

adaptation of certain faculties to a certain end or aim" which is eminently graceful and feminine, and exactly describes the mental characteristics of Portia, as most conspicuously displayed in the trial scene, wherein her success is achieved, not by the exercise of inherent wisdom, or an educated judgment, but by the merely clever discovery of a legal quibble. That the word has fallen into disrepute, from unworthy associations, should not impair its legitimate value. True, it does "suggest the idea of something we should distrust and shrink from, if not allied to a higher nature;" but we contend that, in Portia, cleverness *is* allied to a higher nature—to qualities which are, indeed, scarcely less perfect than her fair panegyrist has portrayed them—in a woman whose "plenteous wit" and excelling accomplishments are more than equalled by her tenderness, her magnanimity, her graceful dignity, and her lofty honor.

The scene wherein the happy consummation of her love depends on the perilous chance of her lover's choosing the casket which contains her picture, is full of eloquent touches. We may almost count the heart-throbs of Portia, as she pleads to Bassanio, in such candid confusion of fear, to "pause a day or two before he hazards:"

I pray you, tarry; pause a day or two
Before you hazard; for, in choosing wrong,
I lose your company; therefore, forbear a while.
There's something tells me, (but it is not love,)
I would not lose you; and you know, yourself,
Hate counsels not in such a quality;
But lest you should not understand me well,
(And yet a maiden hath no tongue but thought,)
I would detain you here some month or two,
Before you venture for me. I could teach you
How to choose right—but then I am forsworn;
So will I never be: so may you miss me;

But if you do, you'll make me wish a sin—
That I had been forsworn. Beshrew your eyes!
They have o'erlook'd me, and divided me;
One half of me is yours, the other half yours,—
Mine own, I would say; but if mine, then yours—
And so all yours:
* * * * *
Away then! I am lock'd in one of them;
If you do love me, you will find me out.

Her chaste passion, which she has studiously repressed while threatened with the possibility of disappointment, bursts forth in this exuberance of joy when her lover has indeed won her:

How all the other passions fleet to air—
As doubtful thoughts, and rash-embrac'd despair,
And shudd'ring fear, and green-ey'd jealousy!
O Love, be moderate, allay thy ecstasy,
In measure rain thy joy, scant this excess;
I feel too much thy blessing; make it less,
For fear I surfeit!

But Portia is surrounded by guests and attendants; this is no time for Love's transports, even if she were less accustomed to self-command; it is necessary that she should formally acknowledge her future husband; and with what rare tact, excelling dignity, and love disdaining all affectation of diffidence, is her acceptance of him clothed. We wonder how any one, after having read this most womanly speech, dictated by the simplest emotions of a loving and modest heart, can accuse Portia of affectation or pedantry:

You see me, lord Bassanio, where I stand,
Such as I am. Though, for myself alone,
I would not be ambitious in my wish,
To wish myself much better; yet, for you,
I would be trebled twenty times myself—
A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times
More rich;

That only to stand high on your account,
 I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,
 Exceed account. But the full sum of me
 Is sum of something; which, to term in gross,
 Is an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractis'd:
 Happy in this—she is not yet so old
 But she may learn; and happier than this—
 She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
 Happiest of all is, that her gentle spirit
 Commits itself to yours to be directed,
 As from her lord, her governor, her king.
 Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours
 Is now converted; but now I was the lord
 Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
 Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now,
 This house, these servants, and this same myself,
 Are yours, my lord; I give them with this ring.

For the trial scene, that “master-piece of dramatic skill,” as so much of its effect depends upon the by-play, we resign our reader to the text—except for Portia’s famous appeal to Shylock, which, apart from its circumstantial force, stands alone, one of the most beautiful of the “beauties of Shakspeare:”

Por. The quality of mercy is not strain'd;
 It droppeth, as the gentle rain from heaven
 Upon the place beneath; it is twice bless'd:
 It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes.
 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
 The throned monarch better than his crown;
 His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
 The attribute to awe and majesty,
 Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
 But mercy is above this sceptred sway—
 It is enthroned in the hearts of kings—
 It is an attribute to God himself;
 And earthly power doth then show likest God's
 When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
 Though justice be thy plea, consider this—

That in the course of justice none of us
 Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy;
 And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
 The deeds of mercy.

Portia's wit, guiltless of malice, irreverence, or vulgar effort at display, is as fresh, hopeful, and light-hearted as her own elastic spirit. Her conversation with her maid, Nerissa, about the lovers who have come a-wooing, is incomparably lively and satirical, yet perfectly good-humored; and not a few of her happy sallies have become proverbial. Of these we give but two: the first a portrait, as true of the subject to-day as when Portia sketched it; the second a titbit of moral philosophy, that will continue to be relished as long as a moral finger-post is left in the land:

* * * * *
 * * * * * I'll hold thee any wager,
 When we are both accouter'd like young men,
 I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two,
 And wear my dagger with the braver grace;
 And speak, between the change of man and boy,
 With a reed voice; and turn two mincing steps
 Into a manly stride; and speak of frays,
 Like a fine bragging youth; and tell quaint lies—
 How honorable ladies sought my love,
 Which I denying, they fell sick and died;
 I could not do with all. Then I'll repent,
 And wish, for all that, that I had not kill'd them;
 And twenty of these puny lies I'll tell,
 That men should swear I have discontinued school
 Above a twelvemonth:—I have within my mind
 A thousand raw tricks of these bragging Jacks,
 Which I will practise.

If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces. It is a good divine that follows his

own instructions: I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching.

As to her beauty, her goodness, and the fame of both—could any one doubt—we find abundant testimony in the following passages:

In Belmont is a lady richly left;
And she is fair, and, fairer than that word,
Of wondrous virtues;

* * * * *

Her name is Portia—nothing undervalued
To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia.
Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth;
For the four winds blow in from every coast
Renowned suitors; and her sunny locks
Hang on her temples like a golden fleece—
Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos' strand,
And many Jasons come in quest of her.

* * * * *

* * * * * All the world desires her:

From the four corners of the earth they come,
To kiss this shrine, this mortal breathing saint.
The Hyrcanian deserts, and the vasty wilds
Of wide Arabia, are as through-fares now,
For princes to come view fair Portia;
The wat'ry kingdom, whose ambitious head
Spits in the face of heaven, is no bar
To stop the foreign spirits; but they come,
As o'er a brook, to see fair Portia.

* * * * *

Why, if two gods should play some heavenly match,
And on the wager lay two earthly women,
And Portia one, there must be something else
Pawn'd with the other; for the poor rude world
Hath not her fellow.