in six parts, and every part a ducat, I would not draw them; I would have my bond."

The fawning, servile spirit of the Jew comes out when Portia apparently gives sentence in his favour. He stoops, and kisses repeatedly the hem of Portia's garment, as he heaps compliment upon compliment: "A Daniel come to Judgment! Yea, a Daniel! Oh, wise young Judge, how do I honour thee!"

The fiendish hatred with which he springs towards his victim with uplifted knife, though awful, suggests as parallel some of those characters in Old Testament story, where, according to the account which the most orthodox of us can scarcely read without skepticism, the chosen people were only obeying the commands of the Lord when they butchered relentlessly the armies of the alien.

The anti-climax of this act is even more dramatic and suggestive as Irving gives it than the climax. When the Jew finds he is robbed of his revenge, he, though in a position in which most men would have lost reason and presence of mind entirely, is still capable of thinking of money. When the last and cruelest blow is struck, and he is completely in the power of these Christians, nay, must himself become a Christian, his spirit is utterly crushed and broken. When