

# INTRODUCTION

## DATE OF THE PLAY

Eighteen of Shakespeare's thirty-seven plays are known to have been separately printed in small quarto form during his life-time. *The Merchant of Venice* was one of those eighteen plays. It was published twice in 1600, and has enjoyed a continuous popularity for three centuries.

## KIND OF PLAY

Tragedy deals with grave topics, rests on the virtues, crime and sufferings of mankind, and is intended to arouse the deepest feelings of admiration, pity, and awe; comedy chooses mirthful topics, rests on the humours, follies, and pleasures of mankind, and is intended to provoke merriment.

Both tragedy and comedy must contain a plot, unity of action, at least one leading personage, and several less important personages.

*The Merchant of Venice* is tragi-comedy—a blending of tragedy and comedy, comedy predominating. It is a romantic drama; *i.e.*, Shakespeare uses stories of romance as the warp and woof of his magic web. But he is a subtle weaver, and his poetic tapestry is a most original production—a unique picture of mediæval life; of the Venice of our dream—its gondolas, its carnivals, its money-lenders, its princely merchants, its magnificoes, doges, and ladies; of companionship and isolation, of friendship and enmity, of reality and appearance, of joy and sorrow, of generosity and greed, of the spirit and the letter.

## OUTLINE OF THE PLOT

When Venice was queen of the Adriatic, Signior Antonio was one of her wealthiest merchants. Suddenly a cloud of gloom enveloped him, and no sunshine of his friends' affection could cheer him; but when his kinsman Bassanio, a scholar and soldier, appeared, the cloud dissolved.

Bassanio needed money to hold a rival place among princely suitors of beautiful Portia, a wealthy heiress of Belmont.