

THE MERCHANT
OF VENICE



THE ARDEN
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THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE
THE MERCANT
OF
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By the systematic arrangement of the introductory matter, and by close attention to typographical details, every effort has been made to provide an edition that will prove convenient in use.

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INTRODUCTION.

I. THE PLOT.

In the days when Venice was the busiest and wealthiest city in all Europe, there lived in it a rich merchant named Antonio, who by means of several great ships of his own traded eastward as far as India, and westward as far as Mexico. This Antonio, at a time when all his wealth was at sea, wishing to furnish his young kinsman and dearest friend, a soldier and scholar called Bassanio, with means to pay his court to Portia, a lady of Belmont in Italy, borrowed the sum of three thousand ducats, for three months, from an enemy of his own, one Shylock, a Jew, on agreement that, if he failed to repay the sum in time, he should suffer the loss of a pound of his own flesh. On the selfsame night in which Bassanio, thus equipped, set sail from Venice, an acquaintance of his, by name Lorenzo, fled to the mainland of Italy with Jessica, Shylock's only child, carrying off also a quantity of his jewels and money. This loss so inflamed the Jew's malice, that when Antonio's ships failed to come home within the period of three months, Shylock flung him into prison and clamoured to the Duke for execution of the forfeit on his bond. Meantime Bassanio, by a right choice among three caskets respectively of gold, silver, and lead, having won Portia to wife, in the very hour of marriage heard of Antonio's danger, and, provided by Portia with three times the sum needed, sped to Venice. His intervention failing, Antonio was saved in extremity by Portia herself, who, in the guise of a Doctor of Civil Law, followed her husband into the Duke's Court of Justice. The trial over, they returned severally to