

## THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

forward.—‘Certainly he is able. Here I tender it for him in open court, and will tender twice, even ten times the sum, if need be. I beseech your Grace’—he appealed to the Doge—‘for once override and wrest the law a little to prevent this great wrong!’ But Portia, in her character of learned lawyer, would not have this. ‘Nay, that must not be. No power in Venice can override an established decree of the state.’ ‘A Daniel! a Daniel come to judgment!’ applauded Shylock: for if the law might not be upset, the verdict must surely be his. ‘Let me look upon the bond,’ said Portia, and the Jew eagerly presented it. ‘Yes,’ she decided after perusing it, ‘this bond is forfeit, and by it the creditor may legally claim a pound of flesh and cut it—if he please—from nearest the merchant’s heart. Sir, be merciful: accept thrice the money and bid me tear the bond in two.’ ‘Not until I have what the law gives me,’ Shylock persisted; ‘there is no power in human tongue can change my resolve. I charge you, proceed to judgement.’ ‘Ay,’ cried Antonio, to whom all this delay was but as torture before death; ‘from my heart I beseech the court to give judgement and make an end!’ ‘Why then,’ said Portia sadly, ‘you must prepare your bosom for his knife’—and while Antonio made ready to bare his breast, the Jew whetted his knife with glee, calling aloud, ‘O noble judge! excellent young man! O wise and upright judge!’ ‘Have you scales to weigh the flesh?’ asked Portia. ‘I have them ready.’ ‘And a surgeon likewise—to stop his wounds, lest he bleed to death?’ ‘A surgeon? . . . the bond says nothing of any surgeon.’ ‘Not expressly, Shylock. But what of that? So much at least you might do for charity.’ ‘I cannot find it,’ replied the merciless man; ‘it is not in the bond.’ Portia turned from him to Antonio. ‘Merchant, have you anything to say?’ ‘But little,’ answered Antonio; ‘I am armed and prepared for death. Give me your hand, Bassanio—farewell! Grieve not that I suffer this for you: but commend me to your honourable wife, telling her how I died and how I have loved you!’ Bassanio could scarcely speak for anguish. ‘Antonio,’ he cried at length, ‘I am married to a wife dear to me as life itself. But life itself, my wife, all that the world