

THE STORY

the sweetest of temper, the most unwearied in doing courtesies ; in whom dwells the old Roman honour and is unmatched by any man to-day drawing breath in Italy.' 'What sum does he owe to this Jew?' 'For me, three thousand ducats.' 'No more? Let him have six thousand, twelve thousand, thrice twelve thousand, before such a friend lose so much as a hair through fault of my husband Lassanio! First go with me to church and make me your wife—then away to Venice to your friend! and with gold enough to release him twenty times over. I would have you my husband ; but no husband will I have with a soul distressed. Go, and till you come again Nerissa and I will live as maids and widows.' Bassanio showed the letter, which ran : *'Sweet Bassanio, my ships are all lost, my estate is very low, my bond to the Jew is forfeit ; and since, in paying it, it is impossible I should live, all debts are cleared between you and me if I might but see you at my death. Notwithstanding, use your pleasure ; if your love do not persuade you to come, let not my letter.'*

'O my love,' cried Portia, 'despatch all business and be gone!' With all haste the weddings were celebrated ; and Bassanio and Gratiano kissed their brides at the church door and posted away to Venice.

When Shylock returned to his house and found it empty, his rage very naturally knew no bounds : but it was a rage in which loss of his daughter and loss of the money she had taken in her flitting jostled together in blind confusion. He ran by the streets and quays screaming 'My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! Fled with a Christian—fled with my ducats—fled with my jewels, too! Justice! find the girl! Gone with the stones upon her—my ducats too! Where is the Law? Where is Justice?' With these outcries he roused the Doge himself, demanding that Bassanio's ship should be detained and searched, for by her he supposed that the runaways were planning their escape. In this the Doge could not oblige him, for the ship had already sailed ; and moreover he had Antonio's word that they were not on board. Indeed on further enquiry he learned that