

At the close of the second act, Bassanio's approach is heralded --

"A day in April never came so sweet,
To show how costly summer was at hand."

April and May bring summer, and two weeks will bring Bassanio. Impatient to be at Belmont, Bassanio sends his post a fortnight ahead. (III, I, 107).

"Thus, the three months have flown."

THE PERSONAGES

Antonio. The royal merchant Antonio gives the name to the drama, not because he is its hero, but because he is its mainspring. In the first act, he is the Venetian trafficker that sets the machinery of the play in motion by borrowing from Shylock the three thousand ducats that enable Bassanio to reach Belmont. In the second act, Antonio is feasted, and is admired for his manly affection. Vague rumours of wrecked merchantmen cause many sympathetic eyes to turn towards him. In the third act, disastrous rumours take shape; Antonio is undone; Shylock claims the forfeiture; and the duke, the magnificoes, and Antonio plead in vain. In the fourth act, Portia saves the bosom lover of her lord from Shylock's hellish cruelty. In the fifth act, Antonio becomes surety for Bassanio, and rejoices in the return of three argosies richly laden. Thus at the beginning and at the end of the drama Antonio is a prosperous merchant; but during the course of the drama, Antonio's credit sinks so low that his very life is at stake.

Antonio is the first personage to attract attention. He does so by arousing sympathy on account of his sadness. Those inclined to believe that "coming events cast shadows before" see in Antonio a common, irrational perturbation that is a canker worm to the rose of content, but are strengthened in their doctrine of presentiment by Shylock's bond. Readers fretted with worries find in Antonio a reflection of themselves, and notwithstanding his denial assert that his mind must be overtaxed, although unconsciously, by commercial speculation. Perhaps both are correct; but is not Antonio sad because his beloved Bassanio has found some one who will henceforth share that love Antonio was wont to possess? Almost angrily Antonio says Fie, fie! at Salarino's suggestion of love, because