

THE STORY

take my place in fulfilment of your Grace's request. He is young: but I beg you to esteem him none the worse on that account, for I never knew so young a body with so old a head.

—'Admit him.' Portia was ushered into court, rustling in her Doctor's robes and with a pile of law-books under her arm. She saluted the Doge, and answered his questions with self-possession while she gazed around on the senators, the lawyers, the crowd, and upon her own dear husband standing beside his friend. 'Yes, she came from Bellario. She was thoroughly informed upon the cause at issue. Might she be told which, in this audience, was the merchant and which the Jew?' They were ordered to stand forth. 'Is your name Shylock?' 'Ay.' 'Your suit is a strange one, yet to this extent valid, that the law of Venice cannot impugn its process. Does the defendant admit that he gave the bond?' 'I admit it,' said Antonio. 'Then the Jew must be merciful.' 'On what compulsion?' demanded Shylock. 'Compulsion?' — in words that should have been persuasive as they were beautiful Portia told him that the quality of mercy knew no compulsion: that it dropped as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath, blessing where it fell, not caring; that itself is twice blessed, in blessing the giver no less than him that receives. It becomes monarchs better than do their crowns, standing above their temporal sway, an attribute of the very God enthroned in their hearts: and earthly power never so nearly resembles God's as when mercy tempers justice. 'Remember, Jew, that if God were just only, none of us should attain salvation. It is for God's mercy we pray: and that prayer should teach us to render the deeds of mercy. . . .' Here she broke off, as though remembering she was a lawyer and her business strictly with the law of the case. 'I have said so much,' she continued, 'to mitigate the legality of your plea, not to deny it. If you persist and press it, the law of Venice is strict and sentence must go against the merchant.' 'I do press it,' Shylock persisted; 'and let my deeds be upon my own head!' 'Is he not able to pay the debt?' Here Bassanio stepped