

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

to go in person to the city and there, in counsel's dress and armed with Bellario's notes, to plead for the merchant in open court. Her house at Belmont she left in charge of Lorenzo and Jessica; set out for Venice; and, being met by the messenger at the ferry, donned her disguise, while Nerissa dressed herself as a lawyer's clerk. So they crossed to the city and entered it on the very day of the trial.

In the Great Court of Justice the Doge sat enthroned with his counsellors. Plaintiff and defendant stood before him; and Bassanio by Antonio's side, in greater agony of mind than his friend who faced the ordeal. In the hush of the crowded court and before he heard the suit the Doge was making a last measured appeal to Shylock to show mercy and not drive his vengeance to the cold process of the law. But Shylock was obdurate. 'I have sworn to have the forfeit,' he answered, 'and I will have it. Why I pursue this man it is not your Grace's province to ask me. Say it is my humour: say that I have no better reason than that I hate and loathe this man. I stand here for law, and you dare not deny it.' To this he held, though Bassanio tendered six thousand ducats for the three thousand owing. 'If every ducat in your six thousand were in six parts and each separate part a ducat, I would not accept. I stand for judgment: answer me, Shall I have it?' The Doge mused. 'I have power to adjourn this court unless Bellario, a learned Doctor of Padua whom I have sent for in this difficulty, appear here to-day.' 'My lord,' it was announced, 'a messenger has this moment arrived from him, bearing a letter.' 'Bid him enter,' the Doge commanded; and Nerissa, dressed like a lawyer's clerk, entered and tendered the letter. It ran:—

Your Grace shall understand that your message found me in ill health: but when it arrived, there happened to be staying with me, on a friendly visit, a young Doctor of Rome, by name Balthazar. I acquainted him with the action between the Jew and Antonio the merchant: we turned over many books together; he is furnished with my opinion, which his own learning will doubtless better. In fine, I have besought him to