

The Merchant of Venice

Act II, sc. 9 (line 13)

ARRAGON

And so have I address'd me. Fortune now

To my heart's hope! Gold; silver; and base lead.

'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.'

You shall look fairer, ere I give or hazard.

What says the golden chest? ha! let me see:

'Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.'

What many men desire! that 'many' may be meant

By the fool multitude, that choose by show,

Not learning more than the fond eye doth teach;

Which pries not to the interior, but, like the martlet,

Builds in the weather on the outward wall,

Even in the force and road of casualty.

I will not choose what many men desire,

Because I will not jump with common spirits

And rank me with the barbarous multitudes.

Why, then to thee, thou silver treasure-house;

Tell me once more what title thou dost bear:

'Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.'

And well said too; for who shall go about

To cozen fortune and be honourable

Without the stamp of merit? Let none presume

To wear an undeserved dignity.
O, that estates, degrees and offices
Were not derived corruptly, and that clear honour
Were purchased by the merit of the wearer!
How many then should cover that stand bare!
How many be commanded that command!
How much low peasantry would then be glean'd
From the true seed of honour! and how much honour
Pick'd from the chaff and ruin of the times
To be new-varnish'd! Well, but to my choice:
'Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.'
I will assume desert. Give me a key for this,
And instantly unlock my fortunes here.