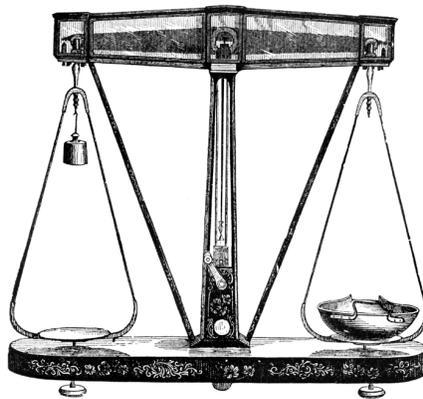


THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

By

William Shakespeare

Act 2, Scene 2



SCENE. Venice. A street

(Enter LAUNCELOT GOBBO.)

LAUNCELOT.

Certainly my conscience will serve me to run from this Jew my master. The fiend is at mine elbow and tempts me, saying to me 'Gobbo, Launcelot Gobbo, good Launcelot' or 'good Gobbo' or 'good Launcelot Gobbo, use your legs, take the start, run away.' My conscience says 'No; take heed, honest Launcelot, take heed, honest Gobbo' or, as aforesaid, 'honest Launcelot Gobbo, do not run; scorn running with thy heels.' Well, the most courageous fiend bids me pack. 'Via!' says the fiend; 'away!' says the fiend. 'For the heavens, rouse up a brave mind,' says the fiend 'and run.' Well, my conscience, hanging about the neck of my heart, says very wisely to me 'My honest friend Launcelot, being an honest man's son'—or rather 'an honest woman's son';—for indeed my father did something smack, something grow to, he had a kind of taste;—well, my conscience says 'Launcelot, budge not.' 'Budge,' says the fiend. 'Budge not,' says my conscience. 'Conscience,' say I, (you counsel well.' 'Fiend,' say I, 'you counsel well.' To be ruled by my conscience, I should stay with the Jew my master, who, God bless the mark! is a kind of devil; and, to run away from the Jew, I should be ruled by the fiend, who, saving your reverence! is the devil himself. Certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnal; and, in my conscience, my conscience is but a kind of hard conscience, to offer to counsel me to stay with the Jew. The fiend gives the more friendly counsel: I will run, fiend; my heels are at your commandment; I will run.

(Enter OLD GOBBO, with a basket)

GOBBO.

Master young man, you, I pray you; which is the way to Master Jew's?

LAUNCELOT.

(Aside) O heavens! This is my true-begotten father, who, being more than sand-blind, high-gravel blind, knows me not: I will try confusions with him.

GOBBO.

Master young gentleman, I pray you, which is the way to Master Jew's?

LAUNCELOT.

Turn up on your right hand at the next turning, but, at the next turning of all, on your left; marry, at the very next turning, turn of no hand, but turn down indirectly to the Jew's house.

GOBBO.

Be God's sonties, 'twill be a hard way to hit. Can you tell me whether one Launcelot, that dwells with him, dwell with him or no?

LAUNCELOT.

Talk you of young Master Launcelot? (Aside) Mark me now; now will I raise the waters. Talk you of young Master Launcelot?

GOBBO.

No master, sir, but a poor man's son; his father, though I say't, is an honest exceeding poor man, and, God be thanked, well to live.

LAUNCELOT.

Well, let his father be what 'a will, we talk of young Master Launcelot.

GOBBO.

Your worship's friend, and Launcelot, sir.

LAUNCELOT.

But I pray you, ergo, old man, ergo, I beseech you, talk you of young Master Launcelot?

GOBBO.

Of Launcelot, an't please your mastership.

LAUNCELOT.

Ergo, Master Launcelot. Talk not of Master Launcelot, father; for the young gentleman,—according to Fates and Destinies and such odd sayings, the Sisters Three and such branches of learning,—is indeed deceased; or, as you would say in plain terms, gone to heaven.

GOBBO.

Marry, God forbid! The boy was the very staff of my age, my very prop.

LAUNCELOT.

Do I look like a cudgel or a hovel-post, a staff or a prop? Do you know me, father?

GOBBO.

Alack the day! I know you not, young gentleman; but I pray you tell me, is my boy—God rest his soul!—alive or dead?

LAUNCELOT.

Do you not know me, father?

GOBBO.

Alack, sir, I am sand-blind; I know you not.

LAUNCELOT.

Nay, indeed, if you had your eyes, you might fail of the knowing me: it is a wise father that knows his own child. Well, old man, I will tell you news of your son. Give me your blessing; truth will come to light; murder cannot be hid long; a man's son may, but in the end truth will out.

GOBBO.

Pray you, sir, stand up; I am sure you are not Launcelot, my boy.

LAUNCELOT.

Pray you, let's have no more fooling about it, but give me your blessing; I am Launcelot, your boy that was, your son that is, your child that shall be.

GOBBO.

I cannot think you are my son.

LAUNCELOT.

I know not what I shall think of that; but I am Launcelot, the Jew's man, and I am sure Margery your wife is my mother.

GOBBO.

Her name is Margery, indeed: I'll be sworn, if thou be Launcelot, thou art mine own flesh and blood. Lord worshipped might he be, what a beard hast thou got! Thou hast got more hair on thy chin than Dobbin my thill-horse has on his tail.

LAUNCELOT.

It should seem, then, that Dobbin's tail grows backward;
I am sure he had more hair on his tail than I have on my face
when I last saw him.

GOBBO.

Lord! how art thou changed! How dost thou and thy master
agree? I have brought him a present. How 'gree you now?

LAUNCELOT.

Well, well; but, for mine own part, as I have set up my
rest to run away, so I will not rest till I have run some ground.
My master's a very Jew. Give him a present! Give him a halter. I
am famished in his service; you may tell every finger I have with
my ribs. Father, I am glad you are come; give me your present to
one Master Bassanio, who indeed gives rare new liveries. If I
serve not him, I will run as far as God has any ground. O rare
fortune! Here comes the man: to him, father; for I am a Jew, if I
serve the Jew any longer.

(Enter BASSANIO, with LEONARDO, with and other Followers.)

BASSANIO.

You may do so; but let it be so hasted that supper be
ready at the farthest by five of the clock. See these letters
delivered, put the liveries to making, and desire Gratiano to
come anon to my lodging.

(Exit a SERVANT)

LAUNCELOT.

To him, father.

GOBBO.

God bless your worship!

BASSANIO.

Gramercy; wouldst thou aught with me?

GOBBO.

Here's my son, sir, a poor boy—

LAUNCELOT.

Not a poor boy, sir, but the rich Jew's man, that would, sir,—as my father shall specify—

GOBBO.

He hath a great infection, sir, as one would say, to serve—

LAUNCELOT.

Indeed the short and the long is, I serve the Jew, and have a desire, as my father shall specify—

GOBBO.

His master and he, saving your worship's reverence, are scarce cater-cousins—

LAUNCELOT.

To be brief, the very truth is that the Jew, having done me wrong, doth cause me,—as my father, being I hope an old man, shall frutify unto you—

GOBBO.

I have here a dish of doves that I would bestow upon your worship; and my suit is—

LAUNCELOT.

In very brief, the suit is impertinent to myself, as your worship shall know by this honest old man; and, though I say it, though old man, yet poor man, my father.

BASSANIO.

One speak for both. What would you?

LAUNCELOT.

Serve you, sir.

GOBBO.

That is the very defect of the matter, sir.

BASSANIO.

I know thee well; thou hast obtain'd thy suit.
Shylock thy master spoke with me this day,
And hath preferr'd thee, if it be preferment
To leave a rich Jew's service to become
The follower of so poor a gentleman.

LAUNCELOT.

The old proverb is very well parted between my master
Shylock and you, sir: you have the grace of God, sir, and he hath
enough.

BASSANIO.

Thou speak'st it well. Go, father, with thy son.
Take leave of thy old master, and inquire
My lodging out. (To a SERVANT) Give him a livery
More guarded than his fellows'; see it done.

LAUNCELOT.

Father, in. I cannot get a service, no! I have ne'er a
tongue in my head! (Looking on his palm) Well; if any man in
Italy have a fairer table which doth offer to swear upon a book,
I
shall have good fortune. Go to; here's a simple line of life:
here's a small trifle of wives; alas, fifteen wives is nothing;
a'leven widows and nine maids is a simple coming-in for one man.

And then to scape drowning thrice, and to be in peril of my life with the edge of a feather-bed; here are simple 'scapes. Well, if Fortune be a woman, she's a good wench for this gear. Father, come; I'll take my leave of the Jew in the twinkling of an eye.

(Exeunt LAUNCELOT and OLD GOBBO.)

BASSANIO.

I pray thee, good Leonardo, think on this:
These things being bought and orderly bestow'd,
Return in haste, for I do feast to-night
My best esteem'd acquaintance; hie thee, go.

LEONARDO.

My best endeavours shall be done herein.

(Enter GRATIANO.)

GRATIANO.

Where's your master?

LEONARDO.

Yonder, sir, he walks.

(Exit.)

GRATIANO.

Signior Bassanio!—

BASSANIO.

Gratiano!

GRATIANO.

I have suit to you.

BASSANIO.

You have obtain'd it.

GRATIANO.

You must not deny me: I must go with you to Belmont.

BASSANIO.

Why, then you must. But hear thee, Gratiano;
Thou art too wild, too rude, and bold of voice;
Parts that become thee happily enough,
And in such eyes as ours appear not faults;
But where thou art not known, why there they show
Something too liberal. Pray thee, take pain
To allay with some cold drops of modesty
Thy skipping spirit, lest through thy wild behaviour
I be misconstrued in the place I go to,
And lose my hopes.

GRATIANO.

Signior Bassanio, hear me:
If I do not put on a sober habit,
Talk with respect, and swear but now and then,
Wear prayer-books in my pocket, look demurely,
Nay more, while grace is saying, hood mine eyes
Thus with my hat, and sigh, and say 'amen';
Use all the observance of civility,
Like one well studied in a sad ostent
To please his grandam, never trust me more.

BASSANIO.

Well, we shall see your bearing.

GRATIANO.

Nay, but I bar to-night; you shall not gauge me
By what we do to-night.

BASSANIO.

No, that were pity;
I would entreat you rather to put on
Your boldest suit of mirth, for we have friends
That purpose merriment. But fare you well;
I have some business.

GRATIANO.

And I must to Lorenzo and the rest;
But we will visit you at supper-time.

(Exeunt.)