

## THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

'No, by my honour, madam, I gave it to no woman, but to a Doctor of Law, who refused three thousand ducats of me and would have the ring or nothing: and I suffered him to go off in displeasure because I denied him, after he had saved my friend's life too! Sweet lady, what could I do? I was so beset with the thought of my discourtesy, my ingratitude, that for very shame I sent the ring after him. Pardon me, Portia! had you been there I think you would have begged the ring from me to give to the worthy Doctor.' Antonio here interposed. 'I,' said he, 'am the unworthy cause of these quarrels.' Portia begged him to feel that he was welcome, notwithstanding. 'Nay, hear me,' he said, 'I once did lend my body that Bassanio might prosper; and but for the man to whom Bassanio gave the ring, this body of mine would even now be in the grave. I dare be bound, madam—and will forfeit my soul upon it—your lord will never again break faith with you!' 'Then,' said Portia, 'you shall be his surety. Give him this ring, and enjoin him to keep it better than he kept the other.'

Bassanio took the ring his friend handed him. 'By heaven!' he cried, 'it is the same that I gave to the Doctor!' And at the same moment Gratiano stared at the ring which Nerissa showed him and gazed at his lord in an equal and blank amazement. 'Listen,' said Portia: and she told them first how that she was the young lawyer Bellario, and Nerissa his clerk; and further how that, as she left Venice, she had assured news that three of Antonio's ships had come to harbour, happily restoring his fortunes. 'And now,' she said, as they stood amazed in the fair garden where the daylight crept and grew about them, 'it is almost morning. Let us all go into our house and be happy.'

*The Merchant of Venice* is the last-named comedy in the list of Shakespeare's plays enumerated by Francis Meres, 1598. An entry in the Stationers' Register, dated July 22, 1598, describes it as 'a booke of the Marchaunt of Venyce, or otherwise called the Jewe of Venice'; but it did not appear in print until 1600, when two quarto editions were published. It was certainly new in