

Shakespeare as a rule did not invent much of the material which he used in the construction of his plots. He simply took the material which he found ready at hand and remoulded it in dramatic form. In the case of *The Merchant of Venice* he used the bond story in *Il Pecorone* as the basis of his plot. Then in place of the test to which the lover in the Italian story is subjected he substituted the story of the caskets; and into these combined stories he wove the romance of Lorenzo and Jessica. The outlines of the stories are borrowed; but the language, the sentiments, the characters, and the wonderful skill with which the stories are woven into one, are all Shakespeare's own.

The Title of the Play.

There is no doubt that in giving the title *The Merchant of Venice* to the play, Shakespeare did not intend merely to name the play after Antonio; for, as a matter of fact, Antonio is not so striking a character as either Shylock or Bassanio. The title is appropriate because it suggests the conditions which form the background of the plot as a whole. It was because Antonio was a rich merchant and occupied a position of influence on the Rialto that he came into contact with Shylock; and it was in part because he was a rich merchant that Bassanio was able to borrow from him. It was, moreover, because he was a "merchant of Venice,"—one whose ventures were "squandered abroad"—that it was possible for him to lose all his wealth at sea. In depicting the character of Antonio the dramatist has, to be sure, made much of his generous nature and his loyal friendship for Bassanio, but it is in reality because the plot turns upon the position and fortunes of "the merchant of Venice" that the play is named after him.

"The Merchant of Venice" as a Comedy.

When we speak of a Comedy we usually have in mind the kind of play that is cheerful in tone and that has a happy ending. But as a matter of fact the tone and the ending are in themselves always dependent upon other conditions in the play. In comedy as in tragedy the plot consists in the development of some difficulty which has to be overcome. If the hero or heroine is able to solve the problem, or overcome the