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BARABAS AND SHYLOCK.

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THE figure of Shylock in "The Merchant of Venice" has become so familiar to all readers of Shakespeare that he is taken as the sole representative, in almost every instance, of the Jewish race in the Elizabethan period. That there is another figure, which stands out prominently in the grand array of the mighty creations of the drama, strong, proud and revengeful, this paper will be an attempt to show.

If Shakespeare had never written "The Merchant of Venice" there is no doubt that the Barabas of Marlowe instead of Shylock would be our type of Jewish avarice and revenge, and though instead, all characters pale before the powerful productions of Shakespeare, we have, nevertheless, in Marlowe's Jew, one of the most striking persons in dramatic literature.

As Marlowe's play is, to the majority of readers, not sufficiently known to pre-suppose a knowledge of the plot, I may be excused if I give as briefly as possible, the outline of the story.

Barabas, a rich Jew, is compelled by the Governor of Malta to pay a ten years' tribute owed by the Maltese to the Turks. He however, having concealed a large amount of wealth in his house, obtains this through a stratagem of his daughter. By the means of his slave he is the cause of the death of the Governor's son. His daughter, weighed down with grief at her father's crimes, seeks a convent, and is, with all the nuns, poisoned by the Jew. The Maltese, refusing to pay tribute to the Turks, are besieged by them. Barabas, on promise of being made Governor, betrays the city, and when the Turks are successful, and Barabas is at the head of the city, he makes an attempt to betray the Turks to the Maltese and is himself destroyed.

In the first scene of the first act of the play, the position and wealth of Barabas is admirably shown. In a magnificent monologue his boundless wealth is laid before our eyes in words of the finest and grandest description in the whole of Marlowe.

"Give me the merchants of the Indian mines,
That trade in metal of the purest mould;
The wealthy Moor, that in the eastern rocks
Without control can pick his riches up,
And in his house heap pearls like pebble stones,
Receive them free, and sell them by their weight;
Bags of fiery opals, sapphires, amethysts,
Jacinths, hard topaz, grass green emeralds,
Beauteous rubies, sparkling diamonds,
And seld-seen costly stones of so great price,
As one of them indifferently rated,
And of a carat of this quantity,
May serve in peril of calamity
To ransom great kings from captivity.
This is the ware wherein consists my wealth."

Later on in the same scene we have an instance of the peculiar domestic nature of the Jew, whose love for his daughter is his most pleasing characteristic. With true Hebrew affection he says:

"I have no charge nor many children,
But one sole daughter, whom I hold as dear
As Agamemnon did his Iphigen;
And all I have is hers."

A less pleasing feature of his character is shown in his interview with the three Jews who inform him of the designs of the Turks on Malta. A selfish egotism, a carelessness for the lives and property of others, manifests itself in such words as:

"Nay, let 'em combat, conquer and kill all!
So they spare me, my daughter, and my wealth."

And,

"If anything shall there concern our state,
Assure yourselves I'll look—unto myself."

The intensity of feeling in the Jew's nature is strikingly shown in that powerful curse which he pronounces on the heads of those who have deprived him of his wealth:

"The plagues of Egypt and the curse of Heaven,
Earth's barrenness and all men's hatred,
Inflict upon them, thou great *Primus Motor!*
And here upon my knees, striking the earth,
I ban their souls to everlasting pains
And extreme tortures of the fiery deep,
That thus have dealt with me in my distress."

There is a fine nobleness in old Barabas too, when we see him in prosperity, in possession of his recovered money bags, and still filled with intense love for his daughter. Notice these lines, which at the close rise to a lyric rapture:

"Oh my girl,
My gold, my fortune, my felicity!
Strength to my soul, death to mine enemy!
Welcome the first beginner of my bliss! . . .
Now Phoebus ope the eyelids of the day,
And for the raven wake the morning lark,
That I may hover with her in the air;
Singing o'er these, as she does o'er her young."

From this on the character of Barabas gradually deteriorates, till he becomes a monster, not a villain. The plot, by which he contrives the fatal duel between the Governor's son and his daughter's betrothed, violates all the laws of domestic happiness, and is the direct cause of the voluntary divorce of Abigail from her revengeful father. The passion of Barabas now denies all bounds, and to gratify his diabolical nature, he poisons the whole nunnery, to which his daughter had fled. And listen how with fiendish delight he utters these words:

"There is no music to a Christian's knell;
How sweet the bells ring now the nuns are dead,
That sound at other times like tinkers' pans!"

The degradation of Barabas is complete in the fifth act, and only at his death does he again show his bold, defiant spirit. Just before he dies he breaks forth into these words of scorn and bitterest hate:

"Damned Christian dogs! and Turkish infidels!
But now begins the extremity of heat,
To pinch me with intolerable pangs:
Die life! fly soul! tongue, curse thy fill and die!"

Comparing, then, the Jew of the Malta with the Jew of Venice, we find striking resemblances. Both men have unbounded wealth, with a corresponding desire for more; both are prompted by motives of deepest hatred to seek revenge on their persecutors, for the wrongs inflicted on them by Christians; in both cases, the sole purpose of life is to accomplish this revenge; and for both, just as all their sweetest desires are about to be gratified, comes ruin.

In both plays we have a common basis, on which to found our conceptions of the men. Both Jews have been seriously injured by Christians, and in matters of personal wealth. This, it will be seen, strikes at the very root of Jewish prejudice and feeling. Next to his religion the Jew prized his property, and when both were infringed upon small wonder is it that revenge to the knife should be his ruling, overmastering passion.

No sooner has Barabas suffered his wrong, than he prepares, with malicious deliberation, for his dire revenge. The method is in his case not so deliberate as in Shylock's procedure. He seems rather to act on the chance of the moment, and then dart with sure aim on his prey. Shylock depends for his satisfaction on the law; Barabas acknowledges no law; for his revenge he violates every principle of right and justice which interferes with his aims. It is in this wild excess of infuriated rebellion against law that Marlowe has failed in this character. He cannot put any bounds to his desire for piling up the agony, and thus, instead of painting a human blood-thirsty villain, he has worked out a fiend, of a nature incompatible with any vestige of humanity. But, as hinted above, it is only in the later acts that the especially horrible nature of the Jew is manifest. In the first two acts he is the Jewish character in its proudest and loftiest form. As he informs us himself, he is formed of finer mould than common men. He is a master in Israel, a judge and a ruler of the people, a leading member of the great Hebrew oligarchy, scattered over Europe and powerful in Asia. Note his proud words:

"There's Kiriah Jairim, the great Jew of Greece, . . .
Myself in Malta, some in Italy,
Many in France, and wealthy every one."

He is a wealthy merchant, whose 'fortune trowls in by land and sea; one on every side enriched.' His storehouses are heaped with the "multitudinous wares of the Syrian merchants, blue cloths and embroidered work, and chests of rich apparel, bound with cords and made of cedar." But still, he is a man distinct in Malta, both among his co-religionists and the hated Christians. He readily deceives his fellow Jews when it suits him, and has for all the sublimest contempt.

Shylock, on the other hand, is no merchant, but primarily and essentially a usurer. He regards all distant traffic and hardy venture of his wares and monies as substance squandered and unwarranted rashness, and upbraids Antonio with having his "means in supposition, an argosy bound to Tripolis, etc." He hates Antonio "because he is a Christian, but more for that he lends out money gratis, etc."

J. A. Symonds, who in his "Shakespeare's predecessors in the Elizabethan Drama," develops the idea of *L'Amour de l'Impossible*, says of Barabas: "The avarice of the Jew of Malta is so colossal, so tempered with a sensuous love of rarity and beauty, in the priceless gems he hoards, so delicious in its raptures, so subservient to ungovernable hatred and vindictive exercise of power conferred by wealth upon its owner, that we dare not call this baser exhibition of the Impossible Amour ignoble. Marlowe has draped the poor and squalid skeleton of avarice with a majestic robe of imperial purple in such grand words as those of the opening soliloquy. In the avarice of Barabas, there is nothing of the base, miserly nature. He disdains counting "this trash," and envies the Arabians,

"Who so richly pay
The things they traffic for with wedge of gold,
Whereof a man may easily in a day
Tell that which may maintain him all his life."

He lives in luxurious splendor and both for wealth and position is the first Jew in Malta.

The happy family love of Barabas and Abigail is in striking contrast to the relations of Shylock and Jessica. Very lovingly does Abigail greet her distressed father, when he has had his property confiscated.

"Not for myself but aged Barabas,
Father, for thee lamenteth Abigail."

No such affection is ever shown between Shylock and his fair daughter. But even this intense love is swept away in the wild storm of Barabas's passions; not even is the beautiful form of Abigail proof against its fury. Could anything be more inconsistent with character drawing, or destructive to all features of dramatic art than this murder of Abigail? These resemblances in character are further borne out by a similarity in situation and language.

When Barabas has been deprived of his goods he exclaims:

"You have my goods, my money and my wealth,
My ships, my store, and all that I enjoyed,
And having all you can request no more;
Unless your unrelenting, flinty heart
Suppress all pity in your stony breasts,
And now shall move you to bereave my life."

Shylock's words on a similar occasion are:

"Now take my life and all; pardon not that."

How much more admirably Shakespeare has succeeded in putting in one simple line, what Marlowe spreads over six, is apparent. The passionate exclaim of Barabas on receiving his jewels is to be compared as showing the same stupendous love of money, with Shylock's curse on his daughter for the theft of his jewels. Barabas says:

"My girl,
My gold, my fortune, my felicity."

Shylock's words are uttered in a different spirit: "Two thousand ducats in that, and other precious, precious jewels. I would that my daughter were dead at my feet and the jewels on her ear, etc."

There are passages of very much the same idea in both plays, which it is impossible to bring forward in so short a paper as this, but from the above it will be seen that there are similarities both in diction and sentiment, which with the striking resemblances of characterization justify us in supposing in Shakespeare an intimate acquaintance with Marlowe's tragedy.