

Bassanio makes his choice under more favourable circumstances than either Morocco or Arragon. He had visited Portia before, while her father was still alive, and from her eyes, even then, he "did receive fair speechless messages." To Nerissa, who saw him then, "he of all men was the best deserving a fair lady," and Portia, who remembers him well, agrees that he is worthy of Nerissa's praise. The messenger whom he sends before, to announce his approach, brings "gifts of rich value;" and we know that Bassanio himself was prepared "to hold a rival place," in outward show, with other suitors. We are told that Bassanio was a welcome suitor, and Portia, as far as her womanly modesty will permit, leaves him in no doubt as to her own anxiety that he will choose aright.

Bassanio was from the outset less likely than either Morocco or Arragon, to be tempted by the "outward shows" of the gold and silver caskets. He was "a soldier and a scholar;" and his own past experience in which he had "disabled his estate," had no doubt put him in a position to form sound judgments as to the real values of external appearances.

This lesson had, indeed, been brought home to him by his preparation for this very event; for when Shylock had attempted to justify himself by quoting from Scripture, Antonio had warned Bassanio especially, that outside appearances were not to be trusted:

"Mark you this, Bassanio,
The Devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.
An evil soul, producing holy witness,
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek;
A goodly apple rotten at the heart,
O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath."

The song that is sung while Bassanio is choosing, helps to confirm the judgment at which he has already arrived. "What of love?" says the singer; "Is it a thing of the heart or of the head?" If it is a thing of the head only, merely dependent upon outward beauty which pleases the eyes, it cannot live. "So may the outward shows be least themselves," comments Bassanio; "The world is still deceived with ornament." It cannot be said that the song gave Bassanio any real hint as to which casket he should choose; for to either Morocco or Arragon the words of the song would have meant