

for present purposes. In it, the moral of the whole play is strikingly exemplified. Up to that part which describes the making of the contract, as far as the Jew is concerned, there is nothing that might be considered as radically wrong. Antonio had borrowed money from Shylock. According to all ideas of justice the latter was undoubtedly entitled to full payment. As to the conditions specified, it is needless to question their validity, since they were accepted without constraint, and were mutually agreeable to the contracting parties.

It is to be conceded that as creditor of Antonio, Shylock was in possession of certain rights. As far as civil law was concerned, those rights were clearly specified in the parchment whereon the contract was written. But all rights have their natural limits, which in this case were culpably overstepped when Shylock directed his envenomed malice towards the person of his creditor. Human flesh is not a proper substitute for dirty ducats, and although "nature craves that all dues be rendered to their owner," no law either human or divine can justly sanction the taking of a human life, as a fitting or adequate representation of monetary value.

It was in this respect that Shylock seriously erred. Knowing that in virtue of his contract he possessed certain lawful claims, his aggressive eagerness and perverse obstinacy of nature urged him beyond legal limits, and the moment he raised his arm against the life of the defendant,—like the wonderful transformation of Nabuchodonosor of old—that very moment, an evident right was promptly converted into the foulest wrong.

Shakespeare shows the marked

injustice of Shylock's action by unexpectedly defeating his apparently successful claims, and plainly asserts the principle which is the very seed of this play, by otherwise punishing him for his malicious intentions and by seasonably discovering a loophole in the law for the effectual escape of Antonio.

In this instance evil received its appropriate punishment. But immediately following the above incidents, comes another violation of natural right, committed too with seeming impunity. It is to be found in the sentence pronounced upon Shylock, and was occasioned by the indiscretion of the Duke himself. Convicted of having contrived against the very life of the defendant, (for which the penalty was death, and confiscation of all property to the state,) the money lender was spared his life, and restored one half his fortune, on the conditions herein contained; that he should let Antonio have

"The other half in use to render it
Upon his death into the gentleman
That lately stole his daughter;
Two things provided more: That for
this favour
He presently become a Christian;
The other that he do record a gift
Here in the court, of all he dies poss-
ess'd
Unto hisson Lorenzo and his daughter."

Here again we see the "summum jus" and the "summa injuria." Leaving aside the manifest injustice of compelling old Shylock to direct his worldly possessions into the pockets of the man who stole from him his ducats and his daughter, there yet appears a more evident wrong, notwithstanding the fact that it is grounded on a worthy underlying principle. I refer to the forcing of he unwilling Jew to become a