

28 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

And better, in my mind, not undertook.

*Lor.* 'Tis now but four o'clock, we have two hours  
To furnish us. Friend *Launcelot*, what's the news?

*Enter Launcelot with a letter.*

*Laun.* An it shall please you to break up this, it shall seem  
to signify.

*Lor.* I know the hand; in faith, 'tis a fair hand;  
And whiter than the paper that it writ on  
Is the fair hand that writ.

*Gra.* Love-news, in faith.

*Laun.* By your leave, sir.

*Lor.* Whither goest thou?

*Laun.* Marry, sir, to bid my old master the *Jew* to sup to-night  
with my new master the christian.

*Lor.* Hold, here, take this; tell gentle *Jessica*  
I will not fail her; speak it privately.

Go, gentlemen, will you prepare for th' mask to-night?

I am provided of a torchbearer.

[*Exit Laun.*

*Sal.* Ay, marry, I'll be gone about it straight.

*Sola.* And so will I.

*Lor.* Meet me, and *Gratiano*,  
At *Gratiano's* lodging some hour hence.

*Sal.* 'Tis good we do so.

[*Exit.*

*Gra.* Was not that letter from fair *Jessica*?

*Lor.* I must needs tell thee all: she hath directed  
How I shall take her from her father's house,  
What gold and jewels she is furnish'd with,  
What page's suit she hath in readiness.  
If e'er the *Jew* her father come to heav'n,  
It will be for his gentle daughter's sake:  
And never dare misfortune cross her foot,  
Unless she do it under this excuse,  
That she is issue to a faithless *Jew*!  
Come, go with me; peruse this as thou goest,  
Fair *Jessica* shall be my torchbearer.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE