

plea, and other familiar statements from similar sources have supported its *sententiae*. The genesis and evolution of the speech are now clear. Portia is defining the *qualitas*, the "quality of mercy." Her topic statement is that there is no compulsion in it. This she phrases in terms of a Biblical figure. While there is no compulsion in mercy, yet there is a double benefit, for

it is twice blest;  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

Incidentally, this finds no parallel in Seneca. It is the Christian rule phrased by St. Augustine, probably with an eye on Cicero, thus, "Dandum est, quod nec tibi nec alteri noceat."<sup>82</sup> This being the twice-blest nature of mercy, it follows that the benefit of mercy is greatest when it is bestowed by the greatest, " 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest." This *sententia* finds a parallel in Seneca, "Eo scilicet formosius id esse magnificentiusque fatebimur quo in majore praestabitur potestate." As used by Seneca, this is fundamentally a stock argument for all the virtues in a prince,<sup>83</sup> and I see nothing in Shakspeare's sententious phrasing to indicate that he had it from Seneca or from any specific source. It is merely a good sententious transition aptly fitted to its place. Since mercy is mightiest in the mightiest, it necessarily befits the throned monarch, God's earthly representative in the administering of justice, most of all. For the monarch administers justice by virtue of his temporal power, symbolized by the sceptre in his hand, as an attribute of earthly rule; but mercy is enthroned in the heart of the monarch, for it is no attribute of earthly power, but is "an attribute to God himself." This idea of mercy as an attribute of God is Biblical, and carried with it in Shakspeare's day the analogy of God's representative on earth. As between the two the distinction is made that mercy belongs to God; justice to the potentate. There is no such idea underlying Seneca, and he certainly is not needed to suggest the analogy in Shakspeare's day. From this chain of reasoning it follows that all earthly power is most like God's "When mercy seasons justice." The application is made that if Shylock, in common with all human beings, received only justice he could not hope for the mercy of salvation. As he prays for mercy, so he must bestow mercy.

<sup>82</sup> *Polyanthea*, under *Liberalitas*. The rule becomes, of course, when stated from the point of view of Christ,

He who gives himself with his gift feeds three,  
Himself, his hungry neighbor and me.

<sup>83</sup> See *Principes* in *Polyanthea*, for instance.