

THE BALLAD OF GERNUTUS¹

A new Song:

Shewing the crueltie of *Gernutus* a Jew, who lending to a Merchant a hundred Crownes, would have a pound of his flesh, because he could not pay him at the day appointed.

To the Tune of *Black and Yellow*.

In *Venice* Towne not long agoe
a cruell Jew did dwell,
Which lived all on Usurie,
as *Italian* writers tell.

Gernutus called was the Jew,
which never thought to die,
Nor never yet did any good
to them in streetes that lye.

His life was like a Barrow Hogge,
that liveth many a day,
Yet never once doth any good,
untill men will him slay.

1. Reprinted from the Bodleian copy, Wood, 401 (101); it was "Printed at London by E.P. for I. Wright, / dwelling in Gilt-spur-street." The Pepys copy (from another edition) is reprinted in *The Pepys Ballads*, ed. H. E. Rollins, 1 (1929), 18-23.

Or like a filthy heape of dung,
that lyeth in a hoord;
Which never can doe any good,
till it be spred abroad.

So fares it with this Usurer,
he cannot sleepe in rest,²
For feare the theefe doth him pursue,
to plucke him from his nest.

His heart doth thinke on many a wile,
how to deceive the poore;
His mouth is almost full of mucke,
yet still he gapes for more.

His Wife must lend a shilling,
for every weeke a penny,
Yet bring a Pledge that's double
worth,
if that you will have any.

And see (likewise) you keepe your
day,
or else you loose it all:
This was the living of his Wife,
her Cow she doth it call.

Within that Citie dwelt that time
a Merchant of great fame,
Which being distressed in his need,
unto *Gernutus* came:

Desiring him to stand his friend,
for twelve moneth and a day,
To lend to him an hundred Crownes,
and he for it would pay

The second part of the *Iewes* crueltie, setting forth the merciful-
nesse of the Iudge towards the Merchant. To the same Tune.

With right good will, the Merchant
said,
and so the Bond was made.
When twelve moneth and a day
drew on,
that back it should be payd,

The Merchants ships were all at
Sea,
and Money came not in;
Which way to take, or what to doe,
to thinke he doth begin

And to *Gernutus* straight he comes,
with cap and bended knee;
And sayd to him of curtesie,
I pray you beare with mee.

My day is come, and I have not
the Money for to pay:
And little good the forfeiture
will doe you, I dare say.³

Whatsoever he would demand of
him,
and Pledges he should have:
No (qd. the Jew with fleering lookes)
Sir, aske what you will have,

No penny for the loane of it
for one ycere you shall pay;
You may doe me as good a turne,
before my dying day.

But we will have a merry ieast,⁴
for to be talked long:
You shall make me a Bond (quoth
he)
that shall be large and strong.

And this shall be the forfeiture,
of your owne flesh a pound:
If you agree, make you the Bond,
and here's a hundred Crownes.

With all my heart, *Gernutus* said,
command it to your minde;
In things of bigger weight then this,
you shall me readie finde.

He goes his way: the day once past,
Gernutus doth not slacke
To get a Sericant presently,
and clapt him on the backe.

And layd him into Prison strong,
and sued his Bond withall;
And when the iudgement day was
come,
for iudgement he doth call.

The Merchants friends came thither
fast,
with many a weeping eye;
For other meanes they could not
finde,
but he that day must dye.

Some offered for his hundred
Crownes
five hundred for to pay;
And some a thousand, two, or
three,
yet still he did deny:

And at the last, ten thousand
Crownes
they offered him to save.
Gernutus said, I will no Gold,
my forfeit I will have,

A pound of flesh is my desire,
and that shall be my hyre.
Then said the Iudge, yet good my
friend
let me of you desire,

To take the flesh from such a place,
as yet you let him live:
Doe so, and loe an hundred
Crownes
to thee here will I give.

No, no (quoth he) no iudgement
here,
for this it shall be try'de;
For I will have my pound of flesh
from under his right side.

It grieved all the companie
his crueltie to see,
For neither friend nor foe could
helpe,
but he must spoyled bee.

The bloudie Jew now readie is,
with whetted blade in hand,⁵
To spoyle the bloud of Innocent,
by forfeit of his Bond.

And as he was about to strike
in him the deadly blow:
Stay (quoth the Iudge) thy
crueltie,
I charge thee to doe so.

That seeketh nothing but the spoyle
of many a wealthie man,
And for to trap the innocent,
deviseth what they can.

Sith needs thou wilt thy forfeit have
which is of flesh a pound;
See that thou shed no drop of bloud
nor yet the man confound,

For if thou doe, like murtherer,
thou here shalt hanged bee:
Likewise of flesh see that thou cut
no more then longs to thee.

For if thou take either more or lesse
to the value of a Mite,
Thou shalt be hanged presently,
as is both Law and right.

Gernutus now waxt frantick mad,
and wotes not what to say:
Quoth he at last, ten thousand
Crownes
I will that he shall pay,

And so I grant to set him free:
the Iudge doth answere make,
You shall not have a penny given,
your forfeiture now take.

At the last he doth demand,
but for to have his owne:
No (quoth the Iudge) doe as you list
thy Iudgement shall be showne.

Either take your pound of flesh (qd
he)
or cancell me your Bond:
O cruell Iudge, then quoth the Jew
that doth against me stand.

And so with griped grievd minde
he biddeth them farewell:
All the people prays'd the Lord,
that ever this heard tell.

Good people that doe heare this
Song,
for truth I dare well say,
That many a wretch as ill as he
doth live now at this day,

From whom the Lord deliver me,
and every Christian too,
And send to them like sentence eke,
that meaneth so to doo.

FINIS

[To secure peace with the Emperor of Rome, the King of Ampluy sent his only daughter to marry the Emperor's only son. The ship in which she travelled was shipwrecked and she was swallowed by a whale which, being wounded, came to the sea-shore. Here the princess was rescued by an Earl named Pyrris.]

And when she was thus deliuered, shee told him foorthwith whose daughter shee was, and how shee had lost all his goods in y^e sea, and how shee should haue bene married vnto the Emperours son. And when y^e Earle heard this [hec] was right glad, wherefore hee comforted hir the more, and kept hir still with him till she was well refreshed. And in the meane time hee sent messengers to the Emperour, letting him to wit how this knights daughter was saued. Then was the Emperour right glad of hir sauety and comming, & had great compassion on hir, saying: A good Mayde for the loue of my sonne thou hast suffered much woe, neuerthelesse if thou be worthy to be his wife soone shal I proue. And when he had thus sayd, hee let bring foorth three vessells, the first was made of pure Gold well besette with precious stones without and within, full of dead mens bones, and therevpon was engrauen this posey. *Who so chooseth mee shall finde that he deserueth.*

The second vessell was made of fyne siluer, fylled with earth and wormes, and the superscription was thus. *Who so chooseth me shall*

1. Reprinted from the Bodleian copy, Douce R4.

[Extract from "The Morall"]

The Emperour sheweth this Mayden three vessells, that is to say, God putteth before man life & death, good and euill, & which of these that he chooseth hee shall obtaine. Therefore saith *Sampson: Ante hominem mors & vita.* Death and lyfe is sette before man, choose which him lyst. And yet man is vncertaine whether he bee worthy to choose lyfe beefore death.

By the first vessell of golde full of dead mennes bones we shall vnderstand some worldly men, both mightie men & riche, which outwardly shine as golde in riches and pomps of this world.

Neuerthelesse within they be full of dead mennes bones, that is to saye, the workes that they haue wrought in this world bene dead in the sight of god thorough deadly sinne. Therefore if any man choose such life he shall haue that he deserueth, that is to say, hell. And such men be like toubmes that be white and roially painted and arayed without and couered with cloth of gold and silke, but within there is nothing but dry bones.¹ By the second vessell of siluer we ought to vnderstand some Justices & wise men of this world which shine in faire speach but within they be full of wormes² and earth, that is to saye, theyr faire speach shall auaille them no more at the day of iudgement, than wormes of earth, and paraduenteur lesse, for than shall they suffer euerlasting paine, if they dye in deadly sinne.

By the third vessell of lead full of golde and precious stones, we ought to vnderstand a simple life and a poore, which the chosen men choose, that they may be wedded to our blessed Lorde Jesu Christ by humilitie and obeysance, and such men beare with them precious stones, that is to saye, faith and hir fruitfull workes, pleasinge to God: by the which at the iudgement day they be espoused to our Lord Jesu Christ and obtaine the heritage of heauen, vnto the which bring vs he that dyed on the Crosse. Amen.

finde that his nature desireth. The third vessell was made of Lead, full within of precious stones, and therevpon was insculpt¹ this posey. *Who so chooseth mee, shall finde that God hath disposed for him.*

These three vessells the Emperour shewed to the Mayden and sayde. Loe here daughter, these bee noble vessells, if thou choose one of these wherin is profit to thee and to other then shalt thou haue my son. And if thou choose that wherin is no profit to thee nor to none other, sothly thou shalt not wed him.

When the Mayden saw this, shee lift vp hir hands to God and sayde. Thou Lord which knowest all things, graunt mee grace this houre so to choose, that I may receiue the Emperours sonne. And with y^t shee beeheld the first vessell of gold which was grauen royally, & reade this superscription. *Who so chooseth mee. &c.* saying thus. Though this vessel be full precious and made of pure gold, neuerthelesse know not I what is within, therefore my deere Lord this vessell will I not choose.

And then behelde shee the second vessell that was of pure siluer, and reade the superscription, *who so chooseth me, shall finde that his nature desireth.* Thinkinge thus within hir selfe, if I choose this vessell, what is within I know not, but well I wot there shall I finde that [na]ture desireth, & my nature desireth the lust of the flesh, and therefore this vessell will I not choose.

When she had seene those two vessells, & giuen an answere as touching two of them, shee beeheld the third vessell of lead, & read the superscription, *who so chooseth me, shall finde that God hath disposed.* Thinking within hir selfe this vessell is not passing riche, ne thorowly precious, neuerthelesse the superscription faith, who so chooseth mee, shall finde that God hath disposed, & without doubt God neuer disposed any harme, therefore as now I will choose this vessell, by the leaue of God.

When the Emperour saw this, he said, O good Mayden, open thy vessell, for it is full of precious Stones, and see if thou hast well chosen or no. And when this yong Lady had opened it, she found it full of fine gold and precious stones, lyke as the Emperour had foretold hir beefore.

And than sayd the Emperour, O my deere daughter, because thou hast wisely chosen, therefore shalt thou wed my sonne. And when he had so said, he ordained a marriage, and wedded them together with great solemnitie, & much honour, and so continued to theyr liues ende.