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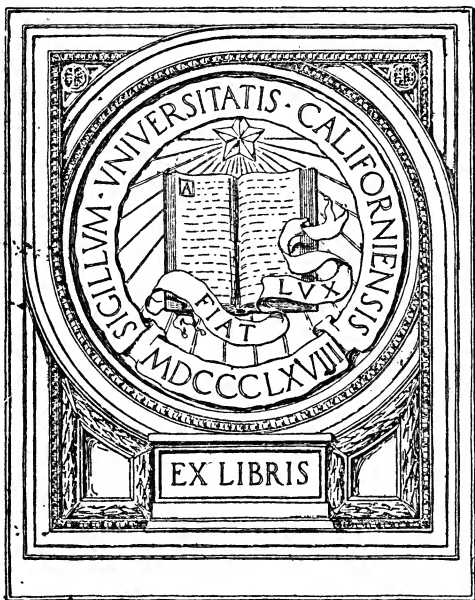
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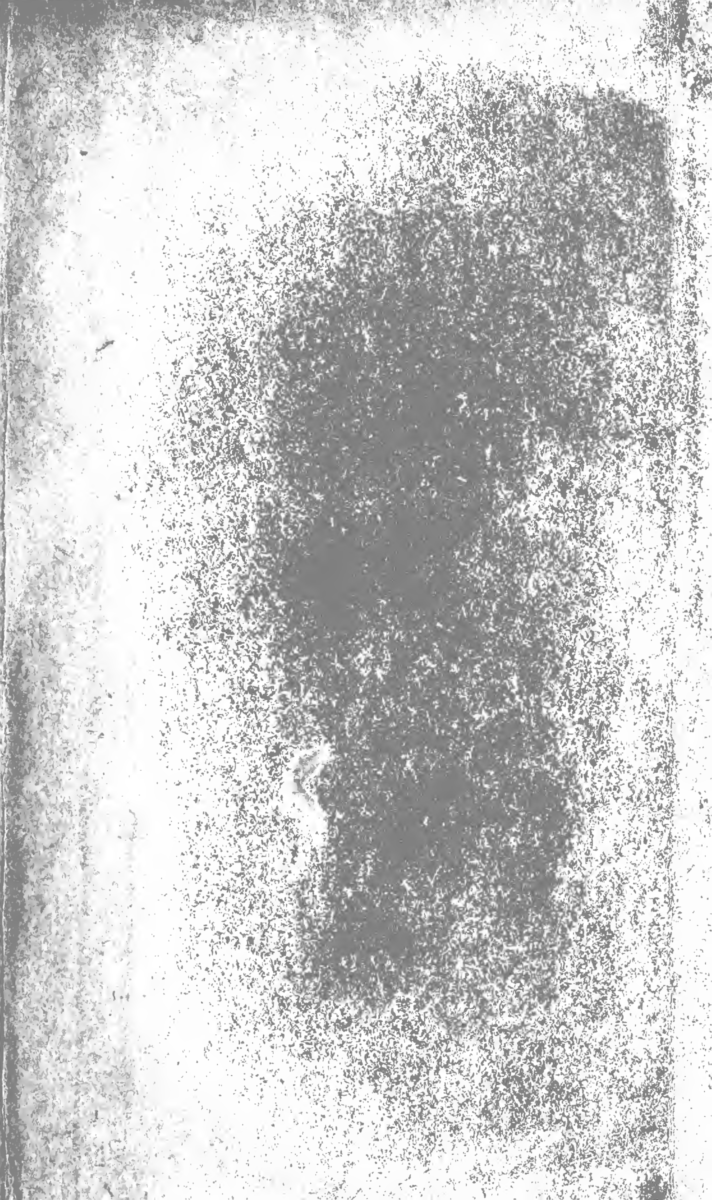

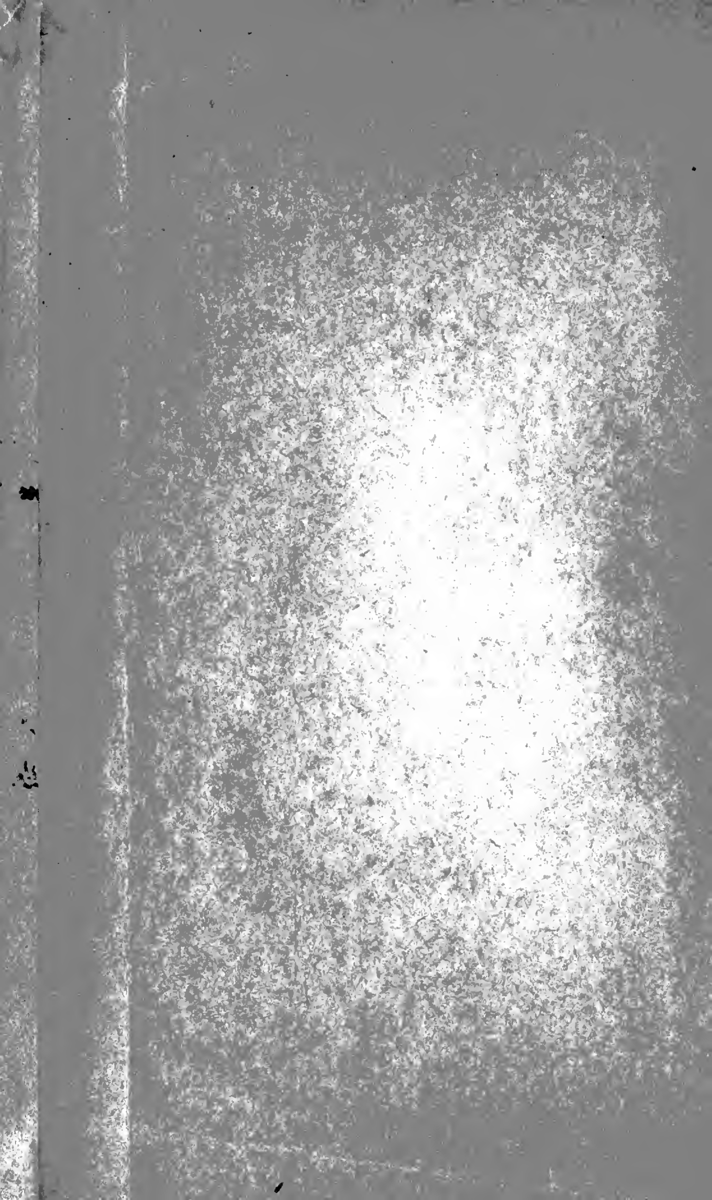

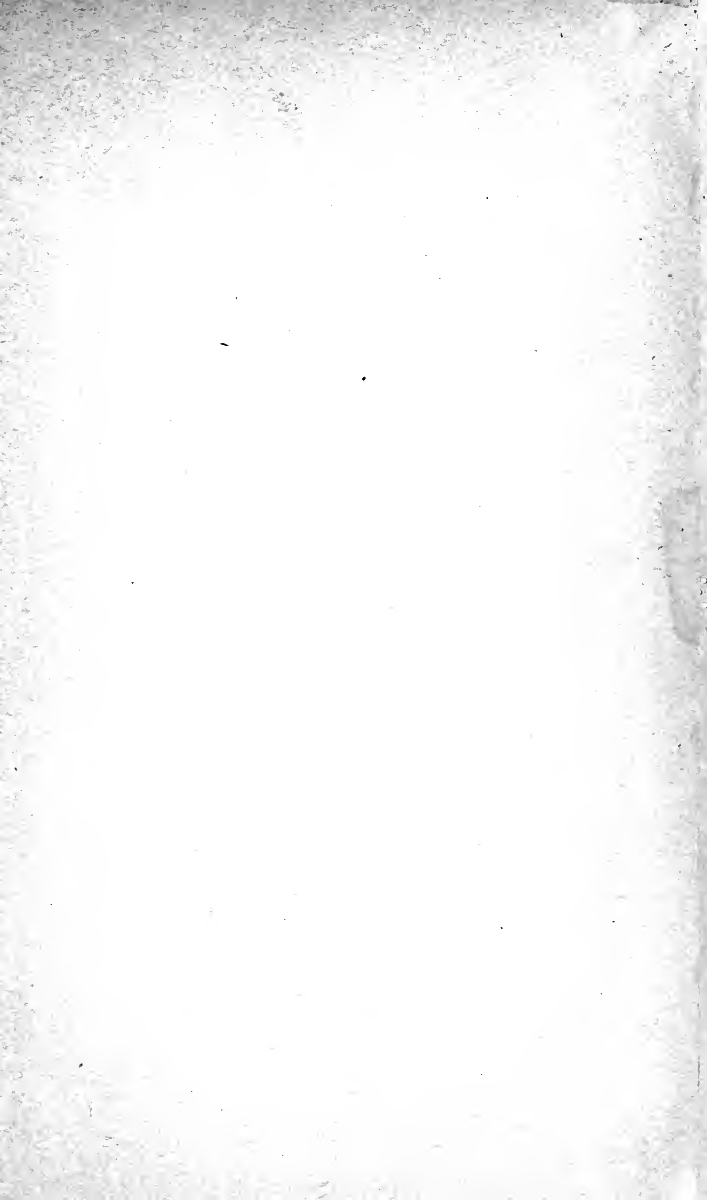

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English Worthies

EDITED BY ANDREW LANG

BEN JONSON

BY

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS

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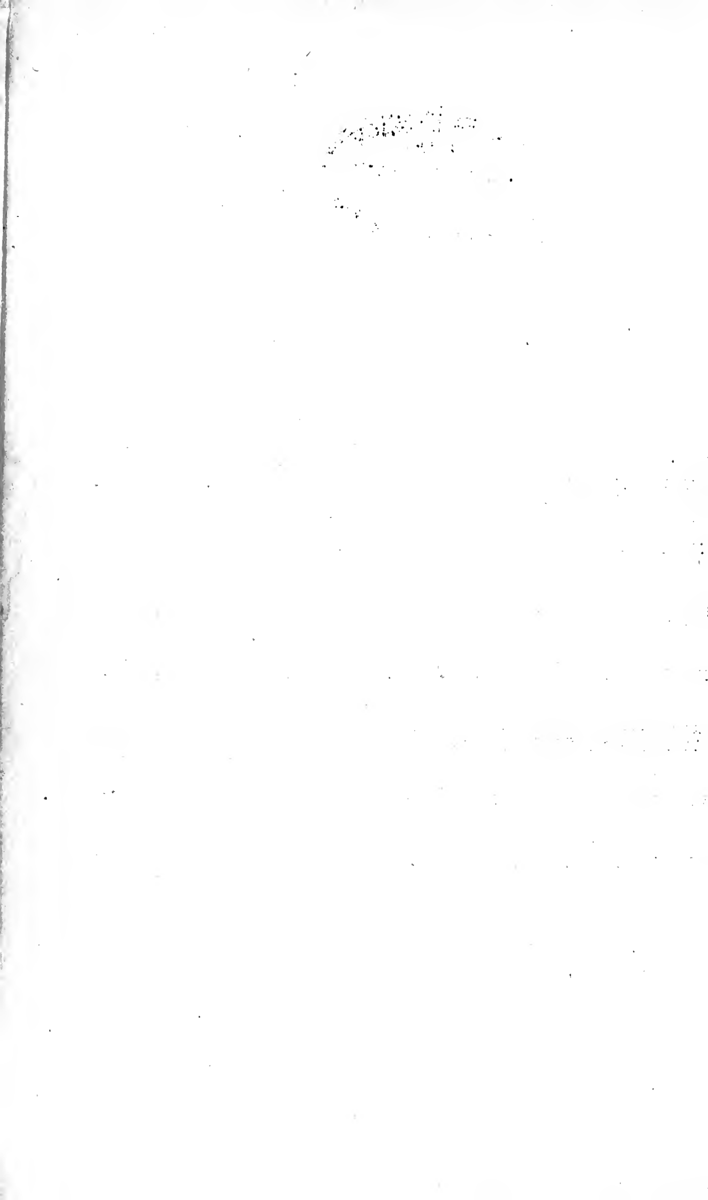

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BEN JONSON.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH AND APPRENTICESHIP.

BENJAMIN JONSON was born in 1573. In the course of conversation with Drummond, at Hawthornden, he gave some particulars of his parentage. 'His grandfather came from Carlisle, and, he thought, from Annandale to it; he served King Henry VIII., and was a gentleman. His father lost all his estate under Queen Mary, having been cast in prison and forfeited; at last turned minister: so he was a minister's son. He himself was posthumous born, a month after his father's decease.'

The spelling of family names varied almost indefinitely in the sixteenth century. It is therefore no argument against Jonson's Annandale descent that he did not write himself Johnston. When he called his grandfather 'a gentleman,' this meant, in the customary parlance of the time, that he had the right to bear coat-armour. From Drummond we learn that the poet's coat was of 'three spindles or *rhombi*.' This indication has led me upon a somewhat circuitous route to the

conclusion that he was really of Border blood. The main features of the Annandale Johnstones' shield are a saltire and a chief, the latter charged with three cushions. With this shield Jonson's 'three spindles' have no apparent connection. But I found that Burke, in his 'General Armoury,' blazoned one coat of Johnson as follows: 'Or, three fusils in fesse, sable.' Now the heraldic fusil is equivalent, etymologically, to a spindle, and in form resembles the geometrical figure called *rhombus*. On applying to our Heralds' College I was informed that no official authority existed for the coat of Johnson as above blazoned by Burke.[1] Next I made application to the Lyon Office, in Edinburgh, and from R. R. Stodart, Esq., to whom my cordial thanks are due, obtained the following solution of the problem. A saltire and a chief formed the original bearings of the Lords of Annandale, and these were adopted by the Annands, Griersons, Johnstones, Moffats, and others, with changes of tincture and additional charges. Among such additions, that of a cushion was distinctive of the Johnstones. In old Scotch heraldry the cushion was presented in the form of a lozenge, not, as now, in that of a rectangle. It seems, therefore, tolerably certain that Jonson had retained the specific bearing of his Annandale forbears, namely, three cushions, depicted lozenge-wise, in which shape they assum the semblance of the heraldic fusil, spindle, or rhombus. His grandfather's Christian name being wanting, it is hopeless to prove his descent from any of the numerous Border Johnstones. Yet I think the

[1] For this information, courteously and liberally given, I have to thank E. Bellasis, Esq., Blue Mantle.

argument which I have set forth, and which illustrates the importance of heraldry in historical investigations, gives us the right to believe that English literature owes the honour of Ben Jonson to the Scotch Border.

Two years after the death of her first husband, Jonson's mother married a master-bricklayer or builder, who subsequently took his step-son into his trade. This circumstance gave rise to much malicious gibing on the part of his literary enemies, and established the tradition that the author of 'Sejanus' and 'The Alchemist' was bred a working mason. Fancy pictures have, accordingly, been freely drawn by imaginative biographers of Jonson as an ungainly youth, ascending a ladder with his hod or trowel in one hand and a 'Tacitus' in the other. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Though Jonson tells us himself that he was 'brought up poorly,' he yet received the best education which the times afforded. His step-father sent him first to a private school at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, whence he afterwards advanced, through the liberality of a friend, to Westminster. Here the great scholar and antiquary, William Camden, was then second master; and we have reason to believe that Camden was the friend to whom Jonson owed his entrance into one of the chief nurseries of English youth. Under Camden's personal guidance he laid the foundation of that thorough and extensive knowledge of Greek and Latin literature which made him the most learned poet of his age. Camden also trained him in habits of composition, which exercised no slight influence over his style. He told Drummond that it was his wont to write first in prose, and then to versify the

matter thus digested, adding that 'so his master, Camden, had learned him.' The benefits which he received at Westminster were repaid by Jonson with grateful and affectionate remembrance. The magnificent dedication of his first great comedy, 'Every Man in his Humour,' testifies to Jonson's feeling for his master; while one of his most spontaneous effusions in elegiac verse:—

> Camden! most reverend head, to whom I owe
> All that I am in arts, all that I know,

bears upon it the stamp of heartfelt sincerity.

Whether Jonson proceeded from Westminster to Cambridge is a matter of doubt; for the records of the university are imperfect during some years in which he may have matriculated. Jonson made no mention of Cambridge to Drummond, and ascribed his degree of M.A. in both universities to 'their favour, not his studies.' Moreover, the couplet just quoted from his address to Camden proves that he recognised no debt to any other Alma Mater than his school. Yet our authority for the fact that he resided at least a few weeks at Cambridge is fairly good. Fuller states it without hesitation. It was, anyhow, at this period, after his first studies were completed, that he became assistant or apprentice to his step-father. From what he told Drummond, we should be rather inclined to suppose that he went straight from Westminster into the builder's service.

His previous education and the bent of his genius rendered Jonson unfit for trade or handicraft. Nothing is more strongly marked in him than a conviction of his own vocation as a scholar-poet, combined with his

haughty sense of its dignity. Whether he was now set to build walls with his own hands, to superintend wall-building, or to keep accounts in the builder's office, does not signify. Whatever his duties were, they proved distasteful. He broke suddenly away from home, enlisted as a soldier, and joined the English troops in the Low Countries. Drummond records his boast of having engaged in single combat with an enemy 'in the face of both the camps.' He killed the man and stripped him of his armour, which he characteristically called 'taking *spolia opima* from him.' History is silent on this exploit, but there is nothing improbable in the narration. Jonson was a man of vigorous build, indubitable courage, and almost truculent thirst for distinction. Such duels, too, were common in an age when campaigns dragged indolently on, the leaguered forces of two hostile nations lying for months together within earshot of each other.

Jonson did not stay long abroad. It is clear from the biographical notes supplied to Drummond that he adopted military service only as a means of escape from his step-father's uncongenial industry. When he returned to London, having thus asserted his independence, he resumed his wonted studies, and soon, apparently, took to himself a wife. This was probably in 1592. Of his domestic life we know but little. He described his helpmate as 'a shrew, yet honest'; which means, I suppose, that though she had a bad temper, she remained loyal to her marriage vows. This is more than can be said for Jonson, who, upon his own avowal in certain coarsely outspoken anecdotes, was by no means a faithful husband. On one occasion he spent

five years apart from his family, lodging all that while in the house of his friend, Esmè Stuart, Lord Aubigny. There were several children by this marriage, all of whom Jonson survived. To these he was attached, as appears from the elegies on his eldest daughter and eldest son; and also from his anxiety, in later life, to obtain the reversion of a place at Court for another of his sons. Yet Fuller says—'He was not very happy in his children.'

This may be the fitting place to introduce a singular incident connected with his son's death. The boy died of plague, in 1603, when his father was staying, together with old Camden, at Sir Robert Cotton's house in the country. On this occasion, as Drummond reports Jonson's words, 'he saw in a vision his eldest son, then a child and at London, appear unto him with the mark of a bloody cross on his forehead, as if it had been cutted with a sword, at which, amazed, he prayed unto God; and in the morning he came to Mr. Camden's chamber to tell him, who persuaded him it was but ane apprehension of his phantasy, at which he should not be dejected. In the meantime comes there letters from his wife of the death of that boy in the plague. He appeared to him (he said) of a manly shape, and of that growth that he thinks he shall be at the resurrection.' We shall soon learn to know Jonson as eminently the poet of sound common sense and robust workmanship. Therefore it may not be amiss to point out now what there was of visionary in his temperament. Drummond, in the final abstract of his character, describes him as 'oppressed with phantasy, which hath ever mastered his reason, a general disease in many poets.' And, beside

the curious tale of second sight which I have just transcribed, Jonson lets fall hints of dreamy abstracted moods, more suited to the poet of the 'Orlando Furioso' than to the playwright of 'Volpone.' For example: 'He hath consumed a whole night in lying looking to his great toe, about which he hath seen Tartars and Turks, Romans and Carthaginians, fight in his imagination.' These freaks of fancy must in part be ascribed doubtless to constitutional humours acting on a saturnine and brooding intellect. Yet it would not be impossible, I think, to regard Jonson's genius as originally of the romantic order, overlaid and diverted from its spontaneous bias by a scholar's education, and by definite theories of the poet's task, deliberately adopted and tenaciously adhered to in middle life. In the sequel of this chapter I may perhaps be able to adduce arguments in support of this view.

It was probably in order to support his family that Jonson now sought work at the London theatres. His own accounts of the beginning of his literary life show that he had to struggle with considerable difficulties. The prologue to the 'Sad Shepherd,' written perhaps in 1637, opens with these lines:—

> He that hath feasted you these forty years,
> And fitted fables for your finer ears,
> Although at first he could not hit the bore.

It does not appear that the playwright's occupation was ever much to Jonson's taste, for when he had abandoned writing for the stage in 1616, only hard necessity forced him to resume it at a later date. He told Drummond 'that the half of his comedies were not in print,' and that he had cleared but 200*l*. by all his labours for

the public theatre. Unlike Shakespeare, he failed to become partner in one of the chief companies. Owing to this circumstance, more than to any other, he never succeeded in making a modest fortune by his work. He was, indeed, too disdainful to accept the conditions of his profession, and too stubborn in the conception he had formed of the poet's function to bend with pliant ease to the exigencies of the drama as it then existed. He used the theatre as a makeshift in his want of money, and wrote plays to vent his satire on society and human foibles.

We do not know for certain how Jonson was employed for the stage during the six years which elapsed between the date of his marriage and the appearance of 'Every Man in his Humour.' Yet it may be conjectured that, like Shakespeare, he began by mending old plays. It is also probable that he acted. An untrustworthy tradition asserts that he played the part of Hieronymo in the 'Spanish Tragedy' while strolling the country with a vagabond troop. It is not, however, likely that the character of Hieronymo would have been assigned to him. Jonson was a big unwieldy fellow; Hieronymo in Kyd's play insists upon his insignificant stature, and, since he was a favourite stage personage, no company could have given his part to the stoutest and tallest of their number. Jonson was, however, connected in a very curious and important way with the 'Spanish Tragedy,' as I shall ere long have occasion to relate. If he served his apprenticeship as actor as well as playwright, this was probably at the Paris Garden theatre, for Marston sneered at him as 'Jack of Paris Garden.'

It will be necessary at this point to introduce a

brief sketch of the English drama antecedent to 1598, at which date Jonson first challenged public censure with a comedy distinguished by his own peculiar style. Without some retrospective survey it would be difficult for those who have not made a special study of the subject to understand Jonson's attitude toward the art of his age. Miracle Plays, founded on the sacred history and doctrine of the Church, had been popular in England during the Middle Ages. Among us, more than elsewhere in Europe, they assumed the comprehensive form of cycles, embracing in a series of actions the whole drama of humanity, from the Creation down to Doomsday. In course of time minor episodes were detached from these colossal schemes, and treated with rude pathos or coarse humour as the case might be. Thus the germs of tragedy and comedy were implanted in the English mind before the new learning of the Renaissance had suggested subtle problems as to the true theory of dramatic art. A further step in the evolution of our national theatre from the shapeless material of the Miracle Plays may be observed in those Moralities, or Moral Plays, which, as their name implies, brought abstract vices and virtues under the form of persons on the stage. They were fashionable throughout the reigns of Henry VII. and Henry VIII., and held their own long after the secular drama had been established. Dull and wooden as were the allegories in these pieces, it was impossible to make such characters as Youth, Good Counsel, the Devil, Hypocrisy, Abominable Living, and so forth, walk and talk together on the stage under the guise of men and women, without developing dialogue, introducing incident, and marking character.

Thus the Moral Play led by imperceptible degrees to the Interlude, which completed the disengagement of the drama from religious and didactic aims. Interludes, regarded as a special type of early histrionic art, brought real people, distinguished by differences of nature, interests, and callings, into some common action. From them to the Farce and Comedy proper there was but one step to take. Comedy naturally developed itself earlier than tragedy out of the material of the sacred and moral drama. The tragic elements were too august to be lightly handled, nor did they lend themselves to separate treatment, whereas comic incidents, suggested by the scene of the Nativity or by the allegory of Youth seduced by Wantonness, could be easily detached and made subjects for humorous expansion. Tragedy, however, although at a slower pace, followed the same path. I have already observed that the cyclical Miracle Plays broke up into episodes. Such pieces as 'Godly Queen Esther,' 'King Darius,' 'The Conversion of St. Paul,' exhibited the same style of handling as the Miracle proper. But they had the merit of confining the dramatic interest to one action, and of allowing a certain degree of character-drawing. They also concentrated attention on the story, dealing in a merely perfunctory way with its lessons of edification. Thus the English people were prepared for that indiscriminate use of histories, fables, novels, narratives of every kind, which eventually determined the character of our Shakespearian drama. Before Renaissance influences touched our shores the public had developed for itself both comedy and tragedy, in a rude and ill-determined fashion, it is true, but in such a way as to render

the highly complex style of our greatest playwrights not only possible but inevitable.

Just at this point the nascent English drama was threatened with a serious danger. Together with the new learning of the classical revival, came the enthusiasm for Italian culture. Critics like Sir Philip Sidney, poets like Lord Buckhurst, by precept and by practice tried to check the growth of that rank literature which filled the theatres of London, as they thought, with weeds. They contended that the only drama worthy of a great people in an enlightened age was one modelled upon the Latin manner of Seneca, as this had been adapted to the stage of Italy. Consequently they began to deride the medleys of farce and bloodshed, pathos and buffoonery, the interminable histories and perplexed fables, which delighted vulgar audiences. In their stead they penned ceremonious tragedies, with due regard for the unities and strict observance of decorum. These were played with applause before the Court and learned coteries. But the nation could not be deluded into exchanging the new dramatic form evolved from their own genius, for the dry and lifeless imitation of a foreign art removed by three degrees from nature.

The new dramatic form which I have just mentioned deserves now to be styled the Romantic, as opposed to the Classical, Drama. A succession of good writers, beginning with Edwards and Whetstone, followed by Greene, Peele, Nash, Lodge, Yarington, Kyd, Lyly, and many authors of anonymous plays, developed its various branches. They gave specific character to the History Play, Domestic Tragedy, the Tragedy of Blood, the Pastoral Play, the Masque and Allegory, Comedy

of several kinds, Farce, Extravaganza, Burlesque and Satire. Being men of education, standing midway between the people and the cultivated classes, these playwrights adopted so much of form and handling from the classical school as gave regularity of proportion to the formerly amorphous romantic play. They did not attempt to alter its distinctive qualities. The interchangeability of pathos and humour, the indifference to unities of time and place, the rapid succession of stirring incidents, the sacrifice of every other element to action on the stage, still remained the striking features of English drama. But they studied unity of subject, fixed the number of the acts at five, employed rhymed iambic verse instead of the jingling rhythms of their predecessors, and sought to create characters which should be worthy of the accomplished actors who were now competing for public favour.

Foremost among these founders of Elizabethan drama towers Marlowe. His brilliant period of brief activity secured the future of romantic art, rendering it impossible that any change of taste should supersede it with the pseudo-classic manner of Italy or France. After 1587, when the first part of 'Tamburlaine' was given to the world, blank verse became the regular dramatic metre of the public stage.

It had already been employed in Court by dramas of the scholastic type, but Marlowe made it popular. He also showed playwrights how it could be handled with a flexibility, a resonance, and a variety of cadence unknown to the timid versifiers of the classic school. At the same time that he fixed and improved the metre of the serious drama, Marlowe advanced his art, in all that

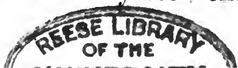
concerns treatment of subject, study of character, and poëtical sublimity, far beyond the point which had been reached by Greene or Peele. When Marlowe died in 1593, he had given six tragedies to the English stage, one of which, 'Edward II.,' is not at all inferior to the work of Shakespeare's younger age. Shakespeare himself came probably to London in 1585. One of his earliest extant plays, 'Love's Labour Lost,' was written before 1590. Jonson, as we have seen, began to work for the theatres after 1592, and in 1598 produced the first comedy which bears his special stamp of style. He therefore shared almost equally with Shakespeare in the powerful influences of Marlowe's somewhat elder art. Like Shakespeare, he had to mend imperfect scenes, to furnish additions for plays which were becoming stale, to improve faulty verses, and, what was even more important, to take his part in representations on the stage. All the plays with which the two leaders of the English drama had to deal in these years of their apprenticeship were romantic. All bore the mark to some degree of Marlowe's manner. Shakespeare contented himself with bringing the romantic style to the very height of perfection in 'Othello,' 'King Lear,' and 'The Winter's Tale.' Jonson, on the contrary, swerved aside from that tradition. It is, indeed, true that even his most regular plays are influenced by the romantic spirit of the age. Yet he strove to strike out for himself a new method, which should adhere more closely to classical models, and exemplify classical rules more nicely, than that of his predecessor Marlowe or that of his incomparable friend and fellow-worker Shakespeare. To a large extent he succeeded; and his best comedies

form a dramatic species which has no analogue in Elizabethan literature.

The material resources of the stage in England were developed in the same homely and spontaneous fashion as its art. While Palladio was building a stately Roman theatre at Vicenza for the representation of lifeless dramas in the style of Seneca, rough wooden sheds erected in suburban fields, or scaffoldings run up in yards of London hostelries, formed the first cradle of the Muse of Shakespeare and of Jonson. Little by little theatres, properly so called, came into existence, while bear-pits and such places of popular entertainment were adapted to the needs of acting companies. Even the two finest of these theatres, the Globe and Fortune, were rude wooden edifices, only partially roofed in. The stage, on which the play was shown, projected into the pit or yard, where spectators stood together on bare ground. For those who could afford such luxuries, boxes were provided round this open central space; and men of fashion might purchase the use of stools upon the stage by payment of an extra fee. The actors were thus brought into closest contact with the audience; and scenery may be said to have been almost wholly wanting. Hitherto I have described what were known as public theatres. The so-called private houses differed from them in being roofed over, smaller, rather more select in company, and somewhat better furnished. Performances took place usually at three P.M. All female parts were acted by boys. The same men exercised both arts of play-writing and play-acting, and very frequently owned some share in the general profits of the theatre. It was thus that the whole business of the drama in

London came into the hands of rival companies. These, from being numerous and variable in the earlier period of its history, had at the epoch I shall have to treat of been absorbed into two permanent and powerful antagonistic bodies. They were severally known as the Lord Chamberlain's and the Lord Admiral's men. Shakespeare and Burbage headed the former company; Henslowe, the capitalist, and Alleyne, the actor, led the latter. The headquarters of the one were the Globe and Blackfriars. The Fortune and various smaller houses controlled by Henslowe employed the other troop.

The curious diary kept by Henslowe shows that in 1597 Jonson was working regularly for this manager. Nothing, however, is known to have survived from this period of his authorship. That he must have adopted the dominant romantic style seems tolerably certain; and that he was a master of that style is proved by the additions to the 'Spanish Tragedy,' produced by him so late as 1601–1602. Competent judges and critics of high excellence have protested against the ascription of these intensely dramatic and powerfully imaginative scenes—'the very salt of the old play,' as Charles Lamb called them—to Jonson's pen. Yet no arguments have been adduced to disprove the plain evidence of Jonson's authorship afforded by Henslowe's diary. He probably created not merely that impassioned picture of a father crazed and maddened by his son's murder, but also much else fantastically terrible in the romantic style, before settling down to his distinctive manner. We know that he collaborated with Dekker on a domestic tragedy called 'Page of Plymouth.' This is unfortunately lost. Else it had certainly been one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of the most valuable documents for studying the development of Jonson's genius. A further proof that Jonson long dallied with the purely romantic muse is furnished by one of the earliest, if not actually the first, of his extant comedies, 'The Case is Altered.' This play stands apart from all the rest of Jonson's work; and has singular interest owing to the indecision between the romantic and the classic methods which it exhibits. It is, in fact, a comedy of the fanciful Elizabethan species, somewhat in the tone of Middleton, founded upon the plots of the 'Captivi' and the 'Aulularia.' The characters of Rachel, Chamont, Camillo, and Count Ferneze are such as Fletcher might have outlined; though their portraits are filled in with something of Jonsonian hardness. Juniper, the cobbler, who is 'an eyesore to everybody by the mispronunciation of epigrams,' is a fairly clever first cousin of Dogberry, and grandsire of Mrs. Malaprop. But the methodical way in which his oddities are exhibited, already forecasts Jonson's mechanical employment of humours on the stage. The personal satire of Anthony Munday in 'Antonio Balladino,' and the general satire upon London playgoers, anticipate those asperities of criticism which embittered the dramatist's middle life. Altogether, after reading 'The Case is Altered,' we are inclined to regret that Jonson did not bring to perfection the species which he here essayed, combining delicate poetry and graceful sentiment with firmly constructed plot and careful character-drawing, instead of devoting himself exclusively to the harder and more prosaic manner of his maturity.

I have already stated that, so far as we know,

Jonson was at no time beneficially connected with any of the players' companies as shareholder. He derived his pay for piece-work from Henslowe; and in September 1598 an event happened which, for a time at any rate, deprived him of this employment. One of the actors in Henslowe's company, named Gabriel Spencer, challenged him to a duel in Hogsden Fields. Jonson killed his man; and when he related the incident to Drummond, he mentioned that Spencer's sword was ten inches longer than his own. A letter from Henslowe supplies us with the adversary's name; and after that of Benjamin Jonson adds 'bricklayer.'

Thus far I had written, upon the evidence furnished by Jonson's conversations with Drummond and Henslowe's letter, when a document of great importance, bearing upon the duel, was brought to light.[1] We owe it to Mr. John Cordy Jeaffreson's researches in the Sessions Files, or Middlesex Sessions Rolls, for the period of Edward VI.'s, Mary's, and Elizabeth's reigns. It throws a light so curious, and in some respects so unexpected, on the incident, that I shall introduce it in this place. From it we learn not only that Jonson was tried at the Old Bailey for homicide, but also that he was convicted on his own confession; that he pleaded his clergy to escape capital punishment for felony; and that he was dismissed with the customary penalty of a brand upon the thumb of his left hand and the forfeit of his goods and chattels. The original document, which is written in Latin, consists of the indictment and the Clerk of the Peace's memorandum. The former is here printed in roman type, the latter in italics; and

[1] *Athenæum*, March 6, 1886.

the English version communicated by the discoverer of the paper has been adopted.

He confesses the indictment, asks for the book, reads like a clerk, is marked with the letter T, and is delivered according to the statute, &c.

Middlesex :—The jurors for the Lady the Queen present, that Benjamin Johnson, late of London, yeoman, on the 22nd day of September, in the fortieth year of the reign of our Lady Elizabeth by God's grace Queen of England, France, and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c., with force and arms, &c., made an attack against and upon a certain Gabriel Spencer, being in God's and the said Lady the Queen's peace, at Shordiche in the aforesaid county of Middlesex, in the Fields there, and with a certain sword of iron and steel called a Rapiour, of the price of three shillings, which he then and there had and held drawn in his right hand, feloniously and wilfully beat and struck the same Gabriel, giving then and there to the same Gabriel Spencer with the aforesaid sword a mortal wound of the depth of six inches and of the breadth of one inch, in and upon the right side of the same Gabriel, of which mortal blow the same Gabriel Spencer at Shordiche aforesaid, in the aforesaid county, in the aforesaid Fields, then and there died instantly. And thus the aforesaid jurors say upon their oath, that the aforesaid Benjamin Johnson, at Shorediche aforesaid, in the aforesaid county of Middlesex, and in the aforesaid Fields, in the year and day aforesaid, feloniously and wilfully killed and slew the aforesaid Gabriel Spencer, against the peace of the said Lady the Queen, &c.

In his account of the duel Jonson asserted that he had been 'appealed to the fields.' It will be observed that the indictment, founded on his public confession,

is somewhat at variance with this statement. Spencer there appears to have been 'in God's and the Queen's peace,' and Jonson's mortal attack upon him takes the semblance of an unprovoked or unsolicited encounter. Yet, in justice to the poet, it must be remembered that the terms of the indictment are not incompatible with a previous challenge. That Jonson was by no means ashamed of his part in the adventure is proved by the fact of his narrating it, twenty years after its occurrence, to Drummond, at Hawthornden. It is also noteworthy that none of the literary antagonists who strove to slur his character in satire and drama described him as a murderer. Singularly enough, they did not even allude to the felon's brand, or Tyburn T, upon his thumb. A circumstance so notorious in the theatrical world as this must assuredly have been, could not have escaped the memory of men like Marston and Dekker. We may therefore draw the inference from their silence, no less than from Jonson's own free speech about the matter, that in some way unknown to us, notwithstanding his conviction for felonious homicide, it redounded to his credit rather than otherwise. At the same time, the record fully confirms his subsequent assertion that he was 'almost at the gallows'; while the danger he then ran explains the curious fact of his conversion to Catholicism under the sharp and pressing dread of death. If we seek to pry still further into the obscurer details of the incident, we may resume the admissions he made in 1619 to Drummond. 'In the time of his close imprisonment, under Queen Elizabeth, his judges could get nothing of him to all their demands but Aye and

No. They placed two damned villains to catch advantage of him with him; but he was advertised by his keeper.' This looks as though an attempt had been made to convict him of an unfair assault upon a man who had not challenged him to duel. Failing proof of this, although the indictment was worded in his disfavour, he escaped the gallows. What the real facts of the encounter were cannot now be discovered. We only know that the author of 'Every Man in his Humour,' a few weeks before that comedy raised him to a first rank among the playwrights of his age, had to save his neck by reading from a book in order to prove his clerkship, and that he left Newgate branded with the letter T. It is notorious that this branding was either a serious affair or a formal ceremony, according to the bad or good will of the gaoler. Perhaps the friendly keeper, who warned him of the spies, took care that he should not go forth to the world marked for life with an ignominious stigma.

As I have already hinted, Jonson was converted to the Popish belief during this imprisonment. He told Drummond that he had then been visited by a priest, from whom he 'took his religion by trust,' and that he afterwards remained twelve years in that persuasion. What caused his return to Protestantism does not appear. But no one who has entered into intelligent sympathy with his character will believe that he was swayed by any of those worldly motives which may have had their weight with Dryden in his changes of faith. Drummond relates a curious detail about his re-conversion. 'After he was reconciled with the Church, and left off to be a recusant, at his first Communion, in token of true reconciliation,

he drank out all the full cup of wine.' This anecdote is so characteristic of the man and of the times that I have quoted it, although, to modern minds, the spirit of the robust convert savours less of devout troth-pledging than of ribaldry.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST PERIOD OF MANHOOD.

Jonson's duel with Gabriel Spencer concludes the first chapter of his life. The same incident, by cutting him adrift from Henslowe, and forcing him to seek support elsewhere, determined the next stage of his literary career. This begins with the production of 'Every Man in his Humour,' at the close of 1598, and ends with his temporary withdrawal from the theatre in 1616. During this second broad period, Jonson developed his dramatic style, and produced all the masterpieces on which his fame now rests. Professionally, he was attached to no one company. We find him writing in turn for the Chamberlain's men, for the Children of the Chapel Royal, for the Admiral's men, for the Children of her Majesty's Revels, for the Lady Elizabeth's servants; but most frequently of all, for the Chamberlain's men, or, as they came to be called, the King's men—that is to say, for Shakespeare's company.

I may here pause to consider the effect of Jonson's early training on his genius. Of all the playwrights who were his contemporaries, he was the only born Londoner. If we except the brief episode of his soldiering in the Low Countries, he had hardly quitted the

purlieus of the Tower and Westminster. His time, as a boy, passed between severe studies at school and perambulations of the City streets. Though the country at that period neighboured so closely on the capital that an active lad might escape into the fields between school-hours, yet the dominant influences of Jonson's growing years were far from rural. Town-bred and bred to scholarship, he underwent influences very different from those which shaped the mind of Shakespeare in his home at Stratford. We ought not to insist too crudely on this contrast. Temperament must in all cases be reckoned more powerful than education; and it may be remembered that Keats was a cockney. Yet no fair critic will contend that the brilliant parallel drawn by Mr. Swinburne between 'Bartholomew Fair' and 'The Merry Wives of Windsor'—'the purely farcical masterpieces of the town-bred schoolboy and the country lad'—is overstrained. Jonson, exploring the classics with Camden for his guide in the heyday of the English Renaissance, formed an ideal of art different from that of his great comrade, who learned 'small Latin and less Greek' under the ferule of some village Holofernes. Hours of leisure passed at Smithfield, or among the wherries of the Thames, developed sensibilities and powers of observation in Jonson alien to those which expanded in the soul of Shakespeare upon the banks of Avon, or in the glades of Charlcote.

We have good right to maintain that Jonson's first real start in his playwright's craft was given him by Shakespeare. Henslowe cast him adrift after September 1698. Before the end of that year, 'Every Man in his Humour' had been put upon the stage by the Cham-

1598

berlain's men. Old tradition affirms that Shakespeare induced his company to buy and represent the play. It is certain that he acted in it. Nothing, therefore, fits the facts so well as this tradition, which may consequently be accepted as authentic. Shakespeare was Jonson's elder by nine years. He was now in full possession of the public, having already produced some of the best work in his first manner, and risen to a post of influence and emolument in the company which used the Curtain, the Globe, and the Blackfriars. He had no reason to be jealous of Jonson, or to fear him as a literary rival. His interests as a shareholder in the theatres he worked for, made him rather eager to secure the first-fruits of rising genius for his troop. We can see nothing strange in Shakespeare's welcoming so robust a recruit as Jonson. Yet, if one should deign to remember the nonsense vented by purblind critics at the end of the last century touching Jonson's animosity against Shakespeare, it is pleasant to be able to believe that their intimacy began by an act of kindness and of business-like discernment on the latter's part.

I shall take this occasion to express my firm conviction that Jonson harboured no envy, malignity, or hostile feeling of any kind for Shakespeare. The two poets differed in their method as playwrights. Jonson was not the man to acknowledge that Shakespeare's method was superior to his own; nor did the opinion of cultivated people in their times tend to this conclusion. He therefore felt himself at liberty to criticise a dramatist, whom now we place in all essential points above him. But when we examine his critique of Shakespeare, what do we find? The enthusiastic panegyric

which introduces Heminge and Condell's folio of Shakespeare's plays, and which is reproduced in Jonson's 'Underwoods,' proves that though his ideal of art differed from that of Shakespeare, though he rated himself highly on attainments which the nobler poet lacked, yet he hailed in his great comrade a tragic and a comic dramatist, born 'not of an age but for all time,' who might compete with 'all that insolent Greece or haughty Rome sent forth,' and with all that had been furnished from their ashes by the feebler poets of a colder clime. In his 'Discoveries,' those 'last drops from Jonson's quill,' as they have been quaintly styled, he censured Shakespeare in very moderate terms for unpruned luxuriance and careless control over his own powers of wit and eloquence. Who will now contend that Jonson was not justified in this criticism? Yet he immediately added: 'I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was indeed honest, and of an open and full nature; had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions; wherein he flowed with that facility, that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped: *Sufflaminandus erat*, as Augustus said of Haterius.' If we remember that Jonson said of himself to Drummond, that 'of all styles he loved most to be named Honest,' it will appear that he meant in the passage I have just quoted to pay the highest tribute to Shakespeare as a man. And could any poet say more of a brother poet's genius than is expressed in those apostrophes, the most impassioned Jonson ever penned?—'Sweet Swan of Avon!' 'Soul of the age!' 'Thou star of poets!'

It was under Shakespeare's auspices, and with 'Every

Man in his Humour,' then, that Jonson made his first decisive mark upon the public stage of London. This is the earliest comedy which he acknowledged; for 'The Case is Altered' was not included in his own folio edition of plays. The facts are noticeable. As the title of the comedy indicates, Jonson now entered upon his peculiar field of *humours*. It is our business to understand what was the common meaning of this phrase in his time, and how he thought fit to employ it. At the date when he was writing, humour was on everybody's lips to denote whim, oddity, conceited turn of thought, or special partiality in any person. We may remember the fatiguing use which Nym makes of it in Shakespeare's 'Merry Wives of Windsor': 'He was gotten in drink: is not the humour conceited?' 'The good humour is to steal at a minute's rest.' 'The anchor is deep: will that humour pass?' 'The humour rises; it is good: humour me the angels.' 'I will discuss the humour of this love to Page.' Lucky instinct made Jonson choose a word so much in vogue to designate the kind of comedy he aimed at. It helped to bring his play into notice, and it also defined the region of his art. In the prologue to 'Every Man in his Humour' he tells the audience that it is the proper end of the comedian—

> To sport with human follies, not with crimes.

Here he seems to have imagined that by 'humour' the public would understand 'human folly,' as differenced from mere affectation on the one hand, and from crime on the other. Soon, however, he felt the necessity of explaining more precisely his own interpretation of the leading phrase. This he did in the induction to 'Every

Man out of his Humour.' The passage throws so much light upon Jonson's conception of character that I shall transcribe it :—

> In every human body,
> The choler, melancholy, phlegm, and blood,
> By reason that they flow continually
> In some one part, and are not continent,
> Receive the name of humours. Now thus far
> It may, by metaphor, apply itself
> Unto the general disposition :
> As when some one peculiar quality
> Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw
> All his affects, his spirits, and his powers,
> In his confluctions, all to run one way,
> This may be truly said to be a humour.

It appears from these lines that Jonson's first conception of humour as a master element in character was connected with the medieval hypothesis of four fluid temperaments. He believed that 'choler, melancholy, phlegm, and blood' governed all classes of men in several degrees; and upon this theory he built up a scheme of human foibles and proclivities, which only differs from Pope's scheme of the 'Ruling Passion' in so far as it is a little more physical and less metaphysical than the nicely expressed doctrine of the 'Essay on Man.' That he took humour in its literal sense of a controlling quality in the vital fluids appears from Cob's vulgar caricature of the phrase: 'Nay, I have my rheum.' Nym would have said, 'Nay, I have my humour.' He also sought to bring the public back to a right notion of its value. The word had become a mere slang term for any eccentricity :—

> Daily to see how the poor innocent word
> Is racked and tortured !

The whole web of his comedy was therefore woven on the warp of humour apprehended as the service paid by imperfect, and consequently comic, characters to their physical temperament. Toward the close of his career Jonson returned to the same topic. In the induction to 'The Magnetic Lady' we read: 'The author beginning his studies of this kind with "Every Man in his Humour;" and after, "Every Man out of his Humour;" and since, continuing in all his plays, especially those of the comic thread, whereof the "New Inn" was the last, some recent humours still, or manners of men, that went along with the times.' This sufficiently proves that Jonson conceived humour, which he first apprehended in the narrow sense of personal temperament, and thence translated to the wider sphere of social manners, to be the proper medium for the comic playwright. Dryden summed up his position in one paragraph: 'Among the English, by humour is meant some extravagant habit, passion or affection, particular to some one person, by the oddness of which he is immediately distinguished from the rest of men; which, being lively and naturally represented, most frequently begets that malicious pleasure in the audience which is testified by laughter; as all things which are deviations from custom are ever the aptest to produce it. The description of these humours, drawn from the knowledge and observation of particular persons, was the peculiar genius and talent of Ben Jonson.'

The success of 'Every Man in his Humour' will surprise no one who has followed the varied and yet simple action of this lively comedy. It is written with all Jonson's precision and in his peculiar manner; but

it lacks that rigidity which his manner afterwards assumed. Though the parts of the knavish servant and his young master remind us of the Roman theatre, Jonson has recast them in accordance with English character and custom. His erudition, indeed, in this play makes itself less prominently felt than in some of his later masterpieces. Kitely, as the jealous husband, deserves a place beside Ford in Shakespeare's 'Merry Wives of Windsor.' Bobadil is a fit companion for Parolles and Bessus, and is superior in comic effect to the swaggering Tucca of Jonson's 'Poetaster.' Brainworm may be regarded as a meritorious study for the far more masterly portrait of Mosca in 'Volpone.' Mathew and Stephen, the town and country gulls, lead that long line of fools to which Sogliardo, Lafoole, Fitzdotterel, Kestril, and Cokes belong. In depicting the specific qualities of such simpletons, Jonson was particularly happy; and though none of them approach the humour of Shallow and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, they exhibit his faculty of observing and reproducing delicate shades of difference in superficial no less than in strongly marked personalities.

It is not my purpose to speak at length of Jonson's plays while sketching his life, but rather to leave the consideration of his merits as poet and dramatist for a future chapter. Yet I may point out those passages which throw distinct light upon his character, his conception of the playwright's function, and his relations to contemporary writers. Unlike Shakespeare, he supplies material of this kind in abundance. He seems to have understood and appreciated the function of the Parabasis in Greek comedy, where the author addressed

the audience in his own person through the mouth of the Chorus. Having no chorus, Jonson made full use of Dedication, Prologue, Epilogue, Induction, and Dialogue between the acts—devices whereby the poet was enabled to communicate his private opinions and his critical observations to the public. The first important manifesto of this kind is the prologue to 'Every Man in his Humour.' Here Jonson, following in the track of Whetstone and Sir Philip Sidney, sweepingly condemns the inartistic method of the pure romantic school, and proclaims his intention of restricting comedy to her proper function of depicting the common actions of men, personages suited to the mirthful stage, and foibles of humanity. The play was originally brought out with Italian names for the characters and considerable differences in the scenes. One passage, which Jonson omitted when he recast the piece as published in the first folio, so admirably expresses the lofty ideal he had formed of poetry that I shall insert it here. Lorenzo, or Young Knowell, defends the inspired art of song from the slanders brought upon it by its ignorant professors :—

> I can refell opinion, and approve
> The state of poesy, such as it is,
> Blessed, eternal, and most true divine:
> Indeed, if you will look on poesy,
> As she appears in many, poor and lame,
> Patch'd up in remnants and old worn-out rags,
> Half starv'd for want of her peculiar food
> Sacred invention; then, I must confirm
> Both your conceit and censure of her merit:
> But view her in her glorious ornaments
> Attired in the majesty of art,
> Set high in spirit with the precious taste

> Of sweet philosophy; and, which is most,
> Crown'd with the rich traditions of a soul,
> That hates to have her dignity prophaned
> With any relish of an earthly thought,
> Oh then how proud a presence doth she bear
> Then is she like herself, fit to be seen
> Of none but grave and consecrated eyes.

This theme is developed with even greater ardour in the 'Poetaster.' The situation is nearly the same. Young Ovid, devoted to poetry, and persecuted by an over-anxious father, bursts into an impassioned Apology for his Art.

There was, in truth, no poet of the age who came near to Jonson in this deep conviction of the sacredness and gravity of his vocation. He was persuaded that the playwright, then too often scorned as panderer to vulgar pleasures, had a serious function to discharge. The poetry of the stage, he held, must aim not merely at delight, but at instruction also. The suffrage of the people must be conquered, not courted. Dramas must be written not to charm the popular ear, but to educate it. This lofty doctrine he expounded with too much arrogance and self-conceit. He insulted the public whom he strove to benefit, and raised animosity by the contempt he poured on individuals. We, however, who are far removed from the literary discords of those times, can peruse with calmness and enjoy the manly eloquence of that great dedication to the Sister Universities which forms the preface to 'Volpone.' Bating some personalities and blustering defiances which impair the dignity of the oration, this high-built edifice of ceremonious language deserves to rank with Milton's sublime periods upon the poet's priesthood, and with

Sidney's lofty vindication of the poet's claim to prophecy. Unhappily, the piece, which ought to find its honoured place in every anthology of English prose, is both too long to quote in full, and also too closely wrought to bear abstraction of its well-weighed sentences without the risk of mutilation. Yet a few phrases shall be culled, in order to define the haughty position assumed by Jonson toward the lesser fry of writers in his age, and the magnificent audacity with which he relied on his own force to stem the tide of ruin menacing the art he reverenced. 'If men will impartially, and not asquint, look toward the offices and function of a poet, they will easily conclude to themselves the impossibility of any man's being the good poet without being first the good man. He that is said to be able to inform young men to all good disciplines, inflame grown men to all great virtues, keep old men in their best and supreme state, or, as they decline to childhood, recover them to their first strength; that comes forth the interpreter and arbiter of nature, a teacher of things divine no less than human, a master in manners; and can alone, or with a few, effect the business of mankind: this, I take him, is no subject for pride and ignorance to exercise their railing rhetoric upon.' Having thus vehemently and proudly sketched the function of the sacred bard as teacher of world-wisdom, he paints the baser brood of poetasters—knaves who batten upon public vices, traduce private reputations, and feed like flesh-flies on the carrion of vulgar applause. 'I choose rather to live graved in obscurity, than share with them in so preposterous a fame.' After dwelling at length upon the terms of this disdainful abjuration, he spreads

his wings once more for a yet more giddy flight. 'Wherein, if my muses be true to me, I shall raise the despised head of poetry again, and stripping her out of those rotten and base rags wherewith the times have adulterated her form, restore her to her primitive habit, feature, and majesty, and render her worthy to be embraced and kissed of all the great and master-spirits of our world.'

I might draw a parallel between these passages and the eulogy of love which Jonson put into the mouth of Lovel in 'The New Inn.' Pure love and sacred poetry walk hand in hand like sisters in the work of Jonson and of Milton. The art of song for them resembles august and honourable matrimony, 'mother of lawful sweets and unshamed mornings.' Many of their brother bards made her a wanton, public to the lusts of a lascivious court and vulgar people, reaping repentance, surfeit, and such tears of shame as Dryden shed for his past errors on the stage. It is, indeed, not a little curious to contrast the tone of Dryden, Jonson's next renowned successor on the laureate's throne and next dictator over literary London, with the grave and reverent language of this elder playwright. Jonson was a Rhadamanthus of justice; Dryden, a parasite of popular caprice. Jonson trampled, Dryden fawned, on public taste. While Jonson wrote as we have seen of poetry, Dryden thus impudently confessed his mean and servile aims: 'My chief endeavours are to delight the age in which I live.' 'To please the people ought to be the poet's aim.' 'The humour of the people is now for comedy; therefore, in hope to please them, I write comedies rather than serious plays.' What Dryden's compliance brought

him was the bitter but superb remorse expressed in the 'Ode on Mrs. Anne Killigrew,' the sad but manly discouragement which tinges the 'Epistle to Mr. Congreve' at its close with gloom. What Jonson gained from his defiant tone of truculent yet generous self-approbation will appear when we examine more closely into his attitude as a dramatist during this first period of his manhood.

Jonson had formed a noble ideal of the poet, conscious of his high vocation; and he was right in judging that the large majority of contemporary playwrights, scribblers for cheaply earned small gains upon the public stage, were unworthy of the name of poet. Yet he was incapable of maintaining the dignity of the poetic art without too loudly asserting his own superiority. He identified the sacred bard with his own person, posed before the world as Apollo's high priest, and presumed upon his erudition to affect the lordly airs of an authentic Aristarchus. The three massive comedies which he brought out in tolerably quick succession after 1598—'Every Man out of his Humour' in 1599, 'Cynthia's Revels' in 1600, and 'The Poetaster' in 1601—breathe a spirit of vainglory and a fierce disdain for fellow-workers in the drama, which exposed him to savage reprisals. These plays were styled by him 'Comical Satires.' He indulged in them that genius for crude and also cruel caricature which may be observed in milder form in 'The Case is Altered.' Not only were the follies of the Court and town freely castigated with touches which probably wrung the withers of now forgotten jades; but living men, his professional comrades and social equals, were also

ridiculed. Henslowe, whose pay he took, with whom he quarrelled and made peace again by turns, is odiously portrayed as a slave-merchant, under whose protection the morals of play-acting boys were not safe. Marston, the disciple who had borrowed from him a pedantic strain of turgid blank verse, and Dekker, with whom he had collaborated in dramatic journey-work, are insulted by sarcasms, now almost utterly devoid of pungency, but at the moment exquisitely irritating. What made this waspish attack upon his neighbours more insufferable, and also exposed it more helplessly to retaliation, was the swaggering attitude assumed by the self-dubbed arbiter of taste. However we may respect Jonson's sterling qualities as man and poet, we cannot read the prologue and epilogue to 'Cynthia's Revels' without resenting its strain of self-laudation. The three characters, used by him as masks in the three 'Comical Satires,' namely, Asper, Crites, Horace, make us justly angry. We cannot stomach the writer who thus dared to praise and puff himself. Let us hear each of them speak. Asper says:—

> My soul
> Was never ground into such oily colours,
> To flatter vice, and daub iniquity:
> But with an armèd and resolvèd hand
> I'll strip the ragged follies of the time
> Naked as at their birth! . . . . . .
> . . . . . And with a whip of steel
> Print wounding lashes in their iron ribs.
> I fear no mood stamped in a private brow,
> When I am pleased to unmask a public vice.
> I fear no strumpet's drugs, nor ruffian's stab,
> Should I detect their hateful luxuries.

Ohe, jam satis! Asper runs on for yet another score of

lines. But we have had enough of him. Let him stand down, and call Crites into the witness-box. Virtue, the Divine Arete, introduces Crites, and describes him thus:—

> Lo, here the man, celestial Delia,
> Who (like a circle bounded in itself)
> Contains as much as man in fullness may.
> Lo, here the man, who not of usual earth,
> But of that nobler and more precious mould
> Which Phœbus self doth temper, is composed.

Enough of Crites. After this panegyric, we do not need his long-winded orations and self-laudatory criticisms. Horace appears before our court after a like fashion, ushered in by Virgil. Horace has rivals, detractors, contemporary poets, who ought not to presume to hold a candle to him. So Jonson makes Virgil trim the balance thus:—

> If *they* should confidently praise their works,
> In *them* it would appear inflation;
> Which in a full and well-digested man
> Cannot receive that foul abusive name,
> But the fair title of erection.

To put it plainly: Jonson maintained that he had liberty and licence to commend himself and abuse his comrades; but if they commended themselves, this was inflation; or if they abused him, this was detraction.

He placed himself in an impossible position. Not without reason was he arraigned for 'self-love, arrogancy, impudence, and railing,' as also for 'filching by translation.' The last count of the indictment against Jonson will have to be treated separately. It is enough now to confine attention to those points which illustrate the man's aggressive and egotistic personality.

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These pretensions in the playwright who had but recently risen from low station into the clear light of fame, excited violent hostility. Jonson was attacked by Marston in his 'Satires' and the 'Scourge of Villainy' (1598), probably under the names of Tubrio, Torquatus, and Jack of Paris Garden. He told Drummond that 'he had many quarrels with Marston, beat him, and took his pistol from him, wrote his Poetaster on him. The beginning of them were that Marston represented him on the stage, in his youth given to venery.' If we are right in identifying Marston's Tubrio with Jonson, the charge is sufficiently attested; for Tubrio is a very loathsome character, and one that justly called a drubbing down upon its author's shoulders from the supposed original. But, on the whole, it would appear that Jonson was the first to open fire upon the stage against Marston. Some critics, to whom this literary squabble is interesting, have identified the Clove of 'Every Man out of his Humour' with Marston; some, and these perhaps with better reason, have detected him in Carlo Buffone of that comedy. It is tolerably certain that both Marston and Dekker felt themselves lampooned in Hedon and Anaides of 'Cynthia's Revels.' Upon this they burst into open warfare. Jonson was caricatured in Marston's 'Jack Drum's Entertainment' (1600); and the two poets together were meditating 'Satiromastix, or the Untrussing of the Humorous Poet,' when Jonson unmasked the heavy guns of his 'Poetaster' (1601), rendering both to the best of his ability ridiculous in the characters of Crispinus and Demetrius.

The match between Jonson and his antagonists was

unequal. They had to be contented with ill-drawn caricatures and spiteful innuendoes, describing Jonson as 'a mere sponge, nothing but humours and observation;' or girding at him for 'his impudence in commending his own things, and for his translating.' He, on the other hand, devoted fifteen weeks of serious study to the preparation of a comedy which should not only crush his opponents by sheer weight, but should also display the qualities of an original work of art. Nothing like the 'Poetaster' had yet appeared upon the English stage; and no one but Jonson then possessed the learning and dramatic skill which were necessary for its production. In the 'Apologetical Dialogue' appended to this piece he describes the circumstances of its composition:—

> Three years
> They did provoke me with their petulant styles
> On every stage; and I at last unwilling,
> But weary, I confess, of so much trouble,
> Thought I would try if shame could win upon 'em;
> And therefore chose Augustus Cæsar's times,
> When wit and arts were at their height in Rome;
> To show that Virgil, Horace, and the rest
> Of those great master-spirits, did not want
> Detractors then or practisers against them.

The design was well conceived and vigorously executed; for Jonson felt at home among the poets of the Roman Court, and never trod more surely than when following the steps of some illustrious predecessor whom he venerated. The play has three strains of interest skilfully intertwined. The one consists of the romance of Ovid's life, his obstinate pursuit of poetry, his love for Julia, and his banishment from Rome. The second in-

troduces us to the fashionable society of the capital, where Gallus, Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid, and their mistresses enjoy the sweets of culture and flirtation. Into this circle Crispinus intrudes—an object for mirth, a magpie among singing birds. The third, which forms the gist of the comedy in its satiric aspect, develops the conspiracy of Crispinus and Demetrius against Horace, and his arraignment of them before the Court of Augustus, Virgil, and the Roman wits in conclave. It is with the last of these three motives that we are at present concerned.

Crispinus, in whom Marston stands manifest, is a oad poet, using the most hideous jargon, and striving by all manner of disgraceful means to be received among the great. The liveliest scene of the play is one which Jonson has closely imitated from Horace. We find the lyrist in his favourite haunt upon the Via Sacra, planning an ode to Mecænas. Crispinus sidles up to him, wearies him with importunity, and sticks like a burr in spite of broad hints and palpable insults. At last Horace is relieved by bailiffs, who arrest the poetaster for debt. Meanwhile the key-note to the character of Marston has been struck. Demetrius is described by a player in words which were but too applicable to the needy author of 'The Honest Whore.' 'His doublet's a little decayed; he is otherwise a very simple, honest fellow, sir, one Demetrius, a dresser of plays about the town here; we have hired him to abuse Horace, and bring him in, in a play, with all his gallants.' These are the pair whom Horace arraigns before Cæsar on the charge of 'taxing him falsely of self-love, arrogancy, impudence, railing, and filching by translation.'

Augustus is discovered seated on his throne. Around him are grouped Mecænas, Gallus, Tibullus, and Horace. Ovid has been banished to the Euxine, and his seat is empty. Virgil is momently expected from Campania. While waiting for him, the prince and his Court discuss the lofty place of poetry in a well-ordered State. Cæsar pronounces poetry to be—

> Of all the faculties of earth
> The most abstract and perfect; if she be
> True-born and nursed with all the sciences.
> She can so mould Rome and her monuments
> Within the liquid marble of her lines,
> That they shall stand fresh and miraculous,
> Even when they mix with innovating dust;
> In her sweet streams shall our brave Roman spirits
> Chase and swim after death, with their choice deeds
> Shining on their white shoulders.

At length a messenger arrives, and says that Virgil is at hand. Cæsar turns to the poets at his side, and asks their opinion of 'Rome's honour.' Horace, Tibullus, and Gallus give their verdict in well-weighed passages of eulogy. It is probable that by Virgil Jonson intended some dramatic poet of his day; and, on the whole, his description suits none better than Shakespeare.

At this point Virgil enters, takes the chair set for him at Cæsar's right hand, and begins to read from his fourth Æneid, a part of which Jonson has translated in the stiff and literal manner he affected. He has not gone far before Crispinus and Demetrius, attended by the braggadocio Captain Tucca, are ushered in with libels upon Horace. One of these is a striking parody of Marston's satire, the other a piece of jingling

doggerel. The Augustan poets form a court, and acquit Horace triumphantly of the charges brought against him. Demetrius is forced to confess that he was only envious of the greater poet's fame and better company. Crispinus has a dose of hellebore administered, which makes him vomit up his crude and stilted phrases. The passage, humiliating enough to Marston, has a certain Rabelaisian humour. We are spared none of the disgusting details of sickness, and the ugly-sounding words come up with comic clenches. The curious thing, however, is that many words which Jonson made his detractor spue forth, such as 'retrograde, reciprocal, defunct, spurious, clumsy, strenuous,' are now in common use; while he himself employed equally cacophonous and now quite obsolete expressions. 'Tartarous, repercussive, arride, salt (from *saltus*, a leap), copy (from *copia*, abundance),' for example, have well-nigh perished with the breath that uttered them.

The 'Poetaster' failed to extinguish Marston and Dekker. In the same year, 1601, they untrussed their censor in 'Satiromastix.' But it brought a hornets' nest about the poet's ears. Lawyers took umbrage at what Ovid said about them, and threatened Jonson with an action. Soldiers fancied that Tucca's buffooneries were meant to insult their dignity. Playgoers and playwrights, already ridiculed by Jonson in preceding comedies, raised a shriek at the still more savage onslaught of this drama. Finally, the whole profession of actors and stage-managers felt themselves mortally wounded by the loathsome caricature of Histrio (Henslowe), and by the parody of players in the declamation of Tucca's two pages. Jonson found it necessary to

defend himself in an Apology, which, however, under his touch became a new declaration of war. Assuming the person of Horace, he had sought to pose as a long-suffering man, not easily moved to wrath, merciful to his foes, indulgent to the foibles of the weak, capable of speaking the truth without flattery to sovereigns, dealing full measure of praise to his literary peers, and finally 'the worst accuser under heaven.' He now attempted to vindicate his style of satire :—

> I never writ that piece
> More innocent or empty of offence.
> Some salt it had, but neither tooth nor gall.
> I used no name. My books have still been taught
> To spare the persons and to speak the vices.

The lawyers he pacified with compliments. To the soldiers he repeated lines from an epigram which he had written :—

> I swear by your true friend, my muse, I love
> Your great profession, which I once did prove;
> And did not shame it with my actions then,
> No more than I dare now do with my pen.

The players were assured that he had been discriminating in his satire of their least worthy members. The poets were threatened with what he could do if he chose :—

> They know I dare
> To spurn or baffle them; or squirt their eyes
> With ink or urine; or I could do worse,
> Armed with Archilochus' fury, write Iambics,
> Should make the desperate lashers hang themselves;
> Rhime them to death, as they do Irish rats
> In drumming tunes.

For a so-called 'Apologetical Dialogue,' this and

three dozen or so more lines of equally vitriolic railing was pretty good. The invective ended:—

> But I leave the monsters
> To their own fate. And, since the Comic Mu
> Hath proved so ominous to me, I will try
> If Tragedy have a more kind aspect.

Jonson kept this resolution, and produced no comedy again until 1605.

Meanwhile, in order to conclude the history of this literary squabble, we are surprised to find Marston contributing at the end of 1601, together with Jonson, Chapman, and Shakespeare, to the 'Phœnix and the Turtle.' The last word Jonson had spoken on him was that he was:—

> Improbior satiram scribente cinaedo.

In 1604 he dedicated his revised comedy, 'The Malcontent,' to Jonson in a stately Latin inscription; and early in 1605, when he and Chapman were thrown into prison for some reflections on the Scots in 'Eastward Ho,' Jonson joined them. The incident is so curious that it shall here be related in Jonson's own words to Drummond, although its insertion breaks the proper chronological narration of his life. 'He was delated by Sir James Murray to the king for writing something against the Scots in a play called "Eastward Ho," and voluntarily imprisoned himself with Chapman and Marston, who had written it amongst them. The report was that they should then have had their ears cut and noses. After their delivery he banqueted all his friends, there was Camden, Selden, and others; at the midst in the feast his old mother drank to him, and shew him her

paper which she had (if the sentence had taken execution) to have mixed in the prison among his drink, which was full of lusty strong poison, and that she was no churl, she told, she intended first to have drunk of it herself.'

I have occupied too much time, perhaps, with the history of Jonson's literary disputes. It had, however, much importance for me in the attempt to bring his character before my readers, and to show in what proportions he combined a lofty ideal of his calling as a poet with overweening arrogance and an ill-habit of satirising individuals. The essential nobleness of the man is evidenced by the tale, just transcribed, of his voluntary imprisonment; and in course of time he seems to have been universally accepted, with all his faults of crustiness and self-conceit, on the solid ground of sterling merits. At any rate, there is no doubt that he soon became literary dictator and leader of jovial society in London. Here he ruled an undisputed and beloved monarch of the wits.

Returning from this excursion to the facts of Jonson's biography, I may conclude the present chapter by summarising the most important events between the years 1601 and 1616. It is probable that during the first five of these years Jonson was living with Lord Aubigny, planning new forms of dramatic art and prosecuting his studies in the classics. To this epoch we may refer his translation of the 'Ars Poetica,' which still survives; and his elaborate commentary, which perished in the urning of his books. He finally broke with the Adiral's Men and joined the King's Company in 1602. ext year, his first tragedy, 'Sejanus,' was put upon stage. Shakespeare acted in it; and tradition holds

that Shakespeare enriched the acting copy of the play with passages from his own pen. When Jonson had it printed in 1604, he gave the following warning to the reader in a preface: 'This book in all numbers is not the same with that which was acted on the public stage; wherein a second pen had good share; in place of which I have rather chosen to put weaker and no doubt less pleasing of mine own than to defraud so happy a genius of his right by my loathed usurpation.' Those who would fain believe that Shakespeare collaborated with Jonson in the stage-copy may find some confirmation of their opinion in the phrase 'so happy a genius.' What most struck contemporaries in Shakespeare seems to have been his felicity. Webster, for example, contrasts 'the right happy and copious industry of Master Shakespeare' with 'the laboured and understanding works of Master Jonson.' Heywood in his 'Hierarchy of Angels' couples them together in four lines:—

> Mellifluous Shakespeare, whose enchanting quill
> Commanded mirth or passion, was but Will;
> And famous Jonson, though his learned pen
> Be dipped in Castaly, is still but Ben.

In 'Sejanus,' as we have it, there is plenty of Ben's labour, learning, and understanding. Will's right happy vein of mellifluous enchantment, if it ever existed there, has perhaps been lost, through the chief author's masculine resolve to claim no man's honours by loathed usurpation. The tragedy brought him into trouble. He had beaten one of Lord Northampton's servants; and that nobleman, taking up his lacquey's quarrel, called Jonson before the Council to answer for treason and popery. This indictment must have been rather

captious than really malicious; for Jonson does not seem to have been seriously compromised. He stuck to his religion, however, until 1610; when he abjured popery, and reconciled himself with true toper's zeal (as we have seen) to the reformed Church of England.

The accession of James I. to the English throne in 1603 opened new spheres of patronage and fresh fields of literary activity for Jonson. I shall show, in another chapter, when I come to treat more closely of his social life, that he had already made friends with members of the aristocracy. This is apparent in the controversy with Marston and Dekker, both of whom are represented as jealous of his noble acquaintances. He also occupied a distinguished place in the higher Bohemian company of the capital. On these foundations he was able to build up close relations with the Court, and to cement them by James's and the Queen's partiality for theatrical entertainments. The period of his masques and of his laureateship now opens. On June 25, 1603, we find him presenting 'The Satyr' at Althorpe before the Queen and Prince Henry. On August 1 he dedicated 'Pancharis' to James. On March 15, 1604, he collaborated with his old foe Dekker in the 'Entertainment,' presented to the King on passing to his Coronation. On March 19 he wrote a panegyric upon the King's reception of the Houses. On May 1 he showed 'The Pirates' to their Majesties at Sir William Cornwallis's residence in Highgate. On Twelfth Night of that year the Queen's masque of 'Blackness,' written by Jonson and put upon the stage by Inigo Jones, was performed at Whitehall. These dates suffice to prove with what energy Jonson cast himself into the special

office of Court poet. He had tried the public; obtained a sudden and a singular success. His own presumption changed that success into one of scandal rather than esteem. From the comic stage he flung off in disdainful anger, wooed tragedy, and reaped somewhat arid laurels in that field. But the man, meanwhile, had gained the sympathy of England's gentlefolk; and when James came, a splendid opportunity for the display of his learned genius was afforded him, of which he was not slack to avail himself.

This while, however, Jonson did not neglect the public stage. I will here omit to mention the masques and entertainments he provided with untiring pen for courtly weddings, royal receptions, and Whitehall festivals. The name of them is legion; and in their proper place they shall be reckoned. But the great work, the work by which his fame must live, was still in these years given to the people. In 1605 'Volpone' was acted at the Globe. In 1609 'The Silent Woman' was performed by the Children of her Majesty's Revels. In 1610 'The Alchemist' was put upon the stage by the King's Men. In 1611 'Catiline' was acted by the same company. In 1614 'Bartholomew Fair,' of all Jonson's plays the most genial and most true to his London cradle, was presented by the Lady Elizabeth's Men at the Hope Theatre. In 1616 'The Devil is an Ass,' one of his declining comedies, saw the light under the auspices of the King's Men.

For those who have studied our dramatic literature, the mere recital of titles and dates in the foregoing paragraph has a grave importance. They show that the enduring work of Jonson, his master-work, was

finished between 1605 and 1614. The decadence is already visible in 1616. This is the year which I have chosen as the term of the second period in his biography. It only remains for me now to gather up two fragments from the annals of his life in this short section. The first to mention is his preparation of a folio edition of his works, which bears the date of 1616. More careful than Shakespeare, possibly because he stood apart from trade-transactions in the theatres, he planned a *prima editio* of all the things which he judged life-worthy from his pen, and gave it to the world in that year. The second point to notice is that he was sent in 1612, or 1613, by Sir W. Raleigh as governor to his son, into France. Jonson worked for Raleigh in the capacity of secretary when Raleigh was penning his 'History of the World' in the Tower. While conversing with Drummond at Hawthornden, Jonson gave a hint of the services which he and others had paid to that great compilation. 'The best wits of England were employed for making his History. Ben, himself, had written a piece to him of the Punic war, which he altered and set in his book.' Be this as it may, Raleigh conceived so high a notion of Jonson as a man that he sent him to France with his heir in the quality of tutor. Of that journey Jonson thought fit to confide to Drummond certain comic details, which cannot here be omitted. 'This youth (young Raleigh) being knavishly inclined, among other pastimes, caused him to be drunken and dead drunk, so that he knew not where he was; thereafter laid him on a car, which he made to be drawn by pioneers through the streets, at every corner showing his governor stretched out, and telling

them, that was a more lively image of the Crucifix than any they had: at which sport young Raleigh's mother delighted much (saying, his father young was so inclined), though the Father abhorred it.' Pardon must, peradventure, be craved for introducing this unseemly picture of Ben Jonson and his pupil, the lad Raleigh, in the streets of Paris. Yet it gives so vivid a notion of Englishmen as they then were, and of Englishmen as they now are (*mutatis mutandis*) in foreign parts, that I cannot deny myself the satisfaction of the quotation. I feel that it will not hurt Jonson; for the next two chapters shall display him in the very blaze of glory as a dramatist whom no contemporary touched in his own line of art.

CHAPTER III.

JONSON'S DRAMATIC STYLE.

Those who have made a special study of Ben Jonson will agree, I think, in judging that his fame must ultimately rest upon four comedies—'Volpone,' 'The Alchemist,' 'The Silent Woman,' and 'Bartholomew Fair.' If a fifth be added to this number, they will unanimously vote for 'Every Man in his Humour.' Should such critics differ, the points at issue will probably concern the order of these plays in merit, and the question whether 'Every Man in his Humour' is not superior to 'The Silent Woman.' At the point we have reached in Jonson's biography, I propose to pause and analyse these four plays in detail. This appears to me the best way of introducing Jonson in his character of playwright to the modern public; even though the minute dissection of comedies and the criticism of characters must involve of necessity some tedious passages. But before proceeding to examine the plays themselves in chronological order, I shall preface this inquiry with remarks on Jonson's style in general.

When our author in his 'Poetaster' made Dekker twit him with being 'a mere sponge, nothing but humours and observation,' when Marston in the same play taxed him for 'filching by translation,' Jonson

struck the key-note of his own dramatic style. What first strikes us in studying one of his plays is the extraordinary combination of accurately imitated manners with voluminous erudition. The common people of Elizabethan London, frequenters of the aisles of St. Paul's, danglers about the theatres, haunters of taverns and worse places of amusement, sharpers and their dupes, actors and their cronies, bad poets and cowardly captains, country gentlemen and Puritans from Amsterdam, vulgar city knights, poor squires, spendthrift heirs, madams who wear acres in pounced velvet on their backs, miserly old men, pedlars, bear-leaders, water-carriers, Thames watermen, all the motley crowd of street and fair and market-place and river, jostle together, each with well-seized peculiarities, like the puppets of a marionette show. The fund of humours is inexhaustible; the observation with which they have been caught and made fit subjects for the comic muse is penetrative. But they are set for us in a quaint framework of elaborate learning. All the classics have been ransacked to point their foibles and exhibit their absurdities. The literature of the Renaissance, Erasmus and Rabelais, the literature of the Middle Ages, books on sports and hunting, books on alchemy, books on natural history, books on Rosicrucian mysticism, furnish unexpected illustrations of the commonest, most vulgar incidents. Beneath the cumbersome panoply of close translations from Greek and Latin authors, ponderous quotations and barbarous jargon out of dusty libraries, these puppets of the moment skip and jump and play their pranks with strange mechanic nimbleness. This combination of the pithiest realism with encyclopædic

erudition is the first thing to notice about Jonson; and for modern readers it forms a serious obstacle to the enjoyment of his art. We have to learn, as it were, a new language before we can enter into the spirit of his comedy.

It has been well said that his dramas are like solidly built houses from which the scaffolding has not been removed. We recognise the skill of their construction and the substantial strength of the edifice; but we never fail to be too conscious of the means employed for a desired result. Admirably as the plots of his best pieces are put together, so admirably that they have wrung enthusiastic applause from brother craftsmen, yet they strike us as Titanic timber-work. Jonson piqued himself on making his own plots, not dramatising a novel or a history, as was the fashion of that day. Consequently, his plays are all of one piece: the whole and the parts of each bespeak the man from whose strong brain they issued. Without predecessor and without legitimate successor, he stands alone, colossal, iron-jointed, the Behemoth of the drama.

Jonson's style is vigorous, robustly English, rarely condescending to the graces of melodious diction. Yet when we analyse his language, we shall find that it is frequently a cento of translations from the classics. This wholesale and indiscriminate translation is managed with admirable freedom. He held the prose writers and poets of antiquity in solution in his spacious memory. He did not need to dovetail or weld his borrowings into one another; but rather, having fused them in his own mind, poured them plastically forth into the mould of thought. Therefore, unless we

happen to recognise the originals on whom he has been drawing, we shall fancy that he is speaking from his own stores. This kind of looting from classical treasuries of wit and wisdom was accounted no robbery in that age; and Jonson's panegyrists praised him as a conqueror who spoiled the empires of the past like Alexander. 'The greatest man of the last age, Ben Jonson,' says Dryden, 'was willing to give place to the classics in all things: he was not only a professed imitator of Horace, but a learned plagiary of all the others; you track him everywhere in their snow. If Horace, Lucan, Petronius Arbiter, Seneca, and Juvenal had their own from him, there are few serious thoughts which are new in him. But he has done his robberies so openly, that one may see he fears not to be taxed by any law. He invades authors like a monarch; and what would be theft in other poets is only victory in him.'[1]

Another general point to notice is that, though a careful observer and minute recorder, Jonson rarely touched more than the outside of character. Not penetrating with the clairvoyance of imagination into the groundwork of personality, but constructing individuals from what appears of them upon the surface, he was too apt to present one glaring quality to the exclusion of all others. Thus his men and women are the incarnations of abstract properties rather than living human beings. We obtain a clear conception of them, and remember each apart from his neighbour. But the rigid maintenance of their master-passion, the strict definition of their leading humour, gives them an air of mechanism. In this respect the feeblest of the romantic

[1] Malone's *Prose Works of Dryden*, vol. iii. pp. 51, 103.

dramatists excelled him. While Jonson made masks, the despised Dekker and Heywood created souls. Their persons move before us with the reality of life; we become familiar with them as entire men and women.

The critical distinction here indicated is so important in its bearings on Jonson's relation to the drama of his day that I must take leave to enlarge on it. The comedy of character and manners, which was derived from antique models, brought types rather than individuals into play. Its *dramatis personæ* were the jealous man, the avaricious man, the misanthrope, the wanton woman; who are always jealous, always avaricious, always misanthropical, always wanton. Romantic art, whether tragic or comic, the English art which rebelled against classical precedent and gave Shakespeare to the world, has never pursued this course. It aims at the creation of personalities, in whom such qualities, though predominant and determinative of the dramatic action, shall yet be blended with a multiplicity of other moral motives, as they usually are in life. We find this tendency even in the allegories of the Moral Plays, where men like Hick Scorner, women like Delilah, speedily supplant the personified abstractions of Juventus or Abominable Living. When the romantic style obtained its victory in England, the licences of time and place involved in the dramatisation of a novel favoured this truer and more vital character-drawing. It enabled great artists to exhibit the development of a quality which shall tyrannise over the whole nature of the man. In Othello we witness the growth of jealousy, in Macbeth the growth of ambition, in Timon the growth of misanthropy, in Coriolanus the growth of pride, in

Antony the growth of amorous dotage, to such a degree of predominance that their destinies are irretrievably determined by the mastery which one moral element has gained over the whole complex of their nature. To use German phrases, the romantic sphere of art is *das Werdende*, not *das Bestimmte*: character in process of formation, not fixed types. It is just here that Jonson diverged most radically from the spirit of the English drama in his age. He starts with character, set, formed, fully defined; a master passion in complete empire; the man absorbed in his specific humour. This he unfolds with inexhaustible variety and brilliant wit before our eyes. He creates as many situations and occasions as he can for its display. But it never alters. The strict logic of his powerful understanding, his grasp of common circumstance, the immense resources of his thought and language, enabled him to flash rays of light on each facet of the chosen humour. Yet we always know what to expect in every conceivable situation where his persons shall be placed. Asper is sure to utter a censure; Macilente, a reflection on the unmerited good fortune of his neighbours; Sir Epicure Mammon disappoints us if he opens his mouth without indulging in some gorgeous dream of far-fetched luxury, or some vast speculation on his future wealth; Morose must always shut his ears from noise, and bawl out for tranquillity. All the persons of Jonson's comedies are thus like masqueraders, with whom it is a point of honour to maintain a certain assumed character; and the index to their maker's notion of their duties may be aptly studied in his list of persons prefixed to 'Every Man out of his Humour.' I have already remarked

that the romantic licence as to time and place favoured the Shakespearian grasp of character in evolution. Macbeth could not grow from a bluff general into a world-wearied tyrant, Timon from a generous spendthrift into a cynical man-hater, Antony from a bold politician into a woman's plaything, in a single day. Given but twenty-four hours for the dramatic action, and fixed types of character, which do not grow, but are analysed, become inevitable. Now Jonson was so far a classic by culture and instinct that he adhered to the unities; and comedy, in which he principally dealt, has ever observed them. His mechanical handling of character belonged, therefore, in a measure to his ideal of art. Still this consideration will not suffice to excuse him altogether. He fails in so far as he does not analyse the type presented, as Molière does, but is contented with displaying and illustrating its outer form.

It is possible that the woodenness which fatigues the reader of all but Jonson's five best comedies may not have struck spectators of the same plays on the stage. Perpetual movement, bright costume, and the vivacity of actors can touch a stiff mechanic thing with liveliness. None of Jonson's pieces suffer from deficiency of business; and his personages are so sharply defined that they offer opportunities to able players. Regarded as forms to be filled with the actor's own breath of life and individuality, even these mechanic puppets may have moved mirth.

Lest I should overstate the case against Jonson for mechanical hardness of delineation, I ought to remark that this defect is closely allied to one of his chief qualities. No playwright of that age, if we except Shakespeare, had so eminent a power of charac-

terisation. The truth of this will be apparent in the next chapter, where I propose to examine his four greatest comedies. It is mainly in the minor personages of his drama that the author's method tends to rigidity. We are too much aware of his intention, and of the means he uses to attain certain effects. To borrow a phrase from painting, there is a want of atmosphere in his elaborated pictures. And here, since no better opportunity will present itself, I may introduce what I have to say about his two tragedies, 'the flat sanity and smoke-dried sobriety' of which have been alluded to by Mr. Swinburne. 'Sejanus' and 'Catiline' are Roman history done into robust blank verse—Tacitus, Cicero, and Sallust not always bettered by translation. Coleridge wished that we had more of these ponderous studies. He must surely have forgotten the tedium of the minor characters; the long soliloquies; the interminable orations; the heavy choruses in Seneca's manner. And yet these plays are distinguished by two eminent qualities: sustained dignity of language, and trenchant character-drawing. In 'Sejanus,' both Tiberius and his favourite are portrayed with masterly force. A tyrant advancing to his ends by dissimulation, and a vulgar upstart calling down upon his head the vengeance of the gods by arrogant self-confidence, could not be more vigorously contrasted. The moral atmosphere of imperial Rome, clogged with suspicion and heavy with dread, as

> when Jove
> Will o'er some high-viced city hang his poison
> In the sick air,

weighs upon us while we thread the laboriously deve-

loped intricacies of the plot. That 'Sejanus' could not have been a good acting play is certain; and the same may be said about 'Catiline,' which its author preferred, and I think rightly. This tragedy well repays careful perusal, however. It compels our interest and our admiration by its rugged Roman strength. The first act, which is wholly devoted to the conspirators, might be quoted as a magnificent study in the sombre manner of a literary Salvator Rosa. Wily and plausible Catiline sets off the vain and superstitious Lentulus; vehement Cethegus, blinded by his blood-lust, finds a foil in the twice-dyed traitor Curius; cautious Cæsar presents a striking contrast to lukewarm, egotistical Antonius. Cicero, always over-voluble of speech, yet dignified by patriotism and rendered amiable by a kind of personal grace, shines with benign radiance by the side of downright, hot-headed Cato, and vindictive Catulus. The two female characters are no less effectively presented. Fulvia, a voluptuous Roman wanton of Messalina's type; Sempronia, who dabbles in politics, reads Greek, and thinks herself the match of Cicero in eloquence, of Cæsar in statecraft. Both are treacherous: Sempronia to the State, Fulvia to the conspiracy. From these two tragedies passages of great poetic beauty, noble images, and weighty maxims might be culled. Jonson made no idle boast when he called attention to his 'height of elocution' and to the 'fullness and frequency of sentence,' in which, with Milton, he recognised 'the offices of a tragic writer.'

When we inquire into the causes which breed satiety in the readers of Jonson's plays, we shall find that a fatal inability to stop at the right moment is a princi-

pal. He never knew when his audience might fairly be supposed to have enough of the substantial diet set before them; but went on heaping period on period, and turning a brace of thoughts in a score of fashions. Whether the character on which he is engaged be Horace or Tucca matters little. He employs the same labour in developing his protagonists and his supernumeraries. Nor does he spare rhetoric when dealing with repulsive themes. It has, therefore, well been said of him that 'his tenaciousness of what is grand and lofty is more praiseworthy than his delight in what is low and disagreeable.' But we have no right to assert that he took pleasure in the vulgar for its own sake. If he had that on hand, he worked it out as fully as the nobler elements of art. All the authors of the English Renaissance erred on the side of redundancy. But while Shakespeare and Fletcher were carried away by a luxuriant fancy, Jonson yielded to prodigious memory and a scholar's conscientiousness. He tells us that he wrote in prose first, and then versified. This probably accounts for the long-winded paragraphs of frigidly expanded oratory which surfeit our attention. Like a mole, as it has been well put, he burrowed into his material, and threw up the soil upon the surface. If, then, he chanced on rich and generous veins, his readers had the benefit; no substance is more marrowy or charged with mental stuff. If not, he still performed the delver's toil, turning the last clod of a clayey earth with satisfaction to himself.[1]

I have touched upon his vast and indiscriminate

[1] For example, the interlude of the parasites, and the scene of the mountebank, in 'Volpone.'

learning. In the employment of this he neglected the Greek rule of 'Nothing overmuch,' no less than in his rhetorical expansion of given themes. We gasp astounded at the wealth of erudition he possessed. Not only the choicer authors of antiquity, on whom a humanistic education is built up; but the sophists, compilers, grammarians, and historical epitomists of the decadence—men like Athenæus, Libanius, Philostratus, the writers of Augustan histories, scholiasts, Strabo, Photius—obey his bidding. The fragments of Greek tragic and comic poets, then embedded in the prose of obscure essayists; the fragments of Ennius and Lucilius; the fragments of Æolic lyrists and Ionian sages; the fragments of Roman inscriptions, imperfectly distributed through treatises of dull Italian scholars: all had been appropriated by his indefatigable industry. Not a jot or tittle of this curious learning does he spare us in his comedies. The same is true of even more recondite subjects. Subtle delivers exact lectures upon alchemy. The 'Masque of Queens' supplies an encyclopædia of witchcraft. The foresters of masque and pastoral expound venery. In one laborious scene he teaches the science of cosmetics; in another the mysteries of the Rosicrucian order. He cannot call upon Arcadian nymphs to scatter flowers without reciting a list of twenty-seven species, in which the pride of Elizabethan horticulture seems to be epitomised. This determination to be exhaustive belonged to some essentially scientific quality of Jonson's mind. Order, classification, rule, measure, governed his conception of the literary builder's art; and he was not satisfied unless he had accumulated on each given point the whole mass of its learning; yet

his robust shoulders were scarcely burdened with the weight they bore. Like Atlas, he supported a world of knowledge. But, all the while, he moved beneath that load with no more effort than war-elephants who carry garrisons upon their backs. It is the mark of insolently virile intellects to sustain the bulk of erudition with facility, and to sport beneath a camel's pack in wantonness. Lord Macaulay, in his comparatively smaller way, came near to Jonson; but no one who has not read and re-read 'Volpone' or 'The Alchemist' has formed a true conception of elephantine sprightliness.

Jonson paid the penalty of these extraordinary qualities. It follows from what I have said of his work that he put nothing into his plays which patient criticism may not extract: the wand of the enchanter has not passed over them. There is no music which we hear but shall not capture; no aërial hues that elude description; no 'scent of violets hidden in the grass'; no 'light that never was on sea or land'; no 'casements opening on the foam of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn.' These higher gifts of poetry, with which Shakespeare—'nature's child'—was so richly endowed, are almost absolutely wanting in Ben Jonson. Perhaps the names of Earine and Aeglamour in the 'Sad Shepherd,' and a few of this shepherd's speeches, have just a touch of the enchantment. On its rare occurrence in Jonson's masques and lyrics I shall dwell when my argument brings me to that part of the inquiry.

In Jonson's qualities of style we discern the same robust virtues and the same limitations. For his prose I must confess a deep and reverent partiality. Its massive periods are moulded with a force anticipating

Milton at his best; and at times he sparkles into epigrams and fiery fits of passion, emitted in single sentences, beyond which it were impossible for our speech to travel. His blank verse is always manly, always individual;—unlike that of any of his contemporaries;—but grace, subtlety, emotion, suggestiveness, are wanting, sacrificed to scholarly solidity and even strength. I cannot but think that it suffered greatly from the poet's habit of converting prose into verse, whereby the thews of prose were wasted on a tolerable mediocrity of metre. It never falls very low; but it rarely rises to imaginative or impassioned heights. It is rough-hewn with the sinews of a Cyclops; but no Praxitelean finish has been bestowed upon this brawny chisel-work; no Ariel of the spirit has blown the poet's feeling into the fine stuff of thought, to float and shine with permanent or passing iridescence: such exquisite tenuity of verse, in short, as we rejoice in when we find it in the work of men like Fletcher or like humble Dekker. It wants lightness and the charm of chance. Indeed, when we compare Ben Jonson's blank verse style with that of the least of his contemporaries, we seem to be contemplating a sound substantial edifice of the Palladian manner—the front of Whitehall for example. Whereas Massinger reminds us of the intricacies of Sansovino, Shakespeare of Gothic aisles or heaven's cathedral, Fletcher of the sylvan architecture of wild green-woods, Ford of glittering Corinthian colonnades, Webster of vaulted crypts, Heywood of homely manor-houses on our English country-side, Marlowe of masoned clouds, and Marston, in his better moments, of the fragmentary vigour of a Roman ruin.

Jonson's art of translation, so highly prized by him, so envied by his rivals, was of a like texture; fabric, not of fancy or imagination, but of understanding. It would be easy to cite examples. They may be culled in both his tragedies by handfuls; but I would not call him to the bar of criticism there. I prefer to go further afield, and invite my readers to study the lines from the fourth Æneid which he placed on Virgil's lips in the 'Poetaster' (act v. sc. 1); or to indicate the version from a passage of Catullus on the cropped flower in his 'Barriers.' These show that the exquisite sensibility to perfume in an antique author's style failed Jonson. And yet, when I have said so much, I must face round, and add that lyric visitings were not unfrequent to his muse. In other words, he was at times felicitous. He found for a fragment of Sappho,

ἦρος ἄγγελος ἱμερόφωνος ἀήδων,

this phrase:—

> The dear good angel of the spring,
> The nightingale.

He turned a score of scattered sentences from the prose of Philostratus into that deathless song, 'Drink to me only with thine eyes.' Like many poets whom the muses love, Jonson uttered his best things by accident, and what weighed heavily upon his genius was the fixed idea that scholarship and sturdy labour could supply the place of inspiration.

Before concluding these remarks upon the general features of Jonson's dramatic style, I must point out the fact that he failed to create a single female character of excellence. We do not expect from him an Imogen, a

Duchess of Malfi, or even an Aspasia. Such women belong essentially to the romantic species, and it is only in 'The Case is Altered' and 'The New Inn' that Jonson tried to assume the tone of romantic art. Yet it might have been thought that he would have produced something in the same kind as Dame Quickly. This, however, is not the case. With the exception of Widow Purecraft and her daughter, in 'Bartholomew Fair,' and Mrs. Fitz Dottrel in 'The Devil is an Ass,' and Lady Frampul in 'The New Inn,' all Jonson's women are mere pieces of machinery—more wooden than his men.

This defect is remarkable, because he possessed one virtue which was rare in that century, and which showed a delicacy of feeling that ought to have made him appreciative of feminine excellence. His plays, though often coarse and nasty, are never licentious. To the public taste for filthy jests he refused to pander, nor would he allow his art to palliate immorality by adding the charm of pathos, wit, or poetic beauty to vice. Indeed, he treated wickedness of every kind so sternly that even his best plays fail to win our sympathy from the utter atrocity of their characters and the nakedness with which Jonson has unmasked them. Hallam says justly of 'Volpone' that 'five of the principal characters are wicked beyond any retribution that comedy can dispense;' while Coleridge remarks that the extreme badness of the personages destroys the interest of this stupendous play. The spectacle of their unmitigated evil presented to our gaze affects us much in the same way as the perusal of a treatise on ethics. Instead of regarding these monsters as men with passions

like our own, we recognise the abstractions which a powerful rhetorician has gifted with mechanical vitality.

At the end of this inquiry into the general characteristics of Jonson's style, it will be useful to survey the whole course of his development as a playwright, and to classify the various species of his dramas which have survived. The first period of his activity was occupied in romantic journey-work. Of the fruits of these earliest labours, if we except 'The Case is Altered,' we possess nothing. To ascribe the fragment of 'Mortimer' to that epoch of his life would be dangerous, in the absence of any direct evidence; though it may be mentioned that a play bearing that title was being acted in 1602. The additions to 'The Spanish Tragedy' were written three years after he had formed his own peculiar style. 'Every Man in his Humour' (1598) marks the emergence of this original manner, formed upon observation of contemporary life and exact study of the ancients. It also opens the cycle of his comedies of humours, which he closed, in his old age, with 'The Magnetic Lady.' But after arriving at self-consciousness, and creating his own art in this epoch-making play, Jonson swerved aside and abandoned the comic drama, properly so called, for what he termed comical satire, in 'Every Man out of his Humour' and 'Cynthia's Revels' (1599 and 1600). These two pieces are rather puppet-shows of character, affording scope for satirical caricatures, analytical descriptions of contemporary affectations, humorous dialogues, and witty personifications of abstract qualities, than comedies. They cannot properly be said to have an action or a plot. The one reminds us of a morality,

the other of a masque. We notice, moreover, that the influence of the Latin drama is now exchanged for that of the 'Plutus' of Aristophanes, which henceforth exercised a somewhat baneful power over Jonson's method. The tendency to general and personal satire, which had already been perceptible in 'The Case is Altered,' was now freely indulged. The playwright, posing as an Aristarchus and a Juvenal, made bitter enemies, not only among men of letters, but also among players and playgoers, courtiers and soldiers. The quarrels in which he became involved led to the production of the 'Poetaster' (1601). This was no puppet-show of humours, but a play, in which living characters contributed by their action to the development of a plot. After the 'Poetaster,' Jonson abandoned comedy for tragedy, producing 'Sejanus' (1603) in a style to some extent modelled upon that of Seneca. It was followed by a second tragic play called 'Catiline' (1611). These two plays achieved, and deserved, only a cold success of esteem. But before the latter date he had resumed his 'learned sock.' 'Volpone' (1605), 'The Silent Woman' (1609), 'The Alchemist' (1610), and 'Bartholomew Fair' (1614), followed each other within the space of nine industrious years. Four true comedies, excellent in plot, masterly in character-drawing, vigorous in style, were added to the treasures of English literature. The manner, which was first formed in 'Every Man in his Humour,' reached its full expansion in these masterpieces. On the accession of James I., Jonson opened a new vein by the production of his masques and entertainments. Here he found scope for the lyrical faculty and capricious inventiveness which

lurked beneath the rugged exterior of his dramatic muse. But though he showed a decided preference for this sort of composition, he did not abandon the comedy of humours. 'The Devil is an Ass' (1616) may be reckoned a satisfactory piece of workmanship in the manner specific to Ben Jonson. But 'The Staple of News' (1625), founded upon the 'Plutus' of Aristophanes; 'The New Inn' (1629), an attempt to break ground in romantic comedy too late; 'The Magnetic Lady' (1632), which closes the cycle of humours, and 'A Tale of a Tub' (1633), which feebly echoes the Rabelaisian laughter of 'Bartholomew Fair': all of these five latest products of Jonson's pen deserve the hard sentence which was passed on them by Dryden. They are works of his decadence. In this brief bird's-eye view of his dramatic industry, it only remains to mention the fragment of a tragedy called 'Mortimer,' which was found among his papers after his death, and an imperfect pastoral entitled 'The Sad Shepherd.' I shall have to enter at some length into questions relating to the date of this pastoral. Here they would be out of place. It is enough to say that this rustic play combines Jonson's regularity of structure with the fancy which had sported so freely in the best of his masques. The prologue, as we have it, was written about 1637 in the last months of the poet's life. But it is scarcely credible that the still extant portion of the drama can have been composed at that epoch. We have at any rate to deplore the accident—whether of Jonson's death before the piece was finished, or of the carelessness with which his MSS. were handled after his decease—whereby English dramatic literature has been defrauded

of what would otherwise have been its most ingeniously constructed and firmly executed pastoral play.

After this summary review of Jonson's dramatic works, it will be possible to arrange them in the following groups. First of all we may place the two tragedies, 'Sejanus' and 'Catiline,' with the fragment of 'Mortimer.' The masques, triumphs, entertainments, barriers, form a second class. The unfinished 'Sad Shepherd' has to stand alone, touching the masques on one side and the comedies upon the other. I am inclined to place 'The Case is Altered,' 'The New Inn,' and the additions to the 'Spanish Tragedy' in a fourth group, since these illustrate Jonson's essays in romantic art. 'The Silent Woman,' 'Bartholomew Fair,' and 'A Tale of a Tub' may be described as farces. To comedies of humour we can assign 'Every Man in his Humour,' 'Every Man out of his Humour,' 'Cynthia's Revels,' 'The Devil is an Ass,' 'The Staple of News,' and 'The Magnetic Lady.' It is true that these plays differ much in their construction; two following the model of Aristophanic allegory, one moulding itself upon the type of Latin comedy, and one borrowing suggestions from the masque. Yet all are marked by the same observation of humours, as the phrase was understood by Jonson. 'The Poetaster,' on account of its avowed satiric intention and the peculiarity of its Roman fable, must stand alone, though Jonson would probably have classed it with 'Every Man out of his Humour' and 'Cynthia's Revels' under the name of comical satire. The two masterpieces of Jonson's dramatic art, 'Volpone' and 'The Alchemist,' cannot be grouped with comedies of humour. 'Volpone' is a

deeply reaching dramatic satire on the vice of covetousness. 'The Alchemist' is a comedy of character and manners, indulging a lighter vein of satire upon human foibles. In form, it leans more to the farcical type than its sombre predecessor.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MASTERPIECES.

VOLPONE.

'Volpone' is no mere comedy of humours or comical satire. It is a sinister and remorseless analysis of avarice in its corrosive influence on human character. Nowhere else has Jonson with so firm a touch bared one master vice, absorbing and perverting all the virtues, passions, and rational faculties of man. 'The accursed thirst for gold' is here displayed as a fell tyrant, swaying the love of kindred and of honour; before which lust, jealousy, and fear of shame are forced to bow; which compels an Italian husband to prostitute his wife, an advocate to perjure himself twice in open court, a gentleman to disinherit and disown his son, an English lady to risk her reputation, and all these dupes to hazard fame and fortune blindly on a cast of chance.

The play takes its title from the hero, Volpone, or the Old Fox. He is a Venetian nobleman, childless, without heirs; who, at the time when the first act opens, has been feigning the last diseases of decrepitude through three years, in order to delude the folk around him. It amuses the subtle voluptuary to study various and well-developed forms of covetousness in his friends and neighbours. His palace has become the haunt of

captatores, legacy-hunters, each one of whom believes that his name will be found alone inscribed upon Volpone's testament. Yet none are quite secure and easy in their expectation. So long as the Fox is above ground, he may always change his dispositions. Therefore the birds of prey, scenting his carcass while he yet lives, keep hovering about his pretended sick-bed. There he lies, smeared with chalk and oils, coughing and drivelling, simulating blindness, deafness, palsy. From time to time they bring rich presents, regarding these as good investments for the future, competing one with another for Volpone's favour. But of them enough has now been said. On three carefully selected specimens of the tribe, Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino (Italian for vulture, old raven, and spruce young crow), the action of the drama turns; and in my analysis of the play we shall hear more about them.

Right instinct led Jonson to lay the scene in Venice, and to make his hero a Magnifico of the Republic. He has conceived Volpone as a man in green old age, sound still of constitution, enjoying the possession of his senses and his intellect. Craft and extravagant voluptuousness form the main-springs of his character. He has grown hoary in vice, and nothing now delights him more than the spectacle of human baseness. Therefore he expends his more than ordinary mental powers and ill-acquired knowledge of the world on subtle schemes for making life a comedy, and proving all the men around him knaves and fools. He is avaricious but not blinded by the love of gold. Wealth he values chiefly as the means for tempting and corrupting others, after he has surfeited himself with every pleasure

it can purchase. Fantastic in his sensuality, he lives like a Roman of the Empire or an Oriental, secluded from the world among his creatures—the parasite, the pigmy, the eunuch, and the page. To this curious company Jonson has given descriptive names—Mosca, the fly; Nano, the dwarf; Castrone, the wether; Androgyno, the hermaphrodite. Mosca is the Fox's right hand. Without him Volpone's schemes would be impracticable; and the ruin, which comes upon him in the end, is due to his habit of regarding this devil of roguery as a second self. In Mosca Jonson paints a monumental portrait of the parasite, as he may possibly have existed at the worst courts in the most debased epochs of civilisation. Plausible, ingenious, pliant to his master's whims, loving evil for its own sake, Mosca glides through the dangerous and complicated circumstances of their common plots with the suppleness and quickness of a serpent. But when he sees the way to build up his own fortunes on Volpone's downfall, he turns round suddenly, implacably, upon his patron. With the same cold cynicism which he had used against Corbaccio to tickle the Fox's fancy, he now lays his fox-trap. How both fall eventually into it together we shall see.

I have said that Jonson obeyed a right instinct when he laid the scene of this comedy in Venice. The exorbitances and eccentricities of evil he has chosen to depict, would have gained but little credence if the action had taken place in London. But the sensualities of Aretino, the craft of Machiavelli, the diabolical ingenuity of Italian despots, lent verisimilitude to his picture—'that most vivid picture,' in Taine's absurd

enthusiastic language, 'of the manners of the century, where wicked covetousnesses display themselves in their full beauty, where sensuality, cruelty, lust for gold, and the impudicity of vice develop a sinister and splendid poetry, worthy of some Bacchanalian piece by Titian.'

The key-note of the drama is struck in the first lines. Volpone and Mosca are discovered in a room of the Venetian palace, standing before a curtain which veils the treasury. Volpone speaks:—

> Good morning to the day; and next, my gold!
> Open the shrine, that I may see my saint.
> Hail the world's soul and mine! More glad than is
> The teeming earth to see the longed-for sun
> Peep through the horns of the celestial ram,
> Am I, to view thy splendour darkening his;
> That lying here, amongst my other hoards,
> Shew'st like a flame by night, or like the day
> Struck out of chaos, when all darkness fled
> Unto the centre. O thou sun of Sol,
> But brighter than thy father, let me kiss,
> With adoration, thee, and every relic
> Of sacred treasure in this blessed room.
> Well did wise poets, by thy glorious name,
> Title that age which they would have the best;
> Thou being the best of things, and far transcending
> All style of joy in children, parents, friends,
> Or any other waking dream on earth.
> Thy looks when they to Venus did ascribe,
> They should have given her twenty thousand Cupids;
> Such are thy beauties and our loves! Dear saint,
> Riches, the dumb god, that giv'st all men tongues,
> That canst do naught, and yet mak'st men do all things;
> The price of souls; even hell, with thee to boot,
> Is made worth heaven. Thou art virtue, fame,
> Honour and all things else. Who can get thee,
> He shall be noble, valiant, honest, wise.

Critics have judged that this opening invocation to

the presiding deity of the drama rises to tragic sub-limity. The playwright must indeed have had full confidence in his power to sustain the action upon a corresponding note of passionate intensity, when he composed it. Nor was he mistaken; for Volpone's rhetoric of adoration lives again in every word and deed of all the characters. True to his habit of firmly expounding the main situation and the leading motives of his personages in the first scene, Jonson next makes Volpone reflect with satisfaction on the acquisition of his treasure :—

> Yet I glory
> More in the cunning purchase of my wealth,
> Than in the glad possession, since I gain
> No common way.

It is not by trade, industry, agriculture, usury, hoarding, that he has brought together 'the price of souls.' And he can afford to spend it freely. Mosca begs for a trifle, and Volpone gives him gold :—

> What should I do,
> But cocker up my genius, and live free
> To all delights my fortune calls me to?
> I have no wife, no parent, child, ally,
> To give my substance to; but whom I make,
> Must be my heir; and this makes men observe me:
> This draws new clients daily to my house,
> Women and men of every sex and age,
> That bring me presents, send me plate, coin, jewels,
> With hope that when I die (which they expect
> Each greedy minute) it shall then return
> Ten-fold upon them.

While he is thus soliloquising, the dwarf, page, and eunuch enter, fantastically attired, and play a comic

farce with songs to entertain him; in the middle of which show his clients begin to gather.

> Fetch me my gown,
> My furs and night-caps; say, my couch is changing:
> And let him entertain himself awhile
> Without i' the gallery. Now, now my clients
> Begin their visitation! Vulture, kite,
> Raven and gorcrow, all my birds of prey,
> That think me turning carcase, now they come;
> I am not for them yet!

The first to appear is Voltore, the advocate. He has brought a massive piece of plate, which he thrusts into Volpone's trembling hands, feebly lifted from the counterpane to clutch it. Voltore gloats over the thin and quavering accents of thanks, which come, half-smothered in choking coughs, from beneath the bed-clothes; and then, without taking the trouble to withdraw from the sick man's chamber, he turns to Mosca:—

> *Volt.* Pray thee, hear me:
> Am I inscribed his heir for certain?
> *Mos.* Are you?
> I do beseech you, sir, you will vouchsafe
> To write me in your family. All my hopes
> Depend upon your worship: I am lost,
> Except the rising sun do shine on me.
> *Volt.* It shall both shine and warm thee, Mosca.
> *Mos.* Sir,
> I am a man, that hath not done your love
> All the worst offices: here I wear your keys,
> See all your coffers and your caskets lock'd,
> Keep the poor inventory of your jewels,
> Your plate and monies; am your steward, sir,
> Husband your goods here.
> *Volt.* But am I sole heir?
> *Mos.* Without a partner, sir; confirm'd this morning:

The wax is warm yet, and the ink scarce dry
Upon the parchment.

Volt. Happy, happy me!
By what good chance, sweet Mosca?

Mos. Your desert, sir.

They are yet talking, when a second knock is heard upon the door without. Voltore has but just time to creep away, and Volpone to jump up and kiss Mosca for the excellent sport, before Corbaccio appears. The Old Raven is a masterpiece of Jonson's dreadful art. Deaf, worn out with the diseases of extreme old age, he yet clings sordidly to the miserable shreds of life, and burdens his last days with detestable crimes for the sake of the gold he cannot carry with him beyond the tomb. He has brought an opiate:—

Mos. He will not hear of drugs.

Corb. Why! I myself
Stood by while it was made, saw all the ingredients;
And know, it cannot but most gently work:
My life for his, 'tis but to make him sleep.

Volp. Ay, his last sleep, if he would take it. [*Aside.*

The reader must remember that these scenes are enacted in the presence of Volpone, who is supposed to be stone-deaf and blind, but who hears and sees everything with lynx eyes and fox's ears from behind his bed-curtains. The situation lends itself to accumulated touches of saturnine humour. Mosca paints a fancy picture of his master's disorders—apoplexy, palsy, vertigo, loathsome affections of the mucous membrane. Old Corbaccio recognises and ticks off the symptoms. They are familiar to himself:—

Yet I am better, ha!
Excellent, excellent! Sure I shall outlast him:
This makes me young again, a score of years.

Being far more deaf than Volpone, he stumbles into ludicrous mistakes of Mosca's meaning, each of which is so contrived as to reveal his one absorbing preoccupation with the Fox's inheritance. It is only by stimulating his jealousy of Voltore that the parasite brings him to lay down a heavy bag of cash as goodwill offering. Then Mosca undertakes to induce Volpone to execute a will in his favour; but in order to ensure success, would it not be well if Corbaccio should also make a will in favour of Volpone? So signal a mark of devotion is certain to clinch the dying man's gratitude. Corbaccio doubts for a moment whether he can disinherit his son; but Mosca urges that Volpone is sure to die first. That argument cannot be resisted, and Corbaccio adopts the plan as though he had invented it:—

Corb. He must pronounce me his?
Mos. 'Tis true.
Corb. This plot
Did I think on before.
Mos. I do believe it.
Corb. Do you not believe it?
Mos. Yes, sir.
Corb. Mine own project.
Mos. Which, when he hath done, sir——
Corb. Published me his heir?
Mos. And you so certain to survive him——
Corb. Ay.
Mos. Being so lusty a man——
Corb. 'Tis true.
Mos. Yes, sir——
Corb. I thought on that too. See how he should be
The very organ to express my thoughts!
Mos. You have not only done yourself a good——
Corb. But multiplied it on my son.
Mos. 'Tis right, sir.
Corb. Still, my invention.

Corbaccio departs to execute the unnatural will, no less gulled than Voltore before him. Then, while Mosca and his patron are performing an interlude of mutual flattery and joy at their successful villainy, a third harpy interrupts them. This time it is the spruce young merchant Corvino. He is the most contemptible and reckless of the set, swallowing any bait, committing himself to plans for Volpone's murder more openly than Corbaccio, ready, as we shall see, to merge his ruling passion of jealousy and to drown his honour in the madness of his gold-lust. Corvino has brought a fine pearl for his present. Volpone faintly murmurs *Signor Corvino!* while his fingers shut upon the jewel. This raises Corvino's suspicion. Can he talk freely in the bedchamber?

> *Corv.* Does he not perceive us?
> *Mos.* No more than a blind harper. He knows no man,
> No face of friend, nor name of any servant;
> Who 'twas that fed him last or gave him drink.

Corvino, whom Jonson has made a gross and brutal fellow in the prime of vulgar manhood, in order to contrast him with the lean greediness of Voltore and Corbaccio's senile delirium of covetousness, now pours loathsome invectives into Volpone's ears. Mosca flatters this humour to the bent, heaping hideous imprecations on the prostrate man. Yet, when Corvino departs, Volpone's cynicism is so marble-hard that he only applauds the gruesome comedy which should have made him tremble. He leaps from his bed, tired, but satisfied with his morning's imposture.

> My divine Mosca!
> Thou hast to-day outgone thyself. [*Knocking within.*] Who's there?

> I will be troubled with no more. Prepare
> Me music, dances, banquets, all delights;
> The Turk is not more sensual in his pleasures
> Than will Volpone.

Mosca goes out and returns with the news that Lady Would-be, wife to an English knight, seeks an interview. This time she must content herself with being Lady Cannot-be; for Volpone will have none of her, though it is hinted that she is ready to give him everything. He spends an hour more agreeably by listening to Mosca's glowing description of Celia—the young, beautiful, and virtuous wife of Corvino. And thus the first act closes.

In this act Jonson has introduced us to the chief personages of the drama. They are drawn with grim precision, in bold lines, as ugly and as natural as the dwarfs and monarchs of Velasquez. Also, their work has been cut out for them; and the mention of Celia in the last scene prepares us for what follows in the second act.

The tying and unloosing of the plot in this misnomered comedy shall be related more briefly. Volpone, obeying his humour for fantastic pleasure and extravagant disguises, goes forth to win a sight of Celia. He attires himself in the costume of a quack doctor, Mosca in that of the charlatan's drudge. They set up their platform under Corvino's windows. Volpone acts the mountebank with such spirit that Celia is drawn to the balcony, and while she takes her pastime of the crowd, her husband rushes in and drags her to a back room with brutal insults. The man is here revealed under the violent pressure of coarse jealousy, just at the very

moment when he will be made to sacrifice his honour to his avarice. Mosca is sent to work upon his master-passion; for the sight of Celia has persuaded Volpone that she and none but she can satisfy his appetite. Corvino then is told by Mosca that the mountebank's powders have revived the Fox, and that nothing is wanting to his cure but the warmth of an Abishag to comfort his decrepitude. The doctors and the legacy-hunters are vying with each other in offering their nearest relatives.

> *Mos.* They are all
> Now striving who shall first present him; therefore—
> . . . . . Have you no kinswoman?
> Odso! Think, think, think, think, think, think, sir.
> One of the doctors offered there his daughter.
> *Corv.* . . . . . I will prevent him. Wretch!
> Covetous wretch! Mosca, I have determined.
> *Mos.* How, sir?
> *Corv.* We'll make all sure. The party you wot of
> Shall be mine own wife, Mosca.

After this master-stroke of villainy, we do not wonder at Mosca's breaking into a soliloquy upon his superiority to common city-parasites and trencher-scrapers.

Meanwhile the plot is now in full swing. Corvino drags his outraged wife with blows and gross taunts to Volpone's bedside. When he has withdrawn, the Fox throws off his mask and falls at Celia's feet:—

> Nay, fly me not,
> Nor let thy false imagination
> That I was bed-rid make thee think I am so;
> Thou shalt not find it. I am now as fresh,
> As hot, as high, and in as jovial plight
> As when, in that so celebrated scene,
> At recitation of our comedy,
> For entertainment of the great Valois,
> I acted young Antinous.

This introduces a scene, in which Jonson has given rein to his peculiar fancy. Every word used by Volpone to ply Celia, every voluptuous image he suggests, is drawn from some repository of antique conceits; but these are so fused and interwoven that they appear to be the natural utterance of a hoary sybarite's desire. She, who had shrunk with horror from the bed of a diseased and drivelling old man, sees before her an eloquent and insidious seducer. She shrieks for succour; and at her cries Bonario, Corbaccio's son, appears to rescue her. This young man had been hidden in a gallery by Mosca, in order that he might be witness to the act whereby his father meant to disavow and disinherit him. The parasite, it seems, had hoped to work upon his natural resentment so that he should commit some act of violence—either murder Corbaccio or compromise himself by yielding to his own fury. I shall take occasion, later on, to criticise this motive on its artistic merits; for the present, it is enough to point out that it brings about the first catastrophe in the drama.

Volpone stands unmasked. Bonario carries off the rescued lady. And at this juncture Voltore appears, while Corbaccio comes hobbling in with his will signed and attested. It looks as though the Fox were at his last gasp. But Mosca rises to the occasion. He has been wounded in the scuffle with Bonario. Now he takes both victims of gold-lust in hand. Voltore is persuaded that Corbaccio's will was meant to swell Volpone's fortune in the lawyer's interest. Corbaccio is made to believe that his son has been lurking in the palace to take his father's life before it was too late to save his own estate. Corvino has also to be settled;

but Mosca works with ease upon the grossness of his avaricious appetite. The three legacy-hunters, hating each other as they do, yet severally blinded by their covetousness, are combined into one band to extricate Volpone from his difficulties. They have to swear that Celia and Bonario have been guilty lovers, and that each was practising against the Fox in his own palace. These parts they play in open court, the one vying against the other in false-swearing and in ventilating his own shame. Lady Would-be is dragged opportunely into the same meshes of intrigue, and gives suspicious testimony to Celia's public wantonness. Mosca drives the discordant team with consummate skill and audacity. They perjure themselves, repudiate their kindred, stamp the brand of dishonour on their foreheads, labouring with avidity to win Volpone and secure his fortune, in their blindness, each for his own self. The fixed idea of wealth to be inherited has taken hold upon their brains, and, like clockwork, they strike true to the machinery invented for them.

Justice is baffled for the moment. Under the deluge of adroitly prepared false witness, the judges, who were favourable to Bonario and Celia, admit that a monstrous case has been made out against them. Volpone, who appeared in court bed-ridden, is carried home to his palace, and there he hugs Mosca for the success of their deeply laid plots. This opens the fifth act; and here, in a sense, the drama is concluded. But it was required by Jonson's plan that poetical justice should be done, and that the Fox should finally be caught. The poet has heaped ignominy on the legacy-hunters. But he leaves two innocent persons, Bonario and Celia,

under unmerited disgrace. His work will not be finished until Volpone and the parasite have been taken in their own toils. At this juncture he calls the Até of the gods, the insolence of guilty creatures swollen with their own conceit, to the aid of his languishing intrigue. Volpone is so intoxicated with the triumph of his craft, so contemptuous of human nature, that he resolves to indulge his cynicism with a new trick. He feigns death, and gives to Mosca a will in which the parasite's name is inserted as sole heir. The *captatores* scent the carcass. First comes Voltore; then Corbaccio, carried in a chair; next Corvino; lastly, Lady Would-be. Mosca receives them in the palace, allowing them to dangle at his heels. He holds an inventory in his hands, which he checks by items in the several apartments. They raise a fugue of clamorous entreaties to see the will, each firmly believing that his name will be written there, to the exclusion of the rest. Mosca, at last, flings the deed over his shoulder, and the fugue becomes a chorus in unison of indignant objurgation. Mosca, meanwhile, goes on with his inventory: 'Two cabinets, one of ebony, the other mother-of-pearl—I am very busy; good faith, it is a fortune thrown on me—Item, one salt of onyx—not of my seeking.' One after the other they pounce down upon him. But he has the sting of the epigram for each. To Lady Would-be:—

> Remember what your ladyship offered me,
> To be his heir!

To Corvino:—

> You are
> A declared cuckold . . . .
> Go home, be melancholy too, or mad.

To Corbaccio:—

> Are you not he, that filthy, covetous wretch,
> With the three legs, that here, in hope of prey,
> Have any time this three years snuffed about
> With your most grovelling nose, and would have lured
> Me to the poisoning of my patron, sir.

All shrink away except Voltore, who has not yet received his answer. He still clings with the tenacity of a rapacious bird of prey to his imagined quarry. Mosca affects to ignore him:—

> Why, who are you?
> What! who did send for you? O, cry you mercy,
> Reverend sir! Good faith, I am grieved for you,
> That any chance of mine should thus defeat
> Your (I must needs say) most deserving travails.

At last he beats him off with insolence; but the heavy-pinioned Vulture is sent flying on an errand which shall break the over-strained meshes of the close net woven round him.

Volpone, as usual, has witnessed this comedy of thwarted passions from his hiding-place. He now concerts new schemes with Mosca for the bantering of his victims, yielding yet once again to the intoxication of self-conceit. Mosca is to assume the robes of a Magnifico; his master the dress of a common sheriff's officer. Thus attired, they roam the streets of Venice, jeering at the disappointed *captatores*. The game, however, has been carried too far. It is the hour at which Bonario and Celia have to receive sentence from the judges. All the actors of the drama assemble in court, led by various curiosities. Then, to the surprise of every one, Voltore, who has been maddened by disappointment and en-

venomed against his rivals, declares the stratagem by which the guiltless pair have been drawn to the verge of ruin. Still, the intrigue is not ripe for its catastrophe. Volpone, beginning to suspect that Mosca may play him false, whispers to the advocate that he is yet alive. Voltore, responding to his dominant motive, upon this hint that he may still inherit, repudiates what he has just delivered, and pretends that witchcraft has deprived him of his reason. The judges know not what course to take. The accused stand waiting for their sentence. It seems as though no issue from the deadlock could be found. But at this moment Mosca, who has hitherto been absent, enters the court. Volpone runs to him, as to his last resource of safety. He is met with boxes on the ears :—

> What busy knave is this? . . . .
> Whose drunkard is this same? speak, some that know him .
> I never saw his face.

Mosca is playing now at high stakes. Of course he recognises his patron, and he offers, in asides, to compound with him for half of Volpone's estate. But the tension is too great for compromise. Fox and parasite are equally whirled away upon the tide of the moment. The judges take the dispute into their own hands, and order Volpone to be whipped, that he may bear himself discreetly to a gentleman in Mosca's position. Up to the last, thus Jonson scourged society's adulation of wealth; for here are the Venetian officers of justice bending before an enriched parasite. The insult rouses one hot drop of noble blood in Volpone's veins. Rather than tolerate such indignity, he will declare all. It is

only the affair of throwing off his disguise. This he does, and in one moment the whole plot is dissolved.

> I am Volpone, and this is my knave.
> [*Pointing to Mosca.*

Nothing more remains but the vindication of the innocent, and a proper apportionment of punishments to the guilty.

What most excites admiration in 'Volpone' is the sustained vigour of the action, and the ingenuity of the fable. Few extant plays exhibit so closely connected an intrigue. The mechanic force and versatility of invention which are lavished on the framework of this comedy suffice to carry the reader or spectator onward to its unforeseen conclusion. Yet some objections may be taken to the plot. As Dryden first pointed out, the unity of action is not well preserved; one motive being exhausted at the end of act iv., 'the second forced from it in act v.' The slight and meagre under-plot of Sir Politick Would-be and his wife (which I have omitted in my analysis, except in so far as Lady Would-be affects Volpone) is superfluous and tolerably tedious. But the heaviest blot upon Jonson's construction remains to be noted. He has suggested no adequate motive for Mosca's introduction of Bonario into Volpone's palace, at the moment when Corbaccio is coming to execute his will, and Celia is being brought by her unworthy husband. Bonario's presence there was necessary for the conduct of the intrigue. But this circumstance hangs upon so fine a thread of calculation in Mosca's brain, that we must regard it as not sufficiently accounted for. In all other respects, the use which

Jonson has made of base passions as the cords of human conduct in this drama may be looked upon as masterly; and the skill with which he has woven them into a comic net of serried strength is indubitable. The spectacle, alas! is too grisly. Nature rebels against it. We do not easily or willingly believe that men and women are such as Jonson painted them. We rise from the study of 'Volpone,' as we do from that of some of Balzac's masterpieces, with the sense that all these human reptiles, true enough in their main points to life, yet over-fattened in the vast slime of the poet's brain, represent actual humanity less than they personate ideals, which the potent intellect, brooding upon one vice of man's frail being, has diversified into a score of splendidly imagined specimens.

THE SILENT WOMAN.

I treated 'Volpone, or The Fox' by analysis; and it is possible that those who honour human nature may resent the stringency of that method in so terrible an instance. It was, however, necessary to show Jonson in his strength. In dealing with 'Epicoene, or The Silent Woman,' I can choose the method of description. Here we breathe a lighter atmosphere. The play is still more subtly woven; the art is even more 'intense and burning.' But the subject-matter is no longer wickedness beyond the comic poet's lawful scope. We frolic in a sphere of foibles and mirth-moving eccentricities of humour.

'The Silent Woman' received a splendid eulogy

from Dryden. 'I prefer it before all other plays, I think justly, as I do its author, in judgment, above all other poets.' In his 'Essay of Dramatic Poetry' he submitted this comedy to close examination, praising 'the copiousness and well-knitting of the intrigue,' the skill with which the characters are introduced to notice before they appear upon the stage, and the continual heightening of the interest. It has for him the highest value, because the unities are strictly, yet naturally, observed, and the connection or *liaison* of scene with scene is perfect. The action is complete within the space of twelve hours. It takes place almost entirely in the rooms of a single house; and each incident contributes to the final catastrophe. Lastly, the plot, when it has reached a point of apparently hopeless entanglement, is suddenly and triumphantly unravelled by a disclosure which satisfies all conditions of easy *dénouement*, and has the further merit of casting ridicule upon the false pretences of the minor characters.

Like all of Jonson's works, 'The Silent Woman' illustrates the constructive ability of its author rather than the laws of artistic growth from within. We can see how it has been put together. We do not watch it expanding and spreading fantastic boughs like a comedy of Aristophanes. Yet the architecture is so flawless that the connection of each part seems to be inevitable. From the interlude between acts i. and ii. of 'The Magnetic Lady,' we know that Jonson attached much value to Aristotle's rules for the formation of a comedy; and Dryden has devoted some pages of his essay to an analysis of these rules, which are admirably illustrated by 'The Silent Woman.' Though their terms have a

pedantic sound for modern ears, I shall call attention to them here, if only for the purpose of introducing my readers to the sphere of ideas in which the poet moved when he created this play. The Protasis, or first part of a drama, sets forth the persons. The Epitasis, or working up of the plot, puts the action into movement. The Catastasis gives the height or full growth of the play, at which point the action is perplexed, and what seemed easy of achievement is deferred by obstacles. The Catastrophe, or the *dénouement*, sets all straight, and brings things back to such a state as enables the first expectations of the audience, founded upon their judgment of the persons and the plot, to be satisfied by the natural conclusion of the action. The divisions here indicated are not merely arbitrary. Some such arrangement and coherence of parts will be observed in all good plays; it is, for instance, the importance of the Catastasis which makes French critics insist so strongly on the claims of the Fourth Act. Nowhere is this order more nicely observed than in 'The Silent Woman.'

Though so artfully constructed, 'Epicoene' rather deserves the name of a Titanic farce than of a just comedy. It does not, like 'Volpone,' exhibit a ruling vice, but exposes a ludicrous personal peculiarity in the main actor. On Morose's horror of noise every incident is made to hinge, and the various humours of the minor characters are severally related to this leading motive. The satire of the play is superficial. A conceited fop, a boastful poetaster, and a Ladies' College, or Society of Précieuses Ridicules, whom Jonson displays as a peculiarly vulgar set of coarse and pretentious women, furnish but slight themes for ethical censure. Jonson's

object was to make us laugh. On the stage of Pandemonium devils might have laughed at 'Volpone.' It is difficult to imagine a human audience deriving mere amusement from that spectacle of enormous wickedness. But 'The Silent Woman' stirs genial mirth in an ever increasing degree; and what may also here be added, the manners and conversation of the persons in this play, especially of the young men, are both more natural and more entertaining than is common with Jonson. As Dryden remarked, 'he has here described the conversation of gentlemen with more gaiety, air, and freedom, than in the rest of his comedies.'

Morose is a churlish old man of good fortune, who hates his nephew, and refuses to make him any reasonable allowance. His nerves are morbidly sensitive to noise, and he spends his life chiefly in securing himself against this special annoyance. It is the object of Dauphine, his nephew, to wring a portion of the curmudgeon's wealth from him by working on his susceptibility. Before we meet with Morose, we are informed that he 'hath chosen a street to lie in so narrow at both ends that it will receive no coaches nor carts nor any of these common noises.' He carries on a guerilla warfare against fish-wives, chimney-sweepers, orange-women, costermongers, broom-men, and other street-criers. Smiths, armorers, and braziers are not suffered by him to live in the same parish. 'He would have hanged a pewterer's prentice, once upon a Shrove-Tuesday's riot, for being of that trade, when the rest were quit.' His sitting-room has double doors and treble ceilings; quilts and beds are nailed against the house-door; inside, the shutters are closed, the window-

cracks caulked, the staircase laid with mattresses. Here Morose lives by candlelight. One footman has been turned away because his shoes creaked. The new servant, Mute, wears list upon his soles, and communicates with his master by dumb-show. But though Morose devotes all his energies to avoiding noise, he loves the sound of his own voice, and preaches interminable sermons to his valet on the virtue of silence. 'All discourses but my own afflict me; they seem harsh, impertinent, irksome.'

Dryden says that Jonson studied this fantastic character from a real person. Gifford has traced it to a passage in Libanius. The admirable spirit with which the humour is maintained makes it both natural and original. Wherever he derived the hint, Morose is Jonson's own.

The misanthropist has resolved to balk his nephew's expectations by marrying and getting an heir to his estate. The problem is how to secure a noiseless wife; for nothing is more notorious than woman's garrulity. Dauphine, becoming acquainted with his uncle's intention, forms a plot, which he conducts with admirable skill, to catch Morose in a trap. He conceals the point of it even from the friends and accomplices whom he summons to his aid. But we, who are neither agents nor spectators, may forestall the catastrophe, and declare at once that Dauphine has dressed a comely page in woman's clothes, and placed him in lodgings near his uncle's house. Epicoene, as the lad is called, assumes silence so discreet that it only relaxes under urgent necessity into whispered monosyllables. Her fame reaches Morose. After an interview, in which he is

charmed to find that he can barely catch the few words she utters, he determines to marry her off-hand.

When Dauphine receives intelligence of this resolve, he summons his accomplices; and these, we must remember, are unconscious of his project. They obey his whim, as they think, for the mere persecution of Morose. Clerimont and Truewit, the companions of his youth, first answer to the summons. Then come Sir John Daw, the poetaster; and Amorous La Foole, the fop. Otter, a rowdy captain and bear-leader, with his notable wife, joins the gang. Three ladies collegiate—Mistress Haughty, Centaure, and Dol Mavis—follow scent. Dauphine is able to turn the whole kennel loose upon his uncle by the fortunate circumstance that La Foole has invited them to eat at Captain Otter's. It is only necessary that they should transfer their company to the house of Morose. And for this they have a good excuse, inasmuch as Epicoene is known as a girl to all of them, and she will naturally expect congratulations on her wedding-day.

Dauphine has, however, no intention of allowing misfortunes to fall pell-mell upon his uncle. The old man must be brought by degrees to mortification. Accordingly this portion of the comedy exhibits the young man's skill in marshalling the troops which are destined to make Morose capitulate. No sooner has the wedding been completed, and the parson sent about his business, than Epicoene finds her tongue. The bridegroom objects that he had not bargained for his wife's eloquence in the marriage contract. She cuts him short: 'What! did you think you had married a statue—one of the French puppets with the eyes turned

with a wire?' Then she pours forth such a wordy deluge that he relapses, groaning: 'She is my regent already. I have married a Penthesilea, a Semiramis, and sold my liberty to a distaff.' This is only the beginning of his troubles. When the nuptial altercation is at its height, Truewit enters, loudly complimenting the bride and congratulating Morose. Sir John Daw, with four of the ladies, next makes his appearance; and the dialogue becomes an orchestral symphony in seven pronounced parts. Not one of the vocal instruments plays 'piano,' for each of the unwelcome visitors has taken his cue from Dauphine. Epicoene receives them all with boisterous cordiality; while Morose is fain to sit apart, drawing a treble nightcap over his forehead and stopping both his ears. The guests ply him in his corner, shake him by the elbow, complain there are no gloves, no bride-cake, no music, no masque. While they are rating him for meanness and rusticity, Clerimont arrives to remedy the bridegroom's negligence with a variety of bands, which strike up all together. La Foole and his attendants, at the same time, pass across the stage rattling knives and forks, and carrying a banquet for the wedding company. They are closely followed by Captain Otter, with his bull and bear and horse, and their accompanying drums and fifes. The dissonance gathers in complexity and volume. Fiddles squeak, trumpets bray, beasts begin to growl. The women scream and giggle in one corner; in another, Captain Otter organises a drinking-bout, stamping on the floor, and bellowing to his boon companions *Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero pulsanda tellus!* Morose can only groan out lamentable 'Ohs' and 'Ahs,' his feeble

execrations being drowned in the infernal hubbub round him. At last he runs away and hides; but the uproar swells to a climax. Mrs. Otter quarrels with her husband; the howls of conjugal battle rise above the clatter of contending voices and the piercing music of the trump and fife. This 'crescendo' is suddenly cut short by the maddened Morose descending from his lurking-place, and scattering the tormentors with a drawn sword.

They only part to recombine. But, in the lucid interval of dearly purchased quiet, Morose is driven to seek sympathy from Dauphine. While he is pouring forth his woes into that perfidious ear, Epicoene rushes in and overwhelms him with inquiries about his health. It is of no use to answer that he is quite well. She pursues him with solicitous endearments: his staring eyes, his pallid cheeks—what do they mean? Then the chorus bursts on his devoted head. Every known malady is suggested, and the most preposterous remedies are recommended. After a prolonged altercation over his stunned person, all agree in prescribing a continuous course of reading aloud. This charms Epicoene. What could be more fitting than that a devoted wife should read her afflicted husband to rest? Morose feebly remonstrates, and begs to be allowed to sleep at least in peace. But no, his bride must be his bedfellow; and he now hears, with despair, for the first time, that she talks volubly in her sleep, and snores like a porpoise.

In his anguish he bethinks him of divorce. Rushing from his house, he goes in search of counsel. But long retirement has rendered him so helpless that he returns bewildered by the jargon of the law courts. Dauphine seems to be his only mainstay; and Dauphine under-

takes to procure learned doctors, ecclesiastical and civil, who shall meet and advise at his own house. Two of the conspirators are accordingly disguised in legal robes and primed with Latin terms. They retire with Morose into a chamber apart, and confer upon the proper conduct of his divorce case. Their pedantic glosses, preambles, long-winded definitions, distinctions, and loud professional skirmishings are so wrought as to bring Morose to the verge of delirium. After many ineffectual attempts to find an adequate reason for putting away his wife, he is forced to plead his own incapacity. But at this moment of expected deliverance, Epicoene breaks in with all her company, screaming against the plot on foot against her rights, and vowing she will keep her spouse in spite of every defect. Morose scores nothing therefore by his ignominious admission. Meanwhile, Dauphine, by threats and cajolements, has induced Sir John Daw and La Foole severally to tax Epicoene with the granting of improper favours to them in past weeks of intimacy. The hopes of Morose are now again lifted high. Epicoene, for her part, shrieks hysterically; and all the women gather round her with sympathetic ululations. Then the lawyer raises his voice above the storm, and declares that, since Epicoene has not been faithless to her husband after marriage, there is no ground for divorce upon the plea of previous unchastity. Thus every chance of freedom from his bondage is cut off from the unhappy bridegroom. After the discreditable confession which he has falsely made, and the proof of immorality upon his wife's part, he is left wedded to a termagant for life.

That the knot should be cut appears impossible.

Only two of the persons concerned in the action, Dauphine and Epicoene, know the real state of the case. The rest are enjoying this bear-baiting of the miserable bridegroom; when Dauphine comes forward and swears to free his uncle, if he will allow him five hundred pounds a year and secure him the reversion of his estate. Morose, like a drowning man, catches greedily at the plank held out to him. Before witnesses he consents to his nephew's terms. Dauphine has nothing more to do than to reveal the sex of Epicoene. Morose fades away from us, infinitely relieved, to nurse his outraged sense of hearing. La Foole and Daw are covered with contempt for their pretensions to the favours of the girl who is now shown to be a strapping lad. The rest of the company retire hugely gratified by so burlesque a termination to so comical an entertainment. Not less contented are the spectators or the readers of this colossal farce; and the curtain falls upon a general satisfaction.

In a theatre of Jonson's period, the catastrophe must have afforded special amusement to the audience. Boys, as we well know, then played female parts. It was consequently pleasant to see a real boy acting the *rôle* of a boy who is disguised as a woman, and finally proved to be a boy in theatrical fact, which, both in travesty and earnest, he had all the time been truly. Such complications of the sexes on the stage, as might be amply proved from the Elizabethan drama, whetted the curiosity of play-goers; and here Jonson gave them a tangled knot to untie.

Yet Drummond, probably upon Jonson's information, relates that, 'When his play of a "Silent Woman" was

first acted, there was found verses after on the stage against him, concluding that that play was well named the silent woman, there was never one man to say Plaudite to it.'

THE ALCHEMIST.

In 'The Alchemist' we return from the region of broad farce to that of social satire. Yet the satire of this comedy is not so biting as that of 'Volpone.' Imposture and folly, instead of crime and heartlessness, are here attacked; and the plot has a burlesque termination, more pleasing than the almost tragic end of 'The Fox.'

Alchemy in Jonson's day was not a mere relic of antiquarian nonsense. It befooled the people still; and, in spite of royal edicts, could with difficulty be eradicated from their superstitious veneration. Those who are acquainted with the history of the Venetian Bragadino (about 1600) know to what an incredible extent courts and princes lent their weight to this delusion. Yet at the close of the sixteenth century it had lost its scientific or quasi-scientific aspect, and had become allied to the gross knaveries of sharpers, coney-catchers, quack-doctors, and horoscope-casters. Alchemy, therefore, like knight-errantry, now exposed itself to comic ridicule; and Jonson attempted to do for it what Cervantes in 'Don Quixote' had already done for the decayed forms of chivalrous enthusiasm. He was thoroughly acquainted with the books of the alchemists; and it appears that, at some period of his life, he had himself practised in fun upon the credulity of the public,

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rehearsing, as it were, the scenes which afterwards he invented for Subtle. As Drummond reports, 'He with the consent of a friend cozened a lady, with whom he had made an appointment, to meet an old astrologer in the suburbs, which she kept; and it was himself disguised in a long gown and a white beard, at the light of dim burning candles, up in a little cabinet reached unto by a ladder.'

In order to make this subject worthy of high comedy, it was needful to elevate the Alchemist into a type of all practisers by fraud on human folly. And herein Jonson succeeded. His hero Subtle, and the confederates Face and Doll, personify the scientific charlatan and solemn knave, with his indispensable accomplices, who will continue to flourish so long as nature is mysterious and mankind is gullible. In our age we find the breed plentifully represented by spiritualists, clairvoyants, theosophists, and thought-readers. Jonson, therefore, attained the object of comic satire. While exposing a contemporary phase of imposture and its corresponding credulity, he painted a picture which, deducting purely local colouring, remains true to the permanent facts of human roguery and weakness. And this he did by dwelling on the passions of Subtle's dupes. He shows how the desire to become suddenly rich, blending with hypocrisy, lust, stolid stupidity, vulgar craft, and mean ambition, bring the Puritan, the city knight, the grocer, the lawyer's clerk, and the little country squireen severally into the sharper's clutches.

The action of 'The Alchemist' is very simple. Master Lovewit, a widower, has left his town-house in the charge of a servant, Jeremy Face, and travelled into

the country for a change of scene. Face, in his master's absence, comes across a cheating rascal and his female accomplice, named Subtle and Doll. Subtle is a really clever rogue, and Doll a passably handsome wench. But they happen at this moment to be down upon their luck. Forming acquaintance with this pair and perceiving them to be kindred spirits, the caretaker of Master Lovewit's mansion suggests that they shall all three inhabit its empty rooms, and live upon their wits by gulling the public. This proposal exactly suits the out-at-elbow brace of sharpers; and when the play opens, we find the confederates ensconced in Lovewit's London house. Subtle has to act the part of charlatan, alchemist, astrologer, quack-doctor, chiromantist, metoposcopist, and what not. Face takes upon himself a double office. Inside the house, he is Subtle's understrapper, familiar, bellows-blower, drug-preparer, varlet, Ulen-Spiegel. Outside, he assumes the character of one of those dubious captains, who then infested taverns, ordinaries, play-houses, and the aisles of St. Paul's, on the beat for simpletons to fleece. In his latter capacity he brings dupes to Subtle, and in his former he helps Subtle to empty their pockets. Doll, meanwhile, stays at home, in readiness to make herself an enticing gentlewoman in distress, a flaunting mistress of the *demi-monde*, a queen of the fairies, or a maiden medium, as chance may require. Each taking a tolerably equal part in the imposture, they agree to share equally, working for a common purse and dividing its contents between them.

A variety of silly creatures fall into the snares of this virtuous trio. Dapper, the lawyer's clerk, who

wants a 'fly,' or familiar spirit, to make him win upon the turf and gain at games of hazard. Abel Drugger, the tobacconist and grocer, who believes his shop will prosper, if he can purchase planetary symbols for its timbers. Tribulation Wholesome and Ananias, two Puritans of Amsterdam, who traffic with the powers of darkness in the interests of their conventicle. Kastril, a country gentleman, ambitious of flying high in town, and winning for his widowed sister, Dame Pliant, an aristocratic second husband. These are the small fry who swarm round Subtle. But he also has a big carp by the gills. This is Sir Epicure Mammon, already rich enough, but inflated with visions of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice. At Mammon's heels hangs a candid friend, named Surly, far too familiar with this world's ways to let himself be duped. Surly is a practised gamester; and his cunning, set against that of the impostors, throws their schemes into confusion. At the height of the imbroglio, caused by Surly's interference, Lovewit returns to London. Face makes terms with him at first sight. The rogues and dupes are sent about their business. Lovewit wins Dame Pliant and her fortune; and the rascally servant is pardoned for the mirth afforded to his wit-loving master.

The first scene opens on Subtle and Face quarrelling like pickpockets. Modern readers of a popular book can hardly be expected to stomach their realistically coarse abuse. Otherwise, I would gladly have transcribed at length this altercation, which proves beyond doubt Jonson's power of painting in strong colours from the vulgar model. Hogarth's picture of the Rake in the French surgeon's consulting-room is not more

bluntly truthful; and when Doll bursts in, to rate both soundly, and remind them that there is honour even among thieves, her Newgate slang completes the faithful transcript from low life:—

> 'Sdeath, you abominable pair of stinkards,
> Leave off your barking, and grow one again,
> Or, by the light that shines, I'll cut your throats.
> I'll not be made a prey unto the marshal,
> For ne'er a snarling dog-bolt of you both.
> Have you together cozened all this while,
> And all the world, and shall it now be said
> You've made most courteous shift to cozen yourselves?

The reconciliation of Subtle with Face, following suddenly upon their quarrel, is no less naturally presented:

> *Sub.* I'll conform myself.
> *Dol.* Will you, sir? do so then, and quickly! Swear.
> *Sub.* What should I swear?
> *Dol.* To leave your faction, sir,
> And labour kindly in the common work.
> *Sub.* Let me not breathe if I meant aught beside.
> I only used those speeches as a spur
> To him.
> *Dol.* I hope we need no spurs, sir. Do we?
> *Face.* 'Slid, prove to-day, who shall shark best.
> *Sub.* Agreed.
> *Dol.* Yes, and work close and friendly.
> *Sub.* 'Slight, the knot
> Shall grow the stronger for this breach, with me.

By the firm touches of this opening scene we have the three rogues set before us in their worthlessness.

A knock at the house-door interrupts them; and the dupes begin to put in their appearance. The first is Dapper. Subtle has time to don his cap and velvet gown. Face receives the clerk, and acts a comedy with his confederate, persuading him with great apparent

difficulty to accept four angels as a fee. Dapper is a betting-man of the same kind as those clerks who now risk their salaries, and at times their master's money, on small turf transactions. Subtle pretends to see something extraordinary in the fool's face, and takes the captain aside:—

> *Sub.* Why, sir—— [*Offering to whisper Face.*
> *Face.* No whispering.
> *Sub.* Fore heaven, you not apprehend the loss
> You do yourself in this.
> *Face.* Wherein? for what?
> *Sub.* Marry, to be so importunate for one,
> That, when he has it, will undo you all:
> He'll win up all the money in the town.
> *Face.* How?
> *Sub.* Yes, and blow up gamester after gamester,
> As they do crackers in a puppet-play.
> If I do give him a familiar,
> Give you him all you play for; never set him:
> For he will have it.
> *Face.* You are mistaken, doctor.
> Why, he does ask one but for cups and horses,
> A rifling fly; none of your great familiars.
> *Dap.* Yes, captain, I would have it for all games.

Thus Dapper, who has been allowed to overhear their whispering, is cozened into paying down his uttermost farthing for a spirit which shall make him master of the company he plays with. He resolves at once to leave the law, and puts himself blindly in the hands of the wheedling rascals.

On the heels of Dapper comes another gull, the tobacconist Drugger. He invokes necromancy for instructions where to make his door, where to put up his shelves, and which to use for pots, and which for boxes. Face warrants him for an honest fellow:—

> Doctor, do you hear?
> This is my friend, Abel, an honest fellow;
> He lets me have good tobacco, and he does not
> Sophisticate it with sack-lees or oil,
> Nor washes it in muscadel or grains,
> Nor buries it in gravel, under ground,
> Wrapp'd up in greasy leather, or piss'd clouts:
> But keeps it in fine lily pots, that, open'd,
> Smell like conserve of roses or French beans.
> He has his maple block, his silver tongs,
> Winchester pipes, and fire of juniper:
> A neat, spruce, honest fellow, and no goldsmith.

Subtle angles for him as he did for Dapper. He pretends by metoposcopy to discern wonderful signs of good luck in his forehead, and by chiromancy reads future greatness in his finger nails. The first act is occupied with these minor characters, both of whom play their part in the development of the plot, and serve meanwhile to prepare us for the real hero of the piece. This is Sir Epicure Mammon, whose loud, coarse, strident voice is heard when the curtain rises for the second act. He and his friend Surly have just entered the sharper's lodging:—

> Come on, sir. Now you set your foot on shore
> In Novo Orbe; here's the rich Peru:
> And there within, sir, are the golden mines,
> Great Solomon's Ophir! he was sailing to
> Three years, but we have reached it in ten months.
> This is the day, wherein, to all my friends,
> I will pronounce the happy word, BE RICH;
> THIS DAY YOU SHALL BE SPECTATISSIMI.

After drawing money from the knight on various pretences of making experiments in the transmutation of metals, Surly has felt himself compelled at last to promise the projection of the philosopher's stone for this

day. He and Face count meanwhile on Mammon's grosser nature for putting him off with a failure. As his name denotes, the greedy monster is no less a slave to his sensual appetites than to his thirst for money; and here lies the secret of their plot to cozen him.

Mammon is the twin-brother of Tamburlaine in his extravagant conceits. Compact of lust and avarice, he revels in the wildest dreams of luxury and wealth; vows that he will buy up all the mines of Cornwall and transmute their lead and copper into gold; that the voluptuous pictures which

> Tiberius took
> From Elephantis, and dull Aretine
> But coldly imitated,

shall burn upon his palace walls; that the feasts and sports of insolent Rome shall be repeated in his revelries; that he will lie on beds blown up with air and clothe himself in robes of cobweb texture. With the strength of the elixir of eternal youth, he will rival Hercules in feats of brawny sensuality. London shall be freed from plague by daily distribution of the precious draught. Waxing intoxicate with his own visions of a bestial joy, he swears he will have none but virtuous wives for mistresses, fathers for go-betweens, divines for parasites, the burghers of the city for fools, the Don Juans of the Court for eunuchs. His wealth shall purchase every delicacy that the most preposterous fancy can devise to sate the palate:—

> My meat shall all come in, in Indian shells,
> Dishes of agate set in gold and studded
> With emeralds, sapphires, hyacinths, and rubies.
> The tongues of carps, dormice, and camel's heels,
> Boil'd in the spirit of sol, and dissolv'd pearl,

> Apicius' diet, 'gainst the epilepsy:
> And I will eat these broths with spoons of amber,
> Headed with diamond and carbuncle.
> My foot-boy shall eat pheasants, calver'd salmons,
> Knots, godwits, lampreys: I myself will have
> The beards of barbels served, instead of sallads;
> Oil'd mushrooms; and the swelling unctuous paps
> Of a fat pregnant sow, newly cut off,
> Drest with an exquisite and poignant sauce;
> For which, I'll say unto my cook, *There's gold,*
> *Go forth, and be a knight.*

Charles Lamb observes with justice: 'If there be no one image which rises to the height of the sublime, yet the confluence and assemblage of them all produces an effect equal to the grandest poetry.' It was in such a character as this of Mammon's that the fervour of Jonson's genius, fusing the varied substances of learning into burnished Corinthian brass, displayed itself to best advantage. He piled Pelion upon Ossa of accumulated details; marshalled cloud after cloud across the sky of fancy, till the whole range of vision was canopied and rendered gorgeous by superincumbent masses of glowing imagery. It is of little moment to demur that Mammon's day-dreams are incongruous with his quality of a City knight, and that half of what he says is borrowed from the Augustan Histories. Jonson was depicting a hyperbolical character; and it served his purpose to gather the vices and luxuries of all nations into one delirious vision. Sir Epicure Mammon exhibits in his rhetoric the calenture of a brain inflamed by the expectation of absolutely illimitable power over nature. His fever is fed by all the items of sensuality which he has gathered from commerce with men and books. Not a single jot or tittle of the monstrous compound lies

beyond the reach of one who holds the magic stone and quaffs the goblet of perpetual youth. The exorbitance of Mammon's fancy sinks into nothing when compared with the extravagance of the idea by which it was excited. And yet we know that this idea possessed thousands in Renaissance Europe. Riches and the long years of a toilsome life had been lavished in every capital on the mad quest. Bold spirits, after finding despair among the cinders of their furnace and the dust of their alembics, had spread adventurous sails for El Dorado. Mammon, in his lunes, merely rose to the height of the insanity, which men of feebler covetousness narrowed to the probabilities of common life. Dapper wanted "a fly," to cheat at horse-races. Drugger asked for astrological symbols, to improve his trade. The elders of Amsterdam, whose acquaintance we have yet to make, were for buying up tongs and shovels to transmute, and were meditating some small revolution in the English Church—not grasping the conception that, if they really held the stone and the elixir, they might purchase counties or continents, change the laws of society, and deal at pleasure with the foundations of human nature. Surly interrupts his friend in the full flow of eloquence :—

> *Sur.* And do you think to have the stone with this ?
> *Mam.* No, I do think t'have all this with the stone.
> *Sur.* Why, I have heard, he must be *homo frugi*,
> A pious, holy, and religious man,
> One free from mortal sin, a very virgin.
> *Mam.* That makes it, sir ; he is so : but I buy it ;
> My venture brings it me. He, honest wretch,
> A notable, superstitious, good soul,
> Has worn his knees bare, and his slippers bald,
> With prayer and fasting for it ; and, sir, let him

Do it alone, for me, still. Here he comes.
Not a profane word afore him: 'tis poison.

This introduces Subtle in his character of sanctimonious devotee to philanthropic science. Maddened by his own imagination, Mammon had omitted to reflect how unlikely it was that a sage who could perform the miracles he momently expected, would work for so arrogant, insolent, and crassly ignorant a brute as himself. The affectation of holiness, unselfishness, and purity was the backdoor by which impostors of Subtle's type secured their retreat. They knew that the Mammons of this world came to them with lust and greed in their souls; but they overlooked this, and impressed on their neophytes the absolute necessity of a clean heart and a disinterested spirit. At the same time they took care to throw temptation in their way; and Doll Common was the vulgar trap in which our Alchemist caught Sir Epicure. The dupe meanwhile fondly fancied that if he kept his secret lust concealed until the projection was accomplished, all would go well. Subtle is at pains to warn Mammon. Scarcely have they exchanged good morrow than he reads him this lecture:—

Son, I doubt
You are covetous, that thus you meet your time
In the just point: prevent your day at morning.
This argues something, worthy of a fear
Of importune and carnal appetite.
Take heed you do not cause the blessing leave you,
With your ungovern'd haste. I should be sorry
To see my labours, now even at perfection,
Got by long watching and large patience,
Not prosper where my love and zeal hath placed them.
Which (heaven I call to witness, with yourself,
To whom I have pour'd my thoughts) in all my ends,

> Have look'd no way, but unto public good,
> To pious uses, and dear charity,
> Now grown a prodigy with men. Wherein
> If you, my son, should now prevaricate,
> And, to your own particular lusts employ
> So great and catholic a bliss, be sure
> A curse will follow, yea, and overtake
> Your subtle and most secret ways.

Mammon lyingly replies:—

> I assure you,
> I shall employ it all in pious uses,
> Founding of colleges and grammar schools,
> Marrying young virgins, building hospitals,
> And now and then a church.

The Alchemist, who is aware that Face has established an intrigue between Doll and the knight, can now confidently appoint a solemn hour when the great work shall be accomplished. Mammon departs, and returns true to the hour of his appointment, but with the guilt of his flirtation with Doll upon his conscience. A crash is heard; crucibles fly into the air; Subtle swoons, and, waking from his trance, inveighs so solemnly against the lust which frustrated his watchings, labours, and pious intentions, that Mammon has humbly to beg pardon of the man who hoaxed him.

Apart from the characters of Subtle, Face, and Mammon, the chief interest of this play centres in Jonson's treatment of the Puritans. He was the avowed foe of their hypocrisy, the remorseless satirist of their inurbane manners, and the witty caricaturist of their canting phraseology. The two who figure in 'The Alchemist' are powerfully etched with sharp burin strokes, deeply bitten into the copper-plate. Tribula-

tion Wholesome and Ananias, this pair of worthies, form together a gross compendium of ignorance, superstition, coarse spiritual covetousness, intolerance, mendacity, and reptile casuistry. It would be painful, but for the artist's light of comic humour shed upon the loathsome objects of his satire, to approach them. Whether Jonson was fair to the Puritans, as he had learned to know them, is a problem now beyond dispute. Yet, when I consider that it is not altogether difficult to find a match for these personages in contemporary life, I am inclined to give my vote in favour of Jonson's veracity.

Tribulation plays the part of general referee and divine instructor to his sect. He is withal their ambassador, man of business, and 'very zealous pastor.' Ananias is younger, more fervid, more pugnacious, more crassly stupid and intransigeant, more profoundly ill-educated and incapable of mundane courtesies. Wholesome argues with this deacon upon the need of using Subtle in order to procure money for the godly cause. The whelp whines answer:—

> In pure zeal
> I do not like the man; he is a heathen
> And speaks the language of Canaan truly.

Wholesome admits that Subtle is a profane person; but Ananias takes him up intemperately:—

> He bears
> The visible mark of the beast in his forehead;
> And for his stone, it is a work of darkness,
> And with philosophy blinds the eyes of men.

The fact is that Ananias, with the acute nose of a hound, has smelt the fox in Subtle. Wholesome, who has more sophisticated instincts, plies his younger

brother with true Puritan Jesuistry. Is there not an art, he says, for making good come out of evil, for using impure means to propagate and fundamentally establish a holy cause? Ananias, touched in his major passion of covetousness, now declares that he has never been so edified before; and the two elders enter the Alchemist's sanctuary. Subtle receives Wholesome without superfluous ceremony, but his coldness turns to indignation at the sight of Ananias. In him he recognises an enemy of stubborn mettle, who has to be brow-beaten and subdued. The astuteness with which he alternately snubs the priggishness of Ananias, and plays upon his avarice, deserves all commendation. First he unfolds before his dupes a scheme of temporal and spiritual aggrandisement which absorbs them both, until the zeal of Ananias is offended by the mention of a bell: 'Bells are profane; a tune may be religious.' Again, when the word tradition is dropped, it rouses the conscientious scruples of the deacon: 'I hate traditions; I do not trust them.' Subtle and Face ply him with alchemistic jargon. Ananias snuffles out: 'I understand no heathen language, truly.' This makes Subtle mad:—

> Heathen! you knipper-doling! Is Ars Sacra,
> Or chrysopœia, or spagyria,
> Or the pamphysic or panarchic knowledge,
> A heathen language?

'Heathen Greek, I take it,' persists Ananias; 'all's heathen but the Hebrew.'

BARTHOLOMEW FAIR.

'Bartholomew Fair' is a pure farce, conceived in the spirit of rollicking mirth, and executed with colossal energy. It is no satire either of manners or of individuals, but a broad Dutch painting of the humours of a London Carnival, such as only a man bred from boyhood to the town could have produced. The personages are admirably studied and grouped together with consummate insight into dramatic effect. The proctor, with his pretty wife and puritanical mother-in-law; the sleek minister from Banbury, who woos the widow; the squire from Harrow, and his watchful attendant; the justice of the peace, for ever blundering in his preposterous disguises; the ginger-bread women and toyshop people; the greasy cook, who sells roast pig and carries on more questionable business; the bailiffs, watchmen, sharpers, and bullies, who abound in every booth; the puppet-show, the ballad singer, the madman, and the miscellaneous crowd of costermongers, porters, pickpockets, and passengers, compose one varied ever-moving kaleidoscope of human beings.

We are introduced into this motley crowd by a device which enables the playwright to contrast the coarse diversions of Smithfield with the canting squeamishness of the vulgar Puritans, who supply his scenes with their most lively humours. Dame Purecraft's daughter, Win-the-fight, married to doltish John Littlewit the proctor, is in an interesting situation, and manifests caprices pardonable in her state of health.

She has conceived an irresistible longing to eat roast pig at Bartholomew Fair. This, like the wrath of Achilles in the Iliad, is the motive-passion of the comedy. Roast pig at home will not content her. The pig on which her heart is set must be cooked and eaten in a booth at Smithfield. A matron like Dame Purecraft found herself thus placed in a position involving casuistry. On the one hand she dared not contradict her daughter's longings, however unreasonable they might be, and however unlawful this particular longing was according to her creed. She attempts at first the way of admonition and discouragement:—

> Look up, sweet Win-the-fight, and suffer not the enemy to enter you at this door; remember that your education has been with the purest. What polluted one was it that named first the unclean beast, pig, to you, child?

When Mrs. Littlewit has reluctantly admitted how the longing came upon her, Dame Purecraft resumes her godly exhortations:—

> O, resist it, Win-the-fight! It is the tempter, the wicked tempter, you may know it by the fleshly motion of the pig; be strong against it and its foul temptations, in these assaults, whereby it broacheth flesh and blood, as it were on the weaker side; and pray against its carnal provocations; good child, sweet child, pray.

Such pleading is, however, all to no purpose. Mrs. Littlewit is resolved to eat pig in a booth, or to ruin the hopes of her husband's posterity. In this difficulty her mother bethinks her of the godly man from Banbury, Brother Zeal-of-the-land Busy, who is sure to be equal to the problem:—

> What shall we do? Call our zealous brother Busy hither, for his faithful fortification in this charge of the adversary. Child, my dear child, you shall eat pig; be comforted, my sweet child.

At this point the audience are pretty well informed that Dame Purecraft herself has no insurmountable objection to pig in the abstract. But Win-the-fight will not ratify a bargain on these terms. Her longing is for pig at Smithfield; so she answers: —

Mrs. Lit.: Ay, but in the Fair, mother!
Pure.: I mean in the Fair, if it can be any way made or found lawful.

Meanwhile, Zeal-of-the-land Busy, one of the most unctuous creations of a comic poet's brain, has been discovered in the pantry, comforting himself with a glass of malmsey and a cut of cold turkey-pie. The pious man appears, wiping his lips, and is immediately appealed to by the widow:—

O, brother Busy! your help here, to edify and raise us up in a scruple; my daughter Win-the-fight is visited with a natural disease of women, called a longing to eat pig.

Mr. Littlewit, who has no less longing for Smithfield than his spouse, here puts in a word:—

Ay, sir, a Bartholomew pig; and in the Fair.

His mother-in-law takes him up:

And I would be satisfied from you, religiously-wise, whether a widow of the sanctified assembly, or a widow's daughter, may commit the act without offence to the weaker sisters.

Thus appealed to, the answer of the Rabbi, delivered doubtless in a rich baritone snuffle, is highly edifying, but hardly satisfactory to the persons concerned. Zeal-of-the-land has no objection to the eating of roast pig in itself. He sticks at the place where it must be eaten:—

Verily, for the disease of longing, it is a disease, a carnal disease, or appetite, incident to women; and as it is carnal and incident, it

is natural, very natural. Now pig, it is a meat, and a meat that is nourishing and may be longed for, and so consequently eaten; it may be eaten; very exceedingly well eaten: but in the Fair, and as a Bartholomew pig, it cannot be eaten; for the very calling it a Bartholomew pig, and to eat it so, is a spice of idolatry, and you make the Fair no better than one of the high-places. This, I take it, is the state of the question: a high-place.

True to her name, Win-the-fight persists in her determination; and Dame Purecraft is forced to consult the oracle once more for casuistical easements :—

Good brother Zeal-of-the-land, think to make it as lawful as you can.

This time, the oracle itself is smitten with the savoury temptation of pig at the Fair. He then replies with the same fulsome reiteration of phrases which marks the canting hypocrite :—

Surely, it may be otherwise, but it is subject to construction, subject, and hath a face of offence with the weak, a great face, a foul face; but that face may have a veil put over it, and be shadowed as it were; it may be eaten, and in the Fair, I take it, in a booth, the tents of the wicked: the place is not much, not very much, we may be religious in the midst of the profane, so it be eaten with a reformed mouth, with sobriety and humbleness; not gorged in with gluttony or greediness, there's the fear: for should she go there, as taking pride in the place, or delight in the unclean dressing, to feed the vanity of the eye, or lust of the palate, it were not well, it were not fit, it were abominable, and not good.

Having delivered himself of this convenient sophistry, Brother Busy invokes the spirit of zeal, and rhapsodises as follows :—

In the way of comfort to the weak, I will go and eat. I will eat exceedingly, and prophesy. There may be a good use made of it too now I think on't. By the public eating of swine's flesh, to

profess our hate and loathing of Judaism, whereof the brethren stand taxed. I will therefore eat, yea, I will eat exceedingly.

It was Jonson's invariable practice to introduce the main personages of his drama in the first act, and to set forth the leading comic motive with such clearness that the future conduct of the plot should involve no difficulties for the understanding. We are therefore now prepared, upon the opening of the second act, to find ourselves among the booths of Bartholomew Fair; and here we witness a series of diverting incidents in the expectation of soon returning to the company of our Puritan friends. This expectation is not frustrated; for in due time, though we have to wait for them until the first scene of the third act, Dame Purecraft and Mr. and Mrs. Littlewit, led by Rabbi Busy, are seen advancing with set faces through the booths:—

Busy: So, walk on in the middle way, foreright, turn neither to the right hand nor to the left; let not your eyes be drawn aside with vanity, nor your ears with noises.

The toy-sellers and apple-women gather round them; but the pious man continues his nasal exhortation:—

Look not toward them, hearken not; the place is Smithfield, or the field of smiths, the grove of hobby-horses and trinkets; the wares are the wares of devils, and the whole Fair is the shop of Satan. They are hooks and baits, very baits, that are hung out on every side to catch you, and to hold you as it were by the gills and by the nostrils, as the fisher doth. Therefore you must not look nor turn toward them. The heathen man could stop his ears with wax against the harlot of the sea; do you the like with your fingers against the bells of the beast.

But their object at the Fair is to eat pig; and how are they to find it if they do not use their eyes? The

proctor, who is a weak brother, takes this view, and stands stock still before Ursula's booth :—

Lit.: [*Gazing at the inscription.*] This is fine verily! HERE BE THE BEST PIGS; AND SHE DOES ROAST THEM AS WELL AS EVER SHE DID, the pig's head says!

Pure.: Son, were you not warned of the vanity of the eye? Have you forgot the wholesome admonition so soon?

Lit.: Good mother, how shall we find a pig, if we do not look about for 't? Will it run off o' the spit into our mouths, think you, as in Lubber land, and cry *wee wee?*

Busy's casuistry is equal to the occasion. He had warned his flock to close their ears and shut their eyes; but another sense might lead them no less surely to the object of their quest.

Busy: No, but your mother, religiously-wise, conceiveth it may offer itself by other means to the sense, as by way of steam, which I think it doth here in this place,—huh, huh—yes, it doth. [*He scents after it like a hound.*] And it were a sin of obstinacy, great obstinacy, high and horrible obstinacy, to decline or resist the good titillation of the famelic sense, which is the smell. Therefore be bold—huh, huh, huh—follow the scent: enter the tents of the unclean, for once, and satisfy your wife's frailty. Let your frail wife be satisfied; your zealous mother and my suffering self will also be satisfied.

To this admirable exposition he adds the further casuistical reflection, that 'we scape so much of the other vanities by our early entering'; and Dame Purecraft assents: 'It is an edifying consideration.' Mrs. Littlewit grumbles: 'This is scurvy, that we must come to the Fair, and not look on 't.' However, the whole party enters Ursula's booth; and the voice of the Rabbi is heard within its curtains, sonorously declaiming: 'A pig prepare presently, let a pig be prepared to us.' There we leave him for awhile to the gratifica-

tion of his sanctified appetite. The plot calls our attention to other persons of the comedy. These I must omit, being unable to set so miscellaneous a crowd of characters adequately before my readers, and wishing to concentrate attention upon Jonson's full-length portrait of the Puritan minister.

When Busy has eaten to his heart's content, and drunk no little too it may be guessed, he sallies forth, inspired with zeal against the profanities of the Fair :—

> Thou art the seat of the beast, O Smithfield, and I will leave thee! Idolatry peepeth out on every side of thee.

His eyes light upon a toyshop, and the toy-man presses 'rattles, drums, babies' on his devout attention :—

> Peace, with thy apocryphal wares, thou profane publican; thy bells, thy dragons, and thy Tobie's dogs. Thy hobby-horse is an idol, a very idol, a fierce and rank idol; and thou, the Nebuchadnezzar, the proud Nebuchadnezzar of the Fair, that sett'st it up for children to fall down to and worship.

The toy-man thrusts a drum into his face :—

> It is the broken belly of the beast, and thy bellows there are his lungs, and these pipes are his throat, those feathers are of his tail, and thy rattles the gnashing of his teeth.

Would he like gingerbread perhaps?

> The provender that pricks him up. Hence with thy basket of popery, thy nest of images, and whole legend of ginger-work.

Dame Purecraft, seeing that he is about to fall upon the gingerbread basket and send it flying in the fervour of his indignation, attempts to calm him down with 'Good brother Zeal'; but he will hear no reason :—

> Hinder me not, woman! I was moved in spirit to be here this day, in this Fair, this wicked and foul Fair; and fitter may it be

called a Foul than a Fair; to protest against the abuses of it, the foul abuses of it, in regard of the afflicted saints, that are troubled, very much troubled, exceedingly troubled, with the opening of the merchandize of Babylon again, and the peeping of popery upon the stalls here, here, in the high-places. See you not Goldylocks, the purple strumpet there, in her yellow gown and green sleeves? the profane pipes? the tinkling timbrels? A shop of relicks!

[*Attempts to seize the toys.*]

Then, having lashed himself into a fury, he bears down upon the gingerbread:—

And this idolatrous grove of images, this flasket of idols, which I will pull down [*overthrows the gingerbread basket*] in my zeal, and glory to be thus exercised.

The ensuing commotion brings a brace of watchmen on the scene, who take hold of Busy, and carry him off to the stocks, saying they will stop his noise:—

Thou canst not; 'tis a sanctified noise: I will make a loud and most strong noise, till I have daunted the profane enemy. And for this cause I will thrust myself into the stocks, upon the pikes of the land.

We next behold him in the stocks, roaring and testifying, but displaying withal that obstinate courage and unconcern for what the world might think which gave force to the Puritans in the succeeding age. When a bystander jeeringly asks what he is, he answers:—

One that rejoiceth in his affliction, and sitteth here to prophesy the destruction of fairs and May-games, wakes and Whitson-ales, and doth sigh and groan for the reformation of these abuses.

We may wonder whether Jonson, when he put these words into the mouth of Busy, surmised the probability of his prophecy being shortly realised in dismal fact throughout England. A fellow-prisoner, the unfortunate justice of the peace, Adam Overdo, quotes stoical

phrases from Horace and Persius to keep his courage up. The Rabbi overhears him, and delivers a cutting rebuke :—

> Friend, I will leave to communicate my spirit with you, if I hear any more of those superstitious relics, those lists of Latin, the very rags of Rome, and patches of Popery.

With his wonted skill in throwing side lights upon all points of a favourite character, Jonson here exhibits the Puritan dislike of culture and the gross ignorance of the sect. But when Dame Purecraft comes up, and condoles with him on his misfortune, the valiant spirit of the martyr (as stout in tragic as it here appears in comic difficulty) breaks forth :—

> Peace, religious sister, it is my calling ; comfort yourself an extraordinary calling, and done for my better standing, my surer standing, hereafter.

Notwithstanding this enthusiasm, he is glad enough to escape when the stocks are opened by accident. His Quixotic zeal soon plunges him into other comical adventures. A farcical puppet-show on the pathetic story of Hero and Leander, which might serve as an excellent illustration of English mock-heroic parody, if we had space to dwell on it, is being acted in a booth. The dialogue, of the lowest description, is moving briskly, when a sudden snort and trampling announces the advent of the Rabbi :—

> Down with Dagon! down with Dagon! 'tis I; I will no longer endure your profanations. I will remove Dagon there, I say, that idol, that heathenish idol, that remains, as I may say, a beam, a very beam—not a beam of the sun, nor a beam of the moon, nor a beam of a balance, neither a house-beam, nor a weaver's beam, but a beam in the eye, in the eye of the brethren ; a very great beam, an

exceeding great beam; such as are your stage-players, rimers, and morrice-dancers, who have walked hand in hand, in contempt of the brethren and the cause; and been borne out by instruments of no mean countenance.

His zeal overvaults itself, and leaves him out of breath; whereupon the showman quietly observes:—

Sir, I present nothing but what is licensed by authority.

This sets Busy off again upon the word licence:—

Busy: Thou art all licence, even licentiousness itself, Shimei.
Leath: I have the Master of the Revels' hand for 't, sir.
Busy: The Master of the Rebels' hand thou hast, Satan's! hold thy peace, thy scurrility, shut up thy mouth, thy profession is damnable, and in pleading for it thou dost plead for Baal. I have long opened my mouth wide, and gaped; I have gaped as the oyster for the tide, after thy destruction: but cannot compass it by suit or dispute; so that I look for a bickering, ere long, and then a battle.

Eventually, Rabbi Zeal-of-the-land is drawn into a controversy upon theatrical ethics with the showman, which gives Jonson an opportunity for marshalling the arguments advanced by Puritans against play-acting. His own counter-arguments he puts into the mouth of Busy's antagonist, who in the end confutes and silences the man of Banbury.

Such is the best portrait of a Puritan which remains for us upon the pages of our dramatists. After studying its powerful outlines, we feel the truth of Gifford's observation: 'All this proves how profoundly Jonson had entered into the views and expectations of this turbulent and aspiring race.' Whether he is right in adding: 'Had his royal master understood them half so well, long years of calamity and disgrace might have been averted,' is open to more doubt. It was not Charles' misconception of the Puritans which moved

John Hampden and Pym to their resistance of royal tyranny. Yet the fact remains that the playwright, while caricaturing the fanatics who subsequently formed the Rump Parliament, painted them in their day of comparative obscurity just as they afterwards displayed themselves in the day of their triumph.

CHAPTER V.

MASQUES AT COURT AND LYRICS.

The Masque in England was a dramatic species, occupying a middle place between the Pageant and the Play.[1] It combined dancing and music with lyric poetry and declamation, and was distinguished above all things by magnificence of scenery. The persons who performed a masque had only to be noble in appearance, richly dressed, and dignified in movement. Little demand was made upon their histrionic talent. They were but animated puppets in the hands of artists who devised the piece: the poet who chose the subject and wrote the book of words; the mechanist, who prepared the architectural surroundings, shifted the scenes, and planned the complicated engines requisite for bringing cars upon the stage or lowering a goddess from the heavens; the scene-painter; the milliner; the leader of the band; the teacher of the ballet. The performers played their parts sufficiently, provided their costumes were splendid and their carriage stately. Therefore the

[1] For further details concerning the masque, I may refer to chapter ix. of my *Shakspere's Predecessors*. I must also point out that I have drawn largely on that chapter, and have frequently borrowed from it textually in the composition of this sketch. I found it impossible to cast what I had to say upon the subject in quite a fresh form.

masque became a favourite amusement with wealthy amateurs and courtiers aiming at effect. Since it implied a large expenditure on dresses, scenery, candlelight, and music, it was an indulgence which only the rich could afford. We are thus prepared to understand why the masque was a special branch of Court-parade, in which royal personages and the queens of fashion trod the daïs of Greenwich or Whitehall on festival occasions. The principal actors posed upon this private stage as Olympian deities or personifications of the Virtues, surrounded by a crowd of ballet-dancers, singers, lutists, and buffoons.

The masque was imported into England from Italy. We first hear of it in the year 1512–13, when Henry VIII. and eleven of his nobles appeared 'disguised' after this new fashion. During the reigns of the Tudors it continued to be a comparatively simple pageant; nor do we possess literary records of masques composed by eminent writers in this period. The accession of James I. marked an epoch in its development. This king and his son were both of them partial to such entertainments, and willing to spend freely on them. The average cost of a masque at Court may be reckoned at about 1,400*l.*, which, considering the value of money at that time, represents a large sum. Great noblemen, corporations, and the City of London, not unfrequently indulged their sovereign's taste by presenting still more costly entertainments. On one occasion, when the Inns of Court displayed Shirley's 'Triumph of Peace,' their total expenditure is said to have been 20,000*l.*

It was part of the poet's duty to prepare for publi-

cation a detailed account of the show; describing the scenes, costumes, and dances; introducing the libretto he had written for the actors, and paying compliments to his collaborators. The names of the performers, if they were royal or noble, appeared in their proper places; and the little book was prized as a souvenir by those who had assisted at so august a pageant. To this custom of printing the description of Court masques we owe the preservation of more than thirty pieces by Ben Jonson, not to mention those of other distinguished poets among his contemporaries.

Jonson threw his whole spirit into the work. His masques are not only infinitely varied, witty, tasteful, and ingenious, but vast erudition is exhibited in the notes with which he has enriched them. Conscious of the sterling stuff of these compositions, he chafed at the precedence in popular esteem which was naturally given to the architect on such occasions. He thought that the poet, whose invention was the soul of such splendid trifles, deserved the lion's share of fame. And certainly, were it not for Jonson's lyrics, we should pay them slight attention now. Those far more superb pageants of Florence and of Venice, because they lacked a sacred bard, are forgotten. While, therefore, he was careful to assign what he considered their due share of credit to his several collaborators, he always reserved for himself the chief honours of the piece. His lofty introduction to the 'Hymenaei' opens thus: 'It is a noble and just advantage that the things subjected to understanding have of those which are objected to sense; that the one sort are but momentary, and merely taking; the other impressing and lasting; else the glory of these

solemnities had perished like a blaze, and gone out, in the beholders' eyes. So short-lived are the bodies of all things, in comparison of their souls.'

Inigo Jones, the disciple of Palladio and builder of Whitehall, was the architect who provided the mechanism needed for bodying forth the poet's fancy to the eye. He was no less imperious in self-esteem than Jonson, and by no means relished this assignment of the merely transient portion of the masques to him. Other authors, Daniel and Chapman, had paid him better respect, placed his name first upon the title-page, and acknowledged in their prefaces that his art excelled the poet's in importance. Jonson indeed was right. He might well expect the suffrage of posterity, when all the torches of Whitehall should be extinguished, the royal actors dead and buried, the groves and cars and temples of the mechanician turned to dust. But he had better not have proclaimed this so haughtily, for he made a deadly enemy. Though they worked together for many years, the discord between these two irascible artists grew ever more intense. We shall see that in the darkest days of Jonson's life, when he stood most in need of friendship and goodwill, Jones contrived to do him a bad turn at Court.

The masque, as I have said, was generally presented by royal or noble personages. On their performances the architect lavished his costliest inventions. But this magnificence required a foil. An Antimasque was consequently furnished; and for this, some grotesque or comic motive had to be selected. Actors from the public theatres were hired to play the antimasque. We accordingly find that while the masque assumes

the form of a triumph or ballet, the antimasque is more strictly dramatic. In the antimasque, Hecate led the revels of witches round her cauldron. In the masque, queens attended Anne of Denmark on chariots of gold and jewels; lutes and viols sounded; Prince Henry and Duke Charles stepped the high measures of the galliard. To combine the contrasted motives of the masque and antimasque into one coherent scheme was the poet's pride; and it is just here that Jonson showed his mastery. It may be parenthetically noticed that the antithesis which I have indicated survives in the Italian *ballo* and the English pantomime of the present day.

We can now turn to the consideration of Ben Jonson's masques in detail. Their very names reveal their strangeness and variety. There is a Masque of Blackness, answered by a Masque of Beauty; a Welsh Masque, and an Irish Masque; a Masque of Queens, and a Masque of Owls; a Masque of Christmas, and a Masque of Lethe; a Masque of Augurs and a Masque of Time. At one moment the poet's fancy brings back the Golden Age; at another explores the Fortunate Isles or the world discovered in the moon; now camps with gipsies on the heath, now sports with satyrs and shepherds, now leads the dances of the fairies, and now dons the pomp and panoply of war.

In the perusal, stripped of their 'apparelling,' as Jonson styled the apparatus of the scene, these compositions make severe demands on the imagination. It is, however, possible to read them still with pleasure; especially if the student brings a scholar's memory to the task. He will wonder at the fulness and extent of learning employed on these fantastic toys, no less than

at the poet's sprightliness beneath that ponderous load. Jonson's faculty for alchemising erudition into poetry is admirably displayed in the Antimasque of Witches to the Masque of Queens. 'Macbeth' suggested the motive, and classical literature supplied the details. But the motive is treated in so masterly a style, and the details are applied with such artistic freedom, that we rise from the perusal of those wild incantation scenes with a sense of the author's command of weird and ghastly imagery. In like manner the Latin lore employed in the hymeneal processions of the Masque of Hymen and in the sacerdotal pomp of the Masque of Augurs has been so well assimilated that we might fancy ourselves to be gazing on some triumph like that of Julius Cæsar by Mantegna at Hampton Court. Greek idyllic verse is laid under contribution for 'The Hue and Cry after Cupid;' the Attic comedians suggest scenes in 'Neptune's Triumph.'

Jonson was not unconscious that his masques might prove somewhat tedious to the general public. In the introduction to his 'Hymenaei' he observes: 'And howsoever some may squeamishly cry out that all endeavour of learning and sharpness in these transitory devices, especially where it steps beyond their little or (let me not wrong them) no brain at all, is superfluous; I am contented these fastidious stomachs should leave my full tables, and enjoy at home their clean empty trenchers, fittest for such airy tastes; where perhaps a few Italian herbs, picked up and made into a sallad, may find sweeter acceptance than all the most nourishing and sound meats of the world.' But no one with a true literary sense will fail to be rewarded by a cursory

perusal of those lyrics, which, like their author's prose, so often remind us of Milton's style.

It is not very easy to detach representative passages from Jonson's masques. The opening of the piece he wrote to celebrate the nuptials of Lord Haddington and Lady Elizabeth Ratcliffe may, however, be chosen for its delicate and sprightly fancy. Venus has come down from heaven, attended by the Graces, in search of her runaway boy Cupid. None knows where the wanton little god is hidden. His mother turns to the ladies of the Court assembled in the hall before her. Perhaps the truant is hidden in their laps or nestling in their bosoms. She bids the Graces cry him. This they do in nine stanzas, each singing in turn.

> Beauties, have ye seen this toy,
> Called Love, a little boy,
> Almost naked, wanton, blind;
> Cruel now, and then as kind?
> If he be amongst ye, say!
> He is Venus' runaway.

So the one voice sings; and a second takes up the melody:—

> He hath marks about him plenty:
> You shall know him among twenty.
> All his body is a fire,
> And his breath a flame entire,
> That being shot like lightning in,
> Wounds the heart but not the skin.

A third chimes in:—

> Trust him not; his words, though sweet,
> Seldom with his heart do meet.
> All his practice is deceit;
> Every gift it is a bait;
> Not a kiss but poison bears;
> And most treason in his tears.

This entertainment closed with an epithalamium, in skilfully constructed and sonorous stanzas, which, however, fall short of Spenser's sublimity and Herrick's rapture upon similar occasions.

Turning the leaves of these old libretti, we not unfrequently light on verses of great purity and sweetness. Here is a stanza from 'The Fortunate Isles': —

> The winds are sweet, and gently blow;
> But Zephyrus no breath they know,
> The father of the flowers:
> By him the virgin violets live,
> And every plant doth odours give
> As fresh as are the hours.

Here again is one from 'Pan's Anniversary':—

> Drop, drop your violets! Change your hues,
> Now red, now pale, as lovers use!
> And in your death go out as well
> As when you lived, unto the smell!
> That from your odour, all may say:
> This is the shepherd's holiday!

In the 'Masque of Beauty' a graver note is sounded:—

> So Beauty on the waters stood,
> When Love had severed earth from flood!
> So when he parted air from fire
> He did with concord all inspire!
> And then a motion he them taught,
> That elder than himself was thought;
> Which thought was, yet, the child of earth,
> For Love is older than his birth.

It will be noticed in these quotations that Jonson's lyric style is not exactly what we call Elizabethan— Shakespeare and Fletcher being uppermost in our minds when we use that phrase. It rather suggests the manner of more recent poets—of Milton, of Dryden, even of Wordsworth.

Some of Jonson's masques have a historical interest, which should not be neglected. For the festival of Henry's inauguration as Prince of Wales he composed an entertainment on the past glories of Plantagenets and Tudors, summoning the heroes of the Crusades, of Cressy, of Agincourt, and of the Armada, to be present at the reception of this young knight into chivalry. Henry proved himself not unworthy of the Laureate's compliments. Upon the morrow of the masque he held the lists together with his chosen champions against an equal number of assailants. It was reckoned that he gave and took thirty-two pushes of the pike, and some three hundred and sixty sword-strokes in that tourney. On the evening following the barriers, as they then were called, the Prince appeared in the character of Oberon among his court of fairies. They danced until the night was spent, when Phosphor, rising, bade them haste to bed:—

> To rest, to rest! The herald of the day,
> Bright Phosphorus, commands you hence. Away!
> The moon is pale and spent; and wingèd night
> Makes headlong haste to fly the morning's sight,
> Who now is rising from her blushing wars,
> And with her rosy hand puts back the stars:
> Of which myself the last, her harbinger,
> But stay to warn you, that you not defer
> Your parting longer! Then do I give way,
> As Night hath done, and so must you, to Day.

Little did poet and Court then dream that this Prince of Wales, the hope and darling of the nation, should so soon, like young Marcellus, be taken from them in his prime of manhood.

And the boy-prince Charles, then Duke of York, who danced among the fairies in his brother's train,

did no seer discern the even darker mist of doom wreathed round his forehead? Those Whitehall masques were followed by a very different kind of pageant, when he stepped forth to the scaffold from the Banqueting Hall in 1649.

> He nothing common did or mean
> Upon that memorable scene,
> But with his keener eye
> The axe's edge did try;
> Nor called the gods, with vulgar spite,
> To vindicate his helpless right;
> But bowed his comely head
> Down as upon a bed.

Truly a sad fate was reserved for many of those royal and noble actors in the New Year and Shrovetide revels of King James's Court:—for the luckless Lady Arabella Stuart, innocent victim of unhappy love and political jealousy, who died raving mad, a prisoner in the Tower, in 1615—for Lady Frances Howard, wedded in her fourteenth year to the young Earl of Essex, of whom Jonson sang in his marriage hymns:—

> And wildest Cupid waking hovers
> With adoration 'twixt the lovers.

She lived to seek a disgraceful divorce, to make an infamous second marriage, to be tried for Overbury's murder, and to end her days in obloquy. Her boy-bridegroom was destined to lead the armies of the Parliament against his king, and to sink at last eclipsed by Cromwell's greatness.

With the advance of years, the tragic irony of these masques at Court deepens. The last great entertainment of this kind, of which we possess detailed information, was presented by Charles and Henrietta Maria at

Shrovetide in 1640. The usual sums of money were expended, and we have the right to assume that the pageant lacked none of its customary splendour. The hall, as usual, was crowded with stately men and charming women, exchanging compliments beneath the torches, dancing their brawls and galliards, as though there were no Hampden, Pym, and Cromwell in existence. Those brilliant and bejewelled cavaliers, innocent as yet of civil strife, unstained with fratricidal slaughter, were soon indeed to part, with anger in their breasts, and everlasting farewell on their lips, for adverse camps. While we gaze in fancy on them and the ladies at their side, that voice which De Quincey heard in vision thrills our ears: 'These are English ladies from the unhappy times of Charles I. These are the wives and daughters of those who met in peace, and sat at the same tables, and were allied by marriage or by blood; and yet, after a certain day in August, 1642, never smiled upon each other again, nor met but on the field of battle; and at Marston Moor, at Newbury, or at Naseby, cut asunder all ties of love by the cruel sabre, and washed away in blood the memory of ancient friendship.'

The transition from Jonson's comedies and masques to his lyrics and occasional pieces can easily be made. The plays yield a sufficient number of songs. The collections of minor poems, published by him under the titles of 'The Forest,' 'Underwoods,' and 'Epigrams,' furnish abundant matter for investigation. Only a few of these scattered compositions are generally known. Among them, one is on everybody's lips; for its rarely felicitous language has been married to a beautiful old melody. 'Drink to me only with thine eyes' was a favourite of its author,

if we may trust Drummond. And yet it so happens that this airy and apparently spontaneous effusion illustrates what his detractors meant when they accused Jonson of 'filching by translation,' and lacking 'fire not kindled heretofore by others' pains.' The song, in truth, is almost literally transmuted into rhyme and metre from scattered phrases in the prose of a Greek sophist.[1] Philostratus, to cite one passage, wrote a little epistle, or *billet-doux*, to accompany a gift of roses. Rendered into English word for word, the composition runs thus: 'I have sent thee a wreath of roses, not honouring thee (though this also), but rather giving to the roses themselves this favour, that they should not wither.' In Jonson's verse the paragraph becomes:—

> I sent thee late a rosy wreath,
> Not so much honouring thee
> As giving it a hope that there
> It could not withered be.

In another passage Philostratus had written: 'If you will do your friend a favour, send back what remains of the flowers, no longer breathing of roses only, but of yourself also.' The alchemy of Jonson's fancy touches this conceit to gold:—

> But thou thereon didst only breathe,
> And sent'st it back to me:
> Since when it grows and smells, I swear,
> Not of itself but thee.

In this act of lyric transmutation something has indeed been lost. There is a delicate shade of meaning in the original which we miss when the poet concentrates

[1] I may refer those who are curious in such matters to a letter written by me to the *Academy*, December 6, 1884.

attention on the wreath, and not on the roses themselves. The repetition of *it* is less suggestive than that of *them* would have been. But to dwell upon this point were ungrateful; for the fact remains that Jonson, holding the Love-Letters of Philostratus in free solution in his memory, poured such fragments forth as suited the inspiration of a genial moment into the plastic mould of one perfectly cadenced stanza. His friend, T. Carew, might well console him for the accusation of filching by translation, when, looking at work like this, he wrote :—

> Nor think it theft if the rich spoils, so torn
> From conquered authors, be as trophies worn.

Another felicitous translation, this time from the Latin verses of a French humanist, Jean Bonnefons, has also found a permanent place in English anthologies. 'Still to be neat, still to be dressed,' was the model for several of Herrick's terse and highly polished pieces.[1] Indeed, it may be said to have originated a species of lyrical composition unknown in literature before the age of Jonson, or but faintly indicated in Lyly's songs, which found much favour with writers of the seventeenth century. He was not always so happy. What his genius in this kind seems to have required was an original, like the prose of Philostratus or the elegiacs of Bonnefons, which should suggest fancies and stimulate invention. Coming into competition with a flawless masterpiece of poetry, he mistook his powers, and too often debased gold into inferior metal. This I feel to be the case with the free version of 'Vivamus, mea

[1] It occurs in *The Silent Woman.*

Lesbia,' part of which occurs in 'Volpone' and the rest in 'The Forest.' Still, some excellent touches may even here be pointed out. For the incomparable lines of Catullus :—

> Soles occidere et redire possunt ;
> Nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux,
> Nox est perpetua una dormienda :

Jonson has found these very passable equivalents :—

> Suns that set may rise again ;
> But if once we lose this light,
> 'Tis with us perpetual night.

The enumeration of the kisses leads him away into a pretty *ad libitum* improvisation :—

> Add a thousand and so more ;
> Till you equal with the store
> All the grass that Rumney yields,
> Or the sands in Chelsea fields,
> Or the drops in silver Thames,
> Or the stars that gild his streams
> In the silent summer nights
> When youths ply their stol'n delights;
> That the curious may not know
> How to tell them as they flow,
> And the envious, when they find
> What their number is, be pined.

Passing to songs which are not translations, three of considerable beauty can be cited from 'Cynthia's Revels.' One of these, addressed to the goddess of the night, 'Queen and Huntress, chaste and fair,' is so popular that it calls for no further notice here. Another, named 'The Kiss,' should be transcribed, seeing that it is not so well known. In occasional felicity of terse phrasing, as also in a certain imperfection of rhyme and

rhythm, it illustrates Jonson's qualities and shortcomings as a song-writer :—

O, that joy so soon should waste!
Or so sweet a bliss
As a kiss
Might not for ever last!
So sugared, so melting, so soft, so delicious!
The dew that lies on roses
When the dawn herself discloses,
Is not so precious.
O rather than I would it smother,
Were I to taste such another,
It should be my wishing
That I might die with kissing.

Had the ore been smelted, and the metal fused throughout these lines into the liquid purity of :—

The dew that lies on roses
When the dawn herself discloses:

we should in this lyric have possessed a jewel. More excellent in workmanship, yet demanding part-song or madrigal music to bring out its beauty, is Echo's lament for Narcissus in the same play :—

Slow, slow, fresh fount, keep time with my salt tears:
Yet slower, yet; O faintly, gentle springs:
List to the heavy part the music bears,
Woe weeps out her division when she sings.
Droop herbs and flowers,
Fall grief in showers,
Our beauties are not ours;
O, I could still,
Like melting snow upon some craggy hill,
Drop, drop, drop, drop,
Since nature's pride is now a withered daffodil.

In longer lyric flights Jonson seldom sustained his inspiration at a high level. He fell short of Spenser's

heavenly music and Herrick's Bacchic ecstasy. Yet his odes and nuptial hymns contain passages of fine gnomic poetry. One stanza from the 'Ode to the Immortal Memory of that Noble Pair, Sir Lucius Cary (Lord Falkland) and Sir Henry Morison,' is familiar to readers of the 'Golden Treasury,' where it appears as a separate piece, beginning 'It is not growing like a tree.' I will select another from the epithalamium for Master Jerome Weston and the Lady Frances Stuart:—

> The ignoble never lived; they were awhile
> Like swine or other cattle here on earth:
> Their names are not recorded on the file
> Of life, that fall so; Christians know their birth
> Alone; and such a race
> We pray may grace
> Your fruitful spreading vine,
> But dare not ask our wish in language fescennine.

Here, as so often happens, Jonson starts with lines that have the clarion-thrill of true poetic utterance. But his wings droop, and while the thought is maintained upon a vigorous and manly note, he allows the expression to sink into commonplace or quaintness.

Of elegies and memorial verses we possess abundance from the pen of Jonson. The epitaph on the Countess of Pembroke, 'Underneath this sable hearse,' is known by heart and lives upon the lips of everybody. There is nothing of this kind in the collection of his poems to rival it. Yet thoughts of sterling value and unexpected sweetnesses of phrase might be culled from these compositions; as, for example, a melodious couplet in the threnody on Lady Venetia Digby:—

> Dare I, profane, so irreligious be,
> To greet or grieve her soft euthanasy!

I would, however, prefer to transcribe one little piece of an earlier date, which displays Jonson in a very amiable light. He wrote the lines in question upon the occasion of Salathiel Pavy's death, a Child of Queen Elizabeth's Chapel, who had acted parts in his 'Cynthia's Revels' and 'The Poetaster.' It will be noticed that, though the boy was only just in his fourteenth year, the poet praises him for special skill in representing old men on the stage :—

> Weep with me all you that read
> This little story ;
> And know, for whom a tear you shed,
> Death's self is sorry.
> 'Twas a child that so did thrive
> In grace and feature
> As heaven and nature seemed to strive
> Which owned the creature.
> Years he numbered scarce thirteen
> When fates turned cruel ;
> Yet three filled zodiacs had he been
> The stage's jewel ;
> And did act, what now we moan,
> Old men so duly ;
> As, sooth, the Parcae thought him one,
> He played so truly.
> So, by error, to his fate
> They all consented ;
> But, viewing him since, alas, too late,
> They have repented,
> And have sought to give new birth,
> In baths to steep him ;
> But, being much too good for earth,
> Heaven vows to keep him.

While dwelling on the graver qualities of Jonson's lyric muse, I wish to call attention to a poem of eight stanzas, detached from its context and printed by Gifford

in the 'Underwoods.'[1] Though imperfect in execution, this delicate and subtle address to some person, too much beloved to be called merely friend, and yet not passionately sought, discovers a strain of poetic feeling more nearly allied to that of Lovelace than to any other writer's. If it be really Jonson's, it deserves to be here, in part at least, presented. I therefore give four verses:—

I neither love, nor yet am free;
  For though the flame I find
Be not intense in the degree,
  'Tis of the purest kind.

It little wants of love but pain;
  Your beauty takes my sense;
And lest you should that price disdain,
  My thoughts too feel the influence.

'Tis not a passion's first access,
  Ready to multiply;
But like love's calmest state it is
  Possessed with victory.

It is like love to truth reduced,
  All the false values gone,
Which were created and induced
  By fond imagination.

The violation of metre in the second and fourth of these stanzas raises a doubt whether we possess the correct text, or whether indeed the thing be Jonson's.

I have left to the last a collection of complimentary verses entitled 'A Celebration of Charis in Ten Lyric Pieces.' When they were composed is doubtful. The

[1] Gifford styles it 'An Elegy,' and prints it as No. XL. of *Underwoods*, remarking that he had taken it from the last pages of the folio of 1641, where it appears joined on to *A New Year's Gift to King Charles*. This folio had, of course, not Jonson's supervision.

poet says that he has reached the age of fifty, in the first lines of the dedication; and this would give them the date of 1623-4. But as a part of one lyric was introduced into 'The Devil is an Ass,' some portion of the *Lieder-Kreis* (to use a convenient German phrase) must have been written as early as 1616. It is probable that they were indited upon several occasions, and put together with a view to publication in 1623. That Jonson set a high value on them appears from his having recited a few lines from the series to Drummond in 1618. Drummond, writing them down from memory, got them wrong; but here is the passage which the author thought worthy to be placed beside 'Drink to me only with thine eyes':—

For Love's sake, kiss me once again;
I long, and should not beg in vain.
Here's none to spy, or see;
Why do you doubt or stay?
I'll taste as lightly as the bee,
That doth but touch his flower and flies away.

It was to the last two lines of this stanza that Jonson called his Scotch friend's particular attention. This poem is not, however, that which modern readers would single out from the garland of Charis. The following rather deserves selection, since it displays rarer qualities both of fancy and of rhythmical invention:—

See the chariot at hand here of Love,
Wherein my lady rideth!
Each that draws is a swan or a dove,
And well the car Love guideth.
As she goes, all hearts do duty
Unto her beauty;
And, enamoured, do wish, so they might
But enjoy such a sight,

That they still were to run by her side,
Through swords, through seas, whither she would ride.

Do but look on her eyes, they do light
All that Love's world compriseth!
Do but look on her hair, it is bright
As Love's star when it riseth!
Do but mark, her forehead's smoother
Than words that soothe her!
And from her arched brows, such a grace
Sheds itself through the face,
As alone there triumphs to the life
All the gain, all the good, of the elements' strife.

Have you seen but a bright lily grow,
Before rude hands have touched it?
Have you marked but the fall o' the snow
Before the soil hath smutched it?
Have you felt the wool of beaver?
Or swan's down ever?
Or have smelt o' the bud o' the brier?
Or the nard in the fire?
Or have tasted the bag of the bee?
O so white! O so soft! O so sweet is she!

From the poems to Charis I might also have selected another, headed with this quaint title: 'Her Man described by her own Dictamen.' It yields a very pleasant picture of what Jonson conceived a truly desirable young Englishman of his epoch, both in mental and physical parts, to be; and it is written in short rhyming couplets with something of the grace of Fletcher.

In the foregoing paragraphs I have attempted to make an exhaustive enumeration of the songs and lyrical pieces which deserve perpetual recollection amid the considerable mass of such work by Jonson. It will be observed that the list is by no means a long one; and yet rigorous criticism would have curtailed it by three

or perhaps four of the poems I have cited. The fact is that, when compared with Shakespeare, or even with Fletcher, Jonson did not shine in purely lyric composition. He may be said to have produced five pieces in their kind admirable. These are 'Drink to me only with thine eyes,' 'Queen and Huntress,' 'Still to be neat,' 'Underneath this sable hearse,' and 'See the chariot at hand.' To add a sixth of equal excellence to the number would, I think, after long and scrupulous consideration of his writings, be impossible. Still the five which, upon careful sifting, I now indicate as Jonson's masterpieces in purely lyric composition, have a quality which is definite and individual. No one before him wrote pieces of the sort so terse, so marked by dominant intelligence, so aptly fitted for their purpose. If the haunting evanescent exquisiteness of Shakespeare's song is absent, we have not the right to demand this from a singer of so different a mould. For Jonson's fame it is quite enough to point out that these, rather than Shakespeare's lyrics, struck the key-note of the seventeenth century. We find, even in Milton's supreme handling of studied lyric verse, at least as much of Jonson as of Shakespeare or of Fletcher.

CHAPTER VI.

SECOND PERIOD OF MANHOOD.

RESUMING the thread of Jonson's biography, we may view the decade which elapsed between 1616 and 1626 as the third main period in his life. The year 1616 was marked, as I have already said, by the publication of the first folio of his collected works. It also witnessed the representation of his comedy 'The Devil is an Ass,' by the King's Men at Blackfriars. This play cannot be reckoned one of Jonson's masterpieces; though it counts an excellently outlined coxcomb, Fitzdottrell, among its dramatis personæ, and perhaps the only interesting female character he ever drew, in that coxcomb's wife. How far it was successful on the stage at the time of its first representation we do not know. But there is some reason to suspect that it failed to please; for Jonson wholly ceased writing for the theatres between this date and the year 1625, when want and illness forced him once more to court the public.

That Jonson never loved the playwright's calling is certain. He seems to have felt himself born to rebuke vice and folly; and since society refused to be scourged with patience and submission, he withdrew in dudgeon from the irksome task of writing scenes to amuse its

idleness. In an ode to himself, printed in the 'Underwoods,' we read this stanza :—

And since our dainty age
  Cannot endure reproof,
Make not thyself a page
To that strumpet the stage,
  But sing high and aloof,
Safe from the wolf's black jaw and the dull ass's hoof.

It should be remarked that the last two lines of this ode are borrowed from the close of the 'Apologetical Dialogue' appended to the 'Poetaster.' The little poem may, therefore, have been written about the time when Jonson first resolved to abandon comedy and try the less congenial sphere of tragedy. But the tone of the whole piece corresponds so exactly with that of the far nobler Ode to Himself, which was written in 1629 upon the failure of his 'New Inn,' that we have a right to accept its sentiments as habitual to the poet through all periods of his life. Of that haughty and indignant burst of lyric inspiration, the last sparkle of glowing fire struck from its author's genius by rage, I shall have to speak at length in the concluding chapter of his life. It is enough now to notice that between 'The Devil is an Ass' (1616) and 'The Staple of News' (1625) we possess no dramatic work from his hand.

During this interval, however, his pen was not idle. The accession of James to the English throne had opened a new sphere of social and literary activity to Jonson. His 'learned sock' was well fitted to entertain a monarch who piqued himself equally upon his erudition and his statecraft. Nor was the grossness of the poet's muse disagreeable to his royal master's taste. But with his love for learning James combined an almost childish

passion for spectacles and pageants. His consort, Anne of Denmark, shared this delight in costly shows. We have already seen in the preceding chapter how splendid were those entertainments at Whitehall, and how industriously Jonson laboured to gratify the whim of his patron. When James went on progress to the houses of his nobles, Jonson was in request to furnish forth sylvan interludes or complimentary addresses. The exercise of these talents brought him into close connection with the aristocracy; and there is reason to believe that he made more money by his masques than by his comedies.

In other respects Jonson was a man after the King's heart. He entertained a profound respect for the princely dignity, and formed a conception of sovereigns which closely corresponded to the ideal James had set before him. Some sentences, extracted from his commonplace-book of 'Discoveries,' may here be quoted in illustration of his high monarchical opinions:—

After God, nothing is to be loved of man like the prince: he violates nature that doth it not with his whole heart. For when he hath put on the care of the public good and common safety, I am a wretch and put off man if I do not reverence and honour him in whose charge all things divine and human are placed.

Wise is rather the attribute of a prince than learned or good. The learned man profits others rather than himself; the good man rather himself than others; but the prince commands others and doth himself.

A prince without letters is a pilot without eyes. All his government is groping. In sovereignty it is a most happy thing not to be compelled; but so it is the most miserable not to be counselled. And how can he be counselled that cannot see to read the best counsellors, which are books, for they neither flatter us nor hide from us? He may hear, you will say; but how shall he always be sure to hear true? or be counselled the best things, not the sweetest?

The King appointed Jonson Laureate, with a pension of 100 marks a year. He is also said to have wished to dub him knight, an honour which the poet declined. In the Shrovetide revels at Whitehall Jonson took his part together with the royal family upon the stage. He seems to have enjoyed the privilege of their familiarity, and to have preserved his native candour in their presence. As Drummond reports: 'He said to the king, his master (*i.e.* tutor) M. G. Buchanan had corrupted his ear when young, and learned him to sing verses when he should have read them.' This was frank speech to a royal pedant! 'He said to Prince Charles of Inigo Jones, that when he wanted to express the greatest villain in the world, he would call him an Inigo.' Considering the credit of the architect at Court, this was plain-speaking with a vengeance!

To mention all the noble men and women with whom Jonson lived on terms of honoured friendship, at whose country seats he spent a portion of the year, and who sought his society in London, would be tedious. Lord Clarendon puts the matter briefly: 'his conversation was very good, and with men of most note.' The minor poems in his 'Epigrams,' 'Forest,' and 'Underwoods' contain verses addressed to Lord Salisbury, Lord Mounteagle, Sir Henry Cary, Lord Suffolk, Lord Ellesmere, the Countesses of Bedford and Rutland, Sir Horace Vere, Sir John Ratcliffe, Lord Pembroke, Lady Mary Wroth, the Countess of Montgomery, Sir Edward Herbert, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Sir Henry Nevil, Sir Thomas Overbury, Lord Aubigny, Sir William Sidney, Lord Dorset, Lord Burleigh, Sir Edward Coke, Lord Bacon, Lord Delaware, Lord Newcastle, Lord

Somerset, the Lady Venetia Digby, the Marchioness of Winton, and many others whom it would be irksome to enumerate. The number of these patrons is less remarkable than the evidence of manly freedom which Jonson used in conversing with them. Though he preserved those terms of courtesy which were due to rank, he never forgot his own dignity. To Lady Rutland, the daughter of Sir Philip Sidney, he sent a copy of verses beginning thus:—

> That poets are far rarer births than kings,
> Your noblest father proved.

Very seldom can he have been made to feel his inferiority as a man of letters in this titled company. The only hint he gives of such treatment seems meant to ridicule the man who took advantage of his rank. 'Ben one day being at table with my Lady Rutland, her husband coming in accused her that she kept table to poets, of which she wrote a letter to him [Jonson], which he answered. My Lord intercepted the letter, but never challenged him.' The Sidneys and the Herberts appear to have been most generous in their kindness. Lord Pembroke sent him every first day of the year 20*l.* to buy books. At Penshurst he was undoubtedly a frequent guest, as the delightful poem on Sir Philip Sidney's birthplace, in 'The Forest,' abundantly proves.[1] It was not only with the great, however, that Jonson lived on terms of intimacy. He kept company with the best poets, wits, and men of learning. Selden, Camden, Bacon, Donne, Beaumont, Sylvester, Alleyn, Shakespeare, Fletcher, Drayton, Chapman, all remain embalmed in verses which only the familiarity

[1] *The Forest*, No. ii.

of affectionate friendship can have inspired. The lines to Francis Beaumont, often as they have been quoted, are too representative of Jonson's cordial relations to his brother bards to be here omitted:—

> How do I love thee, Beaumont, and thy muse,
> That unto me dost such religion use!
> How do I fear myself, that am not worth
> The least indulgent thought thy pen drops forth!
> At once thou mak'st me happy, and unmak'st;
> And giving largely to me, more thou tak'st.
> What fate is mine, that so itself bereaves?
> What art is thine, that so thy friend deceives?
> When even there, where most thou praisest me,
> For writing better, I must envy thee.

some humility

Alleyn, the actor, he compares to Roscius; Donne he calls 'the delight of Phœbus and each Muse'; 'my loved' Alfonso Ferrabosco is complimented in delicate strains upon the soothing sweetness of his music; Selden receives the most triumphant eulogy which verse can give:—

> Nothing but the round
> Large clasp of nature such a wit can bound.
> Monarch of letters! 'mongst thy titles shown
> Of others' honours, thus enjoy thy own!

Bacon's birth to greatness is no less felicitously touched:—

> The destined heir
> In his soft cradle to his father's chair;
> Whose even thread the Fates spin round and full
> Out of their choicest and their whitest wool.[1]

But it would be easy to fill many pages with quotations, proving the largeness and the sincerity of

[1] Compare the passages on Bacon as a writer and a man in the *Discoveries*.

Jonson's admiration for his illustrious contemporaries. Before such a mass of testimony the idle calumny that he was jealous of Shakespeare sinks to nothing; and the immortal panegyric, written for the folio of 1623, stands out clear in its candour, when we read it by the light of less enthusiastic verses upon men of minor merit.

It will be noted, both in his compliments to folk of rank and in his eulogies on men of arts and letters, that Jonson never adopts the tone of servile adulation or of undiscriminating praise. He exercises a sound understanding in each case, selecting what is specific in the subject of his verse, and making just criticism subserve the purposes of commendation. Thus, when such superlatives break forth, as to Camden:—

> Most reverend head, to whom I owe
> All that I am in arts, all that I know!

to Shakespeare, 'Shine forth, thou star of poets!' to Selden, 'Monarch of letters!' to Beaumont, 'How do I love thee and thy muse!' we have a right to believe that the heart itself is speaking its own language.

How genial Jonson was in his familiar discourse with friends may be gathered from the neat 'Invitation to Supper' which he partially borrowed from an epigram of Martial, adapting it to English manners.[1] The mention of these verses brings me to consider another, and not less famous, aspect of Ben Jonson's private life—I mean his frequenting of the London taverns, and his genial dictatorship over wits and gallants at their merry meetings. In discussing this topic we must not forget that, in an age when clubs did not exist, the tavern bore a higher

[1] *Epigrams*, No. ci.

reputation than its name now implies. It corresponded to the coffee-house of Dryden's and Pope's epoch, and fulfilled a purpose to which no institution of the present day in England exactly answers. The tavern differed from the private club, inasmuch as its door stood open to all the world; and yet its holiest of holies, the sanctuary of such great folk as Chapman and Jonson, was only accessible by aspirants to literary society upon invitation. It was at once exclusive of the common vulgar, and democratic for all who could contribute something to the intellectual fund. Lords, poets, men of learning, actors, fashionable fribblers, and wine-drawers met together on a common basis of intense life there. Regarded from this point of view, the Elizabethan London tavern, as a social institution of peculiar efficiency, drew its origin from wandering students of the Middle Ages. Their chief poet sang:—

Meum est propositum
In tabernâ mori.

'It is my intention,' said the arch-bard of those early humanists and rollicking Bohemians, 'to die in a tavern; for there, as to the brightest spot on earth, the angels will descend, and cry in chorus, May God be gracious to this toper.' The age was one attuned to wine, rather than to chocolate and coffee—those later growths of modern civilisation. And the tavern had the defect of its quality. It encouraged an excess in liquors, from which, among many others, Jonson suffered. The inheritors of his position and renown, the heroes of Button's in a later century, in addition to their wine, drank aromatic juices infused from the leaf, the berry, and

the nut. He filled beakers of topaz-coloured Canary, and quaffed them in the company of Selden, Shakespeare, Beaumont, Herrick, and less famous folk of rank and fashion.

Sir Walter Raleigh is said to have founded the club which flourished at the Mermaid in Bread Street on Cheapside. This was the place where Jonson held his earliest revels. Here the best men of the epoch gathered round him; and of their meetings we have a fit memorial in Beaumont's verse :—

> Methinks the little wit I had is lost
> Since I saw you; for wit is like a rest
> Held up at tennis, which men do the best
> With the best gamesters. What things have we seen
> Done at the Mermaid! heard words that have been
> So nimble, and so full of subtle flame,
> As if that every one from whence they came
> Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
> And had resolved to live a fool the rest
> Of his dull life; then when there hath been thrown
> Wit able enough to justify the town
> For three days past—wit that might warrant be
> For the whole city to talk foolishly
> Till that were cancelled—and when that was gone,
> We left an air behind us, which alone
> Was able to make the two next companies
> (Right witty, though but downright fools) more wise.

These gatherings, so enthusiastically celebrated by Beaumont, even to the point of literary incoherence, recall the grave and well-weighed words of Fuller: 'Many were the wit-combats between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. I behold them like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war. Master Jonson, like the former, was built far higher in learning, solid but slow in his performances; Shakespeare, like the

latter, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds by the quickness of his wit and invention.' It is no wonder that, pondering upon the honeyed lines of Beaumont and the buoyant sentences of Fuller, Keats should have indited, with eager heart and watering mouth, those lines upon the Mermaid Tavern, over which 'the sweet witty soul' of the Elizabethan age has passed!

The Mermaid was not the only or the last of taverns frequented by Rare Ben. Herrick, in one of his most genial lyrics, gives a list of several others:—

> Ah Ben
> Say how, or when
> Shall we thy guests
> Meet at those lyric feasts,
> Made at the Sun,
> The Dog, the Triple Tun?
> Where we such clusters had
> As made us nobly wild, not mad;
> And yet each verse of thine
> Outdid the meat, outdid the frolic wine.
>
> My Ben
> Or come again;
> Or send to us
> Thy wit's great over-plus:
> But teach us yet
> Wisely to husband it;
> Lest we that talent spend,
> And having once brought to an end
> That precious stock, the store
> Of such a wit, the world should have no more.

Thus it would seem that Jonson frequented more taverns than the Mermaid. Herrick mentions the Sun, the Dog, the Triple Tun. Their names, in fact, were

legion. But the most truly Jonsonian of all these places remains to be spoken of. This was the Old Devil Tavern at Temple Bar. Here, in his ripe years, he lorded it over the society of wits. Here was found the famous Apollo room, where his club held its sittings, and for which he wrote Convivial Laws, engraven in gold letters upon black marble above the chimney-piece. These laws, composed in terse Latin, are much to the point, and cannot well be translated into English :—[1]

> Idiota, insulsus, tristis, turpis, abesto;
> Eruditi, urbani, hilares, honesti, adsciscuntor;
> Nec lectae foeminae repudiantor.
>
> . . . .
>
> Convivae nec muti nec loquaces sunto.
> Fidicen, nisi accersitus, non venito.
> Insipida poemata nulla recitantor.
> Versus scribere nullus cogitor.
> Lapitharum more scyphis pugnare, vitrea collidere,
> Fenestras excudere, supellectilem dilacerare, nefas esto.
>
> . . . .
>
> Focus perennis esto.

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[1] I must, however, attempt a version of those specimens which have been given above :—

Let the dullard, the ass, the sad-faced, the lewd fellow, keep away;
The learned, urbane, merry, good fellows, be welcome;
Nor let choice women be excluded.

. . . .

The guests should be neither dumb nor garrulous.
No fiddler, except on invitation, shall attend.
No tasteless poems shall be read,
No one shall be forced to write verses.
To throw cups, break glasses, smash windows,
Tear the furniture to pieces, shall be counted for a crime.

. . . .

The fire upon the hearth must always burn.

The name of the good Boniface who kept this tavern in the days of Jonson—Simon Wadloe, or old Sim, or old Sir Simon the King—deserves to be commemorated. Here, too, would be the place to quote some vigorous lines written by Jonson's disciple, Shackerley Marmion, in his comedy 'A Fine Companion.' Since they describe Jonson's presidency of the Apollo club, they form a proper pendant to the verses already extracted from Beaumont's poem on the Mermaid. Careless, a young gallant, comes upon the stage drunk, and meets Aemilia, to whom, at the end of the play, he gives his hand :—

Car. Save you, fair lady.
Aem. Save you, Master Careless.
Car. Will you hear me speak any wise sentences?
I am now as discreet in my conceit
As the seven Sophies of Greece, I am full
Of oracles, I am come from Apollo ;
Would he had lent me his tripos to stand upon,
For my two legs can hardly carry me.
Aem. Whence come you? from Apollo?
Car. From the heaven
Of my delight, where the boon Delphic god
Drinks sack, and keeps his Bacchanalias,
And has his incense and his altars smoking,
And speaks in sparkling prophecies; thence do I come!
My brains perfumed with the rich Indian vapour,
And heightened with conceits, from tempting beauties,
From dainty music and poetic strains,
From bowls of nectar and ambrosiac dishes,
From witty varlets, fine companions,
And from a mighty continent of pleasure,
Sails thy brave Careless.

There were not wanting evil tongues who pretended that Jonson's inspiration flowed from Mermaid and

Apollo fountains. But these were rightly spurned by his true devotees. Jasper Mayne writes:—

> Scorn then their censures who gave out thy wit
> As long upon a comedy did sit
> As elephants bring forth; and that thy blots
> And mendings took more time than Fortune-plots:
> That such thy drought was, and so great thy thirst,
> That all thy plays were drawn at the Mermaid first;
> That the King's yearly butt wrote, and his wine
> Hath more right than thou to thy Catiline.

The gentle Falkland, in his Eclogue on the memory of Jonson, has painted the recourse of wits to that Phœbean chamber of the Devil in sweet numbers:—

> To him how daily flocked, what reverence gave,
> All that had wit or would be thought to have,
> Or hope to gain, and in so large a store
> That to his ashes they can pay no more,
> Except those few who censuring thought not so
> But aimed at glory from so great a foe;
> How the wise too did with mere wits agree,
> As Pembroke, Portland, and grave Aubigny,
> Nor thought the rigidest senator a shame
> To contribute to so deserved a fame.

The student of English culture in its two great phases of Elizabeth and Anne may pause to consider how frequently the word 'wit' occurs in the former, and how it is as frequently replaced by 'sense' in the latter period.

It was in these convivial meetings that men of letters, emulous of reputation, 'sealed themselves of the tribe of Ben.' Field, Brome, Cartwright, Marmion, Randolph among playwrights; Bishop Morley, Lord Falkland, Sir Kenelm Digby, Sir Henry Morison, and Sir John Suckling among men of station; Herrick, Rutter, and Howell among writers, sought this

honour. Jonson called them his sons, and they were proud of the title. In his 'Underwoods' he printed an epistle 'to one that asked to be sealed of the tribe of Ben,' drawing the portrait of those who answered to his conception of manhood :—

> So short you read my character, and theirs
> I would call mine; to which not many stairs
> Are asked to climb. First give me faith, who know
> Myself a little. I will take you so,
> As you have writ yourself. Now stand, and then,
> Sir, you are sealèd of the Tribe of Ben.

So many points of close resemblance between Ben Jonson and Samuel Johnson, as regards mind, person, character, and habits, present themselves unsought, that it would argue affectation to ignore them. Both were confirmed Londoners; both felt the town to be their element. Both were huge, unwieldy, unhealthy men. Both possessed vast memories and mighty erudition, and were of a stamp to have been eminent in many branches of human activity if circumstance had not made them authors. Both, as characters, were greater and more influential even than as men of letters. Both, as it happens, made short journeys into France and Scotland; and each found in a Scotchman his biographer. Here, however, a notable distinction has to be drawn. No one, I presume, is ignorant how specially fortunate was Samuel Johnson in having James Boswell, of Auchinleck, Esq., for his biographer. Could Boswell's 'Life of Johnson' be expunged from English literature, the world would be poorer by the loss of one of the small number of books fit to live for ever. This cannot be said about the Notes of Jonson's Conversations

recorded by William Drummond of Hawthornden. They are meagre and perhaps, to some extent, unsympathetic. They only relate what passed in talk during Jonson's short visit to Hawthornden, and they reveal no special insight into his character. Yet, such as they are, posterity has to be very grateful to Drummond for this gift. Without his notes we should command far less knowledge of Jonson's opinions, temperament, and experiences than we now possess. Slight therefore as the record is, the students of his life and genius find it invaluable. But they should always be careful to correct these jottings of his table-talk by comparing them with his own 'Discoveries.' A correct estimate of his character can be best formed upon this method.

It was in the summer of 1618 that Jonson conceived and executed the project of walking on foot to Edinburgh. Pedestrian excursions were not altogether unfashionable in that age. Tom Coryat, the eccentric traveller of Odcome, had trudged on the hard hoof over Europe and part of Asia, bequeathing to the world those amusing 'Crudities' which won the ridicule of his contemporaries and have since formed the delight of antiquarian readers. Almost at the same time as Jonson, Taylor, the doggerel water-poet, performed his once famous 'Penniless Journey' on foot to Scotland. They came together at Leith in September, when Jonson gave his fellow-tramp 'a piece of gold of two and twenty shillings to drink his health in England.' Touching his own journey, he told Drummond an amusing anecdote: 'At his hither coming, Sir Francis Bacon said to him, He loved not to see Poesy go on other feet than poetical Dactylus and Spondaeus.' At

what time he made Drummond's acquaintance is not certain. We may probably assume that they first met in Edinburgh toward the end of 1618, and that the visit to Hawthornden took place early in 1619. About January 27 Jonson set off again from Leith on his homeward journey.

There is no reason to suppose that Jonson's visit to Scotland was in any way occasioned by a desire to see William Drummond. He believed Annandale to be the cradle of his ancestry, and King James may have whetted the Laureate's curiosity to become personally acquainted with his country-folk. Drummond himself cut a considerable figure among the minor poets of his day. He could write English with tolerable purity, but with something of the stiffness which betrays the use of a half-foreign language. He took Italian versifiers for his models, and composed some meditative sonnets distinguished for sweetness and a genuine love of nature. Well-born and well-educated both by reading and by foreign travel, he owned one of the most picturesque seats in the immediate neighbourhood of Edinburgh—a grey-stone house, perched upon rocks, commanding a romantic, richly-wooded glen. In his time he had played the courtier, composing an elegy upon the death of Prince Henry ('Tears on the Death of Moeliades'), and a complimentary poem on the visit made by James in 1617 to Scotland ('Forth Feasting'). A scholar-poet of Drummond's stamp was naturally eager to gain the friendship of the Scotch king's Laureate, one who ranked at this date as the foremost man of fine letters in England.

Jonson, in his usual free and easy way, was liberal of candid criticism to his new friend. 'His censure of my

verses was: That they were all good, especially my Epitaph of the Prince, save that they smelled too much of the schools, and were not after the fancy of the time; for a child (says he) may write after the fashion of the Greeks and Latin verses in running; yet that he wished, to please the King, that piece of Forth Feasting had been his own.' Drummond piqued himself on polished imitations of complex Italian rhyming stanzas. Jonson told him that he detested all rhymes except couplets, 'and that cross rhymes and stanzas (because the purpose would lead him beyond eight lines to conclude) were all forced.' He also passed a severe judgment on the grand Spenserian stanza, and 'cursed Petrarch for redacting verses to sonnets; which he said were like that tyrant's bed, where some who were too short were racked, others too long cut short.' These criticisms, together with slashing observations on Italian and French poets, which roused Drummond to the side-remark that 'All this was to no purpose, for he [Jonson] neither doth understand French nor Italians,' were hardly calculated to secure the perfect sympathy of an Italianated brother-poet. That thin thread of bitter feeling, which may certainly be traced in Drummond's notes, is therefore sufficiently accounted for. The men were of a different temperament and diverse breeding. Yet it would be absurd, as Gifford and others have done, to detect ill-feeling and deliberate malice in a series of useful jottings, drawn up with the obvious intention of preserving a great man's sayings, and with no view to their publication.[1]

[1] The conversations were first printed *in extenso* in 1842, for the Shakespeare Society, from a MS. belonging to the Edinburgh Faculty of Advocates.

I shall take this opportunity of drawing upon the conversations for details illustrative of Jonson's views on matters not immediately connected with his biography. It must be remembered that his bent of mind was nothing if not critical, and that he spoke liberally what he thought, upon the spur of the moment. This will account for some of the hard blows he dealt to his contemporaries. 'He esteemeth John Donne the first poet in the world in some things: his verses of the Lost Chain he hath by heart; and that passage of the Calm, "That dust and feathers do not stir, all was so quiet." Affirmeth Donne to have written all his best pieces ere he was 25 years old.' 'That Donne's Anniversary was profane and full of blasphemies.' 'That Donne, for not keeping of accent, deserved hanging.' 'That Donne himself, for not being understood, would perish.' 'That Shakespeare wanted art.' 'Sir Edward Wotton's verses of a Happy Life he hath by heart.' 'That Sir John Harington's Ariosto, under all translations, was the worst.' 'That Francis Beaumont loved too much himself and his own verses.' 'That Southwell was hanged; yet so he had written that piece of his, the Burning Babe, he would have been content to destroy many of his.' 'That Sir W. Raleigh esteemed more of fame than conscience. The best wits of England were employed for making his history.' 'Marston wrote his father-in-law's preachings and his father-in-law his Comedies.' [1] 'Shakespeare, in a play, brought in a number of men saying they had suffered shipwreck in Bohemia, where is no sea near by some 100 miles.'

[1] The father-in-law, William Wilkes, was a parson. This epigram therefore kills two birds with one stone.

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Such are among the most notable of Jonson's dicta on the poets of his day; and posterity, on points where we can check him, will not find much to traverse or arraign upon the score of spite. In Jonson's sense of the word, Shakespeare certainly wanted art; and there is no doubt that Bohemia has no sea-coast. More valid exception may perhaps be taken to what he spoke about himself. And yet, when these casual remarks are put together, we shall acknowledge that he had formed a just estimate of his own talents. 'He was better versed, and knew more in Greek and Latin, than all the poets in England, and quintessence their brains.' 'He dissuaded me from poetry, for that she had beggared him, when he might have been a rich lawyer, physician, or merchant.' 'Of all styles he loved most to be named Honest, and hath of that one hundred letters so naming him.' 'In his merry humour he was wont to name himself The Poet.' 'He would not flatter though he saw Death.' 'He never esteemed a man for the name of a lord.' On the other hand, he was frank enough in telling stories against himself; as, for instance, how 'a gentleman drank him drowsy' upon one occasion; and there are several anecdotes concerning his relations to the fair sex which do not bear repetition. That he agreed with the minister who taught his flock to pray God for 'a gude conceit of our sels,' appears from advice given to Drummond: 'He said to me that I was too good and simple, and that oft a man's modesty made a fool of his wit.'

After minuting the notes of Jonson's Conversations, Drummond sat down and wrote these general impressions of his guest: 'He is a great lover and praiser of

himself; a contemner and scorner of others; given rather to lose a friend than a jest; jealous of every word and action of those about him (especially after drink, which is one of the elements in which he liveth); a dissembler of ill parts which reign in him, a bragger of some good that he wanteth; thinketh nothing well but what either he himself or some of his friends and countrymen hath said or done; he is passionately kind and angry; careless either to gain or keep; vindicative, but, if he be well answered, at himself.

'For any religion, as being versed in both. Interpreteth best sayings and deeds often to the worst. Oppressed with fantasy, which hath ever mastered his reason, a general disease in many Poets. His inventions are smooth and easy; but above all he excelleth in a Translation.'

No one possessed of any sense of humour will fail to appreciate the circumstances under which these paragraphs were penned, or to recognise the real lineaments of Rare Ben in the perplexed portrait drawn of him by his fatigued host. After spending some days in a country house alone with its master, few men would care to have their characters sketched by him upon the morning after their departure. The situation is one unfavourable to impartial and judicial summing-up. And here was a precise, highly-cultivated, gentlemanly Scotsman, who had been entertaining the dictator of London taverns and the would-be censor of his age. Jonson's frailties had certainly made themselves sufficiently manifest. His boisterous self-assertion, his broad criticism, his bragging independence, his wine-bibbing propensities, his heat of temper and rough indifference

to opinion, his huge, ungainly personality puffed up with a Titanic consciousness of strength, were sufficient to overpower the ceremonious and compassed Scotch laird. Drummond, we may be sure, was not sorry on January 19, 1619, when he dated this review of Jonson's character, to be rid of the great man's company. And yet we feel throughout his notes that he was interested in Jonson, and respectful of his judgment. The total result seems to me more favourable than might have been expected. For those who can bear to look dispassionately upon both Jonson and his host, and who can make reasonable allowances for the conditions under which the latter drew up his recollections, the sketch will have the value of a bad photograph. Considering what our information regarding departed men of eminence for the most part really is, this may be accepted with thanksgiving. A merciless photograph is better than a flattering oil picture by Lawrence.

At any rate, Jonson parted from his host in no ungenial humour. He promised to send Drummond, 'if he died by the way, his papers of this country, hewn as they were,' that is to say, his rough notes on Scotland. Drummond, upon his part, undertook to forward him 'Descriptions of Edinburgh, Borrow Lawes, and of the Lomond.' It appears from the 'Conversations' that Jonson contemplated two literary monuments of his Scotch journey. 'He hath intention to write a fisher or pastoral play, and set the stage of it in the Lomond Lake.' Also, 'he is to write his foot-pilgrimage hither, and to call it a Discovery.' This explains the promised interchange of papers. But the piscatory drama and the history of the pedestrian

journey are both wanting. The latter, as a pendant to Samuel Johnson's 'Tour in the Hebrides,' would have been of the highest interest. It perished in the conflagration of his library. The former we can spare with greater equanimity; for of Jonson's poetry we possess a sufficient quantity, and the loss of this play is less to be regretted than that of his earliest dramatic work. It is not impossible that a rough draft of the Loch Lomond pastoral was also burned.

At some date before 1625, and subsequently to his return from Scotland, Jonson wrote a copy of verses, entitled 'An Execration upon Vulcan.' It commemorates the burning of his books and MSS. by accident. There is no doubt that he had collected a fine library of classical, mediëval, and more recent European literature. Selden, in his 'Titles of Honour,' pays a particular compliment to its extent and choice variety. Having occasion to consult the scholiasts on Euripides' 'Orestes,' 'I went,' he says, 'for this purpose, to see it in the well-furnished library of my beloved friend, that singular poet, Master Ben Jonson, whose special worth in literature, accurate judgment and performance, known only to that few which are truly able to know him, hath had from me, ever since I began to learn, an increasing admiration.' Of his stores, selected with the taste of an accomplished scholar, Jonson was abundantly liberal to students. D'Israeli, in his 'Quarrels of Authors,' bears testimony to the number of gift-books inscribed by Jonson, which were current in his day: 'No poet has left behind him, in MS., so many testimonies of personal fondness as Jonson, by inscriptions and addresses in the copies of his works which he presented

to his friends. Of these I have seen more than one, fervent and impressive.' Gifford adds: 'I am fully warranted in saying that more valuable books given to individuals by Jonson are yet to be met with, than by any person of that age. Scores of them have fallen under my own inspection, and I have heard of abundance of others.' In the first volume of his edition of 'Jonson's Works' (London, 1816), Gifford facsimiled an autograph dedication by Jonson of a copy of Persius to his friend John Rowe. It runs as follows:[1] 'D: Joanni Rowe Amico Probatissimo Hunc Amorem et Delicias suas Satiricorum doctissimum PERSIUM cum doctissimo commentario sacravit Ben: Jonsonius et L.M.D.D. Nec prior est mihi parens Amico.'

Such, then, was the collection of printed books, chosen by Jonson and shared by his friends, which perished by fire at some uncertain date between 1619 and 1625. The poet bore the misfortune with a stoical equanimity that reminds us of his namesake Samuel. He indulged his humour in bantering the God of Flames upon the banquet which might have justified that gluttonous invasion:—

> Had I wrote treason here, or heresy,
> Imposture, witchcraft, charms, or blasphemy;
> I had deserved then thy consuming looks—
> Perhaps to have been burnèd with my books.

Had a feast been spread for Vulcan composed of Talmuds, Korans, Acta Sanctorum, Gesta Romanorum,

[1] 'To John Rowe, his most proved friend Ben Jonson devotes this his darling and delight, Persius, of satirists the most learned, together with a most learned commentary, and gives the trifling present as a gift. For me, a parent takes not rank before a friend.'

Merlin's Prophecies, and Mysteries of the Rosy Cross, Ben would not have grumbled. But no: the Fire-king fed upon good, wholesome, humanistic diet, and took his dessert from the ripe fruits of the poet's brain :—

> I dare not say a body, but some parts
> There were of search and mastery in the arts;
> All the old Venusine, in poetry,
> And lighted by the Stagyrite, could spy,
> Was there made English; with a grammar too,
> To teach some that their nurses could not do,
> The purity of language; and, among
> The rest, my journey into Scotland sung,
> With all the adventures: three books, not afraid
> To speak the fate of the Sicilian maid
> To their own ladies; and in story there
> Of our fifth Henry, eight of his nine year;
> Wherein was oil, beside the succours spent,
> Which noble Carew, Cotton, Selden lent;
> And twice twelve years' stored-up humanity,
> With humbler gleanings in divinity,
> After the fathers and those wiser guides
> Whom faction had not drawn to study sides.

In other words, what the world lost of Jonson's MSS. in this conflagration were: (1) his exposition of the 'Ars Poetica' of Horace and the 'Poetics' of Aristotle; (2) an English Grammar; (3) the narrative in verse of his Scotch journey; (4) three books upon the tale of Proserpine in verse; (5) a nearly-finished history of the reign of Henry V.; (6) the collections of twenty-four years devoted to classical and theological studies. Two fragments from the wreck were saved—a sketch of the English Grammar, and a version of the 'Ars Poetica.' The parts we should have valued most—namely, the Scotch Journey, the Tale of Proserpine, and the miscellaneous notes on humane letters and divinity, have

utterly perished. How valuable the commonplace books or miscellanies may have been is apparent from those fragments, printed in the folio of 1641, which we still possess under the title of 'Explorata, or Discoveries.'

I have not much to add upon this period of Jonson's life. In 1619 he went on a visit to Oxford, and was 'actually' admitted M.A. of the University in full Convocation. The degree had previously been conferred on him. But now he enjoyed a personal triumph. In 1621 he obtained the reversion of the office of Master of the Revels. This was granted to him by King James, after the expiration of the lives of Sir G. Buc and Sir J. Astley. But he did not live to enjoy it. In 1623 he produced that vigorous, warm-hearted poem, 'To the Memory of my beloved Master William Shakespeare,' which has more than once been quoted in these pages. Through all these years he worked at Court masques, varying much in poetic inspiration, but showing no signs of nervous failure. At length, in 1625, he once again essayed a venture on the public stage. 'The Staple of News' was acted by the King's Men, probably in the winter.

This comedy belongs to the group, styled comprehensively by Dryden 'his dotages.' It is not certain at what exact point in Jonson's career Dryden conceived his mental decadence to have begun, though I do not remember his citing any play later than 'Bartholomew Fair' with enthusiasm. Most critics will agree that 'The Staple of News,' 'The New Inn,' 'The Magnetic Lady,' and 'The Tale of a Tub' deserve the name of 'dotages,' if this is to be applied to any of Jonson's productions; but while admitting the inferiority of

'The Devil is an Ass' to the masterpieces of its author's maturity, they will probably exempt that play from so contemptuous a verdict.

In 'The Devil is an Ass' and 'The Staple of News Jonson directs his satire against City speculators and bubble companies. The people of that time seem to have been peculiarly gullible by ingenious schemers, who rested on the favour of monopolists at Court. Meercraft, in the former comedy, is the prince of projectors, as they were then called. He bustles about the town with an accomplice, carrying a sack like an attorney's bag. This contains a bundle of prospectuses in MS., neatly endorsed, and so varied as to suit all tastes in turn. Meeting with a man of small capital, he produces some of the least magnificent of these projects—a scheme for making gloves of dogskin, or for improving bottled ale and saving six per cent. upon the corks, or else for distilling wine from raisins at a thumping profit. One dupe is tempted with a project for economising toothpicks, another with a proposed office for arranging disputes and establishing the laws of duel. Lady Tailbush has embarked her fortune in an undertaking to organise cosmetics on new and larger principles. Fitzdottrel, a Norfolk squire, is ready to sink the purchase-money of his estates in a speculation for recovering the fens. Meercraft plays upon this coxcomb's vanity by promising him the title of Duke of Drownland. Able rogue as he is, the projector possesses keen insight into character, and adapts his schemes to the foibles of his customers. Flustered with self-importance, yet obsequious in manner, he assumes the confidential tone of a commercial magnate,

The net results of all his projects have been calculated to a nicety. He displays the balance-sheet of disbursements and receipts, scaled according to plausible estimates, and carried down to the last farthing. No inquiry finds his wit at fault. When difficulties are suggested, he smiles and overwhelms the wavering dupe with statistics. His own insolvency, that patent argument of his imposture, is explained away by impudent rhetoric. Arrested for debt, he wheedles his creditor into dropping the prosecution by a glowing description of his scheme for introducing forks into England, the patent for which he proposes to set off against his liabilities.

This character, like that of Subtle in the 'Alchemist,' formed a very proper subject for comic satire. Meercraft is no type of transitory social humour. We have plenty of such rogues among us in the City at the present day, while dupes like Lady Tailbush and Fitzdottrel abound. In the under-plot of 'The Staple of News' Jonson exposed another phase of imposture working upon vulgar folly, which is also not without its parallel in our age. He introduces the audience to the interior of an office which has been established for supplying town and country with news.[1] The company has correspondents in every part of London, England, and the Continent. Posts are continually arriving with political, commercial, and diplomatic information. Despatches are momently issued, bearing the company's signature and stamp. Customers in crowds assail its

[1] See Epigrams No. XCII. on the avidity for news in London. My friend, Mr. H. F. Brown, tells me that at Venice there existed a sort of office for the compilation and distribution of news.

counter to buy pennyworths of the latest news. All classes of intelligence are docketed; one pigeon-hole being reserved for Puritans, another for the Court, a third for Roman Catholics, a fourth for the Exchange, and so on. Much show is made, moreover, of distinguishing true from false, fresh from stale items. The current journals, 'Mercurius Britannicus' and 'Gallo-Belgicus,' profit by this Staple, which provides them with authenticated material at a fixed tariff. There will in future be no need to scrape up gossip at the corners of streets, to pen apocryphal pamphlets, or to stuff country letters with town lies. The Staple undertakes to simplify, centralise, and co-ordinate all sources of intelligence. It is a fountain fed by a thousand conduit-pipes, condensing and distributing veracious information. Such is the magnificent conception of this great newsmarket, presented to the public by its agents. But when we read the trash which it sends forth, the puffs, sensational paragraphs, and scraps of highly-seasoned scandal, on which its customers expend their pence, we discover that the imposing machine is a mere bubble floating on the scum of popular credulity.

If 'The Staple of News' had been executed with vigour corresponding to the excellence of this comic motive, it would have ranked with the best of Jonson's pieces. But, as it often happens in plays of this species, only the underplot is amusing. The substance of the drama consists of an allegory, studied from the 'Plutus' of Aristophanes. Lady Pecunia, half-person and half-abstraction, with her attendants, Statute, Mortgage, Band, Rose-wax, and Broker, succeeds in being one of the most wearisome of dramatic nondescripts. Avarice,

Prodigality, and Prudence, thinly disguised under the masks of the three Pennyboys, weary us by their stiff symbolism, without conveying new lessons in the morality of wealth.

Earlier in his career Jonson might, perhaps, have animated even so unpromising a plot as this, which brings metaphorical personages into the sphere of realism. The sheer force of his gigantic intellect and will was at one time adequate to almost any task. But it is clear from 'The Staple of News' that what Marston called a 'heathy dryness' had begun to sterilise his brain; and we are not astonished to find that, shortly after its publication, possibly in the spring of 1626, he was laid low by a stroke of paralysis.

CHAPTER VII.

OLD AGE.

After middle life Jonson's health seems to have gradually yielded to a variety of infirmities. He was a man of massive build, high stature, and, to use his own phrase, 'ungainly gait.' From his parents he inherited scorbutic affections, which impoverished his blood, and externally displayed their effects upon his seamed and swollen features. As time went on, and larger opportunities of indulgence offered, he succumbed more and more to the seductions of the table and the wine-cup. On careful scrutiny of the evidence before us, I do not believe that Jonson can be justly taxed with gluttony or habitual sottishness. But he led a student's sedentary life, frequented the houses of the wealthy, and revelled in Homeric drinking bouts. His own frank admissions, the direct testimony of Drummond, and a considerable mass of tolerably authentic tradition, place beyond doubt the fact that he drank wine to excess. His unhealthy constitution craved alcoholic stimulus, and his social habits made the recourse to it too easy. The consequences of this ill-regulated diet became apparent, and Jonson was the first, with customary candour, to acknowledge them. When he sent Drummond a portrait of himself, some humorous verses accompanied

the gift. The poet feigned that his mistress had turned a deaf ear to his suit, although his words still flowed in liquid numbers :—

> In sentence of as subtle feet,
> As hath the youngest he
> That sits in shadow of Apollo's tree.

Then he turns to the picture and discerns the cause of her disdain :—

> Oh ! but my conscious fears,
> That fly my thoughts between,
> Tell me that she hath seen
> My hundreds of grey hairs,
> Told seven and forty years,
> Read so much waist as she can not embrace,
> My mountain belly, and my rocky face.

To the same half-humorous, half-melancholy lamentations over his vast girth and personal unwieldiness he frequently returns in poems of occasion. Sir William Burlase, the painter, had addressed him a copy of verses. He replies :—

> Why, though I seem of a prodigious waist,
> I am not so voluminous and vast
> But there are lines wherewith I might be embraced.
>
> 'Tis true, as my womb swells, so my back stoops,
> And the whole lump grows round, deformed, and droops ;
> But yet the Tun at Heidelberg had hoops.

Again to one, Master Squib, he communicates the fact that he is going to be weighed for a wager, and that he only lacks two pounds of twenty stone. He artfully uses this shortcoming to beg the gift of five pieces of silver which, held within his pocket, as he calculates, would make the full weight up. The same quip is used to a like purpose in the Epistle to my Lady Covell :—

> So you have gained a servant and a muse:
> The first of which I fear you may refuse;
> And you may justly, being a tardy, cold,
> Unprofitable chattel, fat and old,
> Laden with belly, and doth hardly approach
> His friends but to break chairs or crack a coach.
> His weight is twenty stone within two pound;
> And that's made up as doth the purse abound.
> Marry, the muse is one can tread on air,
> And stroke the water, nimble, chaste and fair.

In other words, his 'too too solid flesh' still held within that ample round a sprightly fancy and the spirit of a high-strung poet. This consoling thought, that though the body labours like a sea-logged vessel, yet the intellectual particle, the spark of divine inspiration, survives man's physical decay, sustained Jonson through eleven declining years. We find it often recurring in his verse during the decade upon which we are now entering.

Manifold ailments weighed down his sturdy nature. Palsy-stricken since 1626, he was later on attacked by dropsy; and toward the close of his life he seems to have been well-nigh bedridden. Owing to these disabilities he gradually lost hold upon the Court and his noble patrons. James had died in 1625, more than a year before the period which forms the subject of this chapter. Charles Stuart, as we shall presently learn, proved himself a kind master to his father's Laureate. But immediately after his accession to the throne there came a hard time of three or four years, during which Jonson almost sank under water. Courtiers had something else to do than to visit a declining playwright, when the policy and personal habits of their new monarch and his Popish consort called for narrow

scrutiny. Then, too, the dictator of the Devil Tavern was missed in his old haunts; and though Jonson returned to these, and burned by flashes with the fire of warmer days, who knows what apes and upstarts, creatures moulded on his pattern, wielded spurious imitations of that cloud-compelling wit while he was absent? He therefore tended toward oblivion, as happens to all who live outside the world of their acquaintances and equals.

It is well to notice that, during these clouded days, Jonson obtained the post of Chronologer to the City of London, upon the decease of Thomas Middleton. The office was worth a salary of 100 nobles, and carried with it certain duties which he very imperfectly discharged. Jonson accepted this service in September, 1628, regarding it apparently in the light of a sinecure. Thus much I had to say upon the matter now, since it will have some slight significance in the future. But the chief event of the year 1628–29 was the representation of a comedy called 'The New Inn.' It was put upon the stage by the King's Men in January, 1629, and 'in the technical language of the Green Room, was completely damned, not being heard to the conclusion.'

The plot of this comedy is so extravagant as to account for its failure on the stage. Lord Frampul, an eccentric nobleman of wit and education, had two daughters, Frances and Lætitia, by his wife. Though in reality attached to Lady Frampul, he treated her with some indifference, and after the birth of his second daughter showed such apparent coldness, that the good lady thought he bore a grudge against her. She left his house, carrying the girl Lætitia, and roamed the

world in the disguise of an Irish gipsy. Lord Frampul, conscience-stricken by this evidence of his wife's grief, assumed the clothes and habits of a tinker, spent several years in vagabondage, and finally settled in an inn at Barnet. He christened this hostelry the Light Heart. After some time his disguised wife reached the Light Heart with Lætitia, whom she passed off as a boy and sold to her husband, the innkeeper. Meanwhile Frances grew up, took the title of Lady Frampul, and enjoyed the family estates. When the play opens, Lord Frampul is still living as the innkeeper at Barnet, with his own daughter Lætitia dressed as a boy and called Frank, and his wife disguised as a drunken Irish-woman, all under the same roof and ignorant of their respective relationships. A devoted lover of Frances, the younger Lady Frampul, who is called Lovel, has also made the Light Heart his temporary place of sojourn. When we have become acquainted with these personages, Frances arrives at the inn, attended by two other of her suitors, the Lords Latimer and Beaufort. It is her whim to collect lovers around her, and to indulge her humour by playing one against the other for sport. She takes a fancy to the boy Frank, dresses him up as a girl, and passes him off upon her company as one of her maternal kinswomen. Frank is henceforth known as Lætitia Sylly. In the course of the play Lord Beaufort falls in love with this extremely puzzling person.[1] They are married in a barn, and the cata-

[1] When we remember that a boy played the part of Lætitia-Frank-Lætitia on the stage, the confusion is almost too bewildering to disentangle. He was a boy personating a girl, disguised as a boy, dressed up as a girl, married as a girl, believed after the wed-

strophe is brought about by the double discovery that Lætitia Sylly is the boy Frank, and that the boy Frank is really Lætitia Frampul. A recognition and warm reconciliation take place between Lord and Lady Frampul, and Frances accepts the hand of her servant Lovel.

That a young lady, believed to be a baroness in her own right, should find her father established as the host of a country inn, her mother disguised as a tipsy Irishwoman in the same house, and her only sister accepted as the host's son, while father, mother, and both daughters are unaware of their kinship, until an accident reveals the truth, is of course preposterous, beyond the license of romance or comedy. Yet, having admitted so much, I must record my opinion that 'The New Inn,' in many important respects, is one of Jonson's best comedies. It ranks far above his other dotages. In this play Jonson attempted something in the romantic style, suggested probably by Fletcher's handling of remote imaginative subjects.[1] But he was unable to

ding to be a boy, then finally recognised as a girl—remaining all the while a boy in his true person. This beats Epicoene.

[1] I must touch upon a question regarding the authorship of some passages in *The New Inn.* The comic speeches of Peck, the ostler, in the third act are repeated textually in Fletcher's play of *Love's Pilgrimage.* This comedy is supposed to have been left unfinished at Fletcher's death in 1625, and to have been completed by Shirley. It was played before 1635, but was not printed until 1647. The editors of Jonson's works believe that Shirley, or whoever adapted Fletcher's play for publication, borrowed the business between Lazaro and Diego, which he inserted in the first act of *Love's Pilgrimage*, from *The New Inn;* and to this opinion I incline. The other supposition, that Jonson took Peck's speeches from Fletcher, is, for many reasons, highly improbable; and, especially, I may notice that in Jonson's defence of his comedy and in the attacks made upon it, we find no allusion to any charge of plagi-

discard the literary habits of a lifetime. His solid workmanship, and the massiveness of intellectual material in high-flown disquisitions and discourses with which he has interpolated scenes of broad farce, do not suit the true romantic manner. The characters, moreover, are defined by deep and trenchant lines, inapplicable to airy creatures of fantastic fable.

Several of these characters, however, are in themselves excellent. Lovel and the Host, for instance, exhibit in their first interview a full and warm humanity —the one mellow and humorous, the other chivalrous and enthusiastic. Into Lovel's mouth Jonson has put some of the finest poetry which survives from the Jacobean age of our drama. When I shall have dealt with the untoward fate of the comedy, and described the indignation which this roused in its author's breast, I mean to resume Lovel's speeches upon love and courage. At present it suffices to remark that these passages of eloquent blank-verse, weighty as they are with thought, breathe fervid intellectual passion—an enthusiasm for spiritual beauty which we are surprised to find still burning in the aged poet's brain. Charles Lamb, after quoting the finest of Lovel's declamations, adds: 'These and the preceding extract may serve to show the poetical fancy and elegance of mind of the supposed rugged old bard.'

Frances, the younger Lady Frampul, again, is what Jonson has rarely attempted to pourtray—a real woman, revealing her woman's nature no less by phantasies and waywardnesses than by high spirit and generous

arism. The theory that *The New Inn* was damned because the plagiarism was recognised seems to me on this account untenable.

self-abandonment to feeling. This lady, at first so reckless in her coquetry, then so impulsive in her passion, is no less admirable than her loyal golden-mouthed adorer. Lord Beaufort serves as a useful foil to the exalted chivalry of Lovel; the young man yielding to the humour of a sudden inclination, and fitly wedded for comic purpose to Frances Frampul's sister. All of these fantastical personages strike us rather as the creatures of an April poet's fancy than as the laboured products of a palsy-stricken playwright's craftsmanship.

'The New Inn' was printed two years after its appearance, with this angry annotation on the title-page: 'As it was never acted, but most negligently played by some, The King's Servants; and more squeamishly beheld and censured by others, The King's Subjects.' The Epilogue, written apparently for the first performance, describes the poet's state of health in moving terms:—

> If you expect more than you had to-night,
> The maker is sick and sad. But do him right;
> He meant to please you: for he sent things fit,
> In all the numbers both of sense and wit,
> If they have not miscarried! If they have,
> All that his faint and faltering tongue doth crave,
> Is that you not impute it to his brain;
> That's yet unhurt, although, set round with pain,
> It cannot long hold out. All strength must yield;
> Yet judgment would the last be in the field,
> With a true poet.

The last lines hint at neglect by the Court:—

> And had he lived the care of king and queen,
> His art in something more yet had been seen;
> But mayors and shrieves may yearly fill the stage:
> A king's or poet's birth doth ask an age.

Gifford supposes that this epilogue reached the ears of Charles; yet it was not spoken on the stage in 1629 nor printed till 1631. Therefore, if this really was the case, the verses must have been submitted to his Majesty in MS. At any rate, the King this year bestowed a present of 100*l.* on Jonson, and in 1630 he raised his pension to the sum of 100*l.*, adding the famous annual present of a tierce of Canary wine. We still possess 'the Humble Petition of poor Ben to the best of monarchs, masters, men, King Charles,' in which he prayed that the marks granted by James might be expanded into pounds. A series of short poems following close upon Charles' act of liberality bespeak the poet's gratitude.

The failure of this comedy inspired Jonson with one of his most vigorous lyric pieces. It is prefaced with a few words of explanation: 'The just indignation the author took at the vulgar censure of his play by some malicious spectators, begat this following ode to himself.' Omitting two stanzas which describe the decadence of the drama, and the last, which compliments the King, I will present the remaining half of this noble composition to my readers, it being in my opinion an almost perfect specimen of rhetoric and rhythmical structure exactly suited to a strain of vehement emotion.

> Come, leave the loathèd stage,
> And the more loathsome age;
> Where pride and impudence, in faction knit,
> Usurp the chair of wit!
> Indicting and arraigning every day
> Something they call a play.
> Let their fastidious, vain
> Commission of the brain
> Run on and rage, sweat, censure, and condemn;
> They were not made for thee, less thou for them.

Say that thou pour'st them wheat,
And they will acorns eat;
'Twere simple fury still thyself to waste
On such as have no taste!
To offer them a surfeit of pure bread,
Whose appetites are dead!
No, give them grains their fill,
Husks, draff to drink and swill:
If they love lees, and leave the lusty wine,
Envy them not, their palate's with the swine.

Leave things so prostitute,
And take the Alcaic lute;
Or thine own Horace, or Anacreon's lyre;
Warm thee by Pindar's fire:
And though thy nerves be shrunk, and blood be cold
Ere years have made thee old,
Strike that disdainful heat
Throughout, to their defeat,
As curious fools, and envious of thy strain,
May blushing swear no palsy's in thy brain.

The trumpet-note of defiance sounded in this poem roused numerous retorts from writers of the day. One of these, composed by Owen Feltham in the same metre as the original, was not deficient in good sense and candid criticism:—

Come, leave this saucy way
Of baiting those that pay
Dear for the sight of your declining wit:
'Tis known it is not fit
That a sale poet, just contempt once thrown,
Should cry up thus his own.

. . . .

'Tis known you can do well,
And that you do excell
As a Translator. But when things require
A genius and a fire
Not kindled heretofore by others' pains:—

. . . .

Next he tells Ben how flat and stupid were his 'Jug, Pierce, Peck, Fly,' and all his 'jests so nominal,' condemns the absurd plot of 'The New Inn,' and points out the impropriety of Lovel's scholastic dissertations in a play of that type. Though worded unkindly, the rebuke was not wanting in justice.

Lovel, the principal male personage of 'The New Inn,' deserves, as I have said above, more than a merely superficial notice. He is the type of the chivalrous and poetic lover, as Jonson conceived that type, modified by philosophical and humanistic culture. He out-Birons Biron in his raptures:—

> There is no life on earth, but being in love!
> There are no studies, no delights, no business,
> No intercourse, or trade of sense or soul,
> But what is love! I was the laziest creature,
> The most unprofitable soul of nothing,
> The veriest drone, and slept away my life
> Beyond the dormouse, till I was in love!
> And now I can outwake the nightingale,
> Out-watch an usurer, and out-walk him too;
> Stalk like a ghost, that haunted 'bout a treasure,
> And all that phant'sied treasure, it is love.

Lovel has adored Frances, the younger Lady Frampul, for a long time, but has forborne to express his passion or to urge his suit because the son of his old sire in chivalry has some pretension to her hand:—

> Did you e'er know, or hear of the Lord Beaufort,
> Who served so bravely in France? I was his page,
> And ere he died, his friend: I followed him,
> First in the wars, and in the times of peace
> I waited on his studies; which were right.
> He had no Arthurs, nor no Rosicleers,
> No Knights o' the Sun, nor Amadis de Gauls,
> Primalions, Pantagruels, public nothings;

> But great Achilles, Agamemnon's acts,
> Sage Nestor's counsels, and Ulysses' slights,
> Tydides' fortitude, as Homer wrought them
> In his immortal phantasy, for examples
> Of the heroic virtue.
> He gave me first my breeding, I acknowledge,
> Then showered his bounties on me like the Hours,
> That open-handed sit upon the clouds,
> And press the liberality of heaven
> Down to the laps of thankful men! But then
> The trust committed to me at his death,
> Was above all, and left so strong a tie
> On all my power as time shall not dissolve,
> Till it dissolve itself and bury all—
> The care of his brave heir and only son;
> Who being a virtuous, sweet, young, hopeful lord,
> Hath cast his first affections on this lady.
> And though I know, and may presume her such
> As, out of humour, will return no love;
> And therefore might indifferently be made
> The courting-stock for all to practise on,
> As she doth practise on all us to scorn:
> Yet, out of a religion to my charge,
> And debt professed, I have made a self-decree,
> Ne'er to express my person, though my passion
> Burn me to cinders.

Chance determines that he shall have the opportunity of wooing his mistress, even against his will. Lovel is moping in his chamber at the inn, when Frances Frampul arrives with her train of servants and suitors. At first, from motives of mere idle coquetry, she sends to bid him join her party in their sports. He obeys unwillingly, and is appointed by the mistress of the revels to discourse on love and valour. Beaufort, the youth in whose favour he has waived his rights of courtship, is also present in attendance on the lady. His frank, light-hearted sensuousness forms an excellent contrast

to Lovel's ponderous but noble dissertations. When, for instance, Lovel has explained love's nature in terms of Platonic mysticism, Beaufort interrupts:—

> I relish not these philosophical feasts;
> Give me a banquet of sense, like that of Ovid.

But Lovel proceeds at the same high pitch:—

> They are the earthly, lower forms of lovers,
> Are only taken with what strikes the senses;
> And love by that loose scale. Although I grant
> We like what's fair and graceful in an object,
> And, true, would use it in the all we tend to
> Both of our civil and domestic deeds;
> In ordering of an army, in our style,
> Apparel, gesture, building, or what not:
> All arts and actions do affect their beauty.
> But put the case, in travel I may meet
> Some gorgeous structure, a brave frontispiece,
> Shall I stay captive in the outer court,
> Surprised with that, and not advance to know
> Who dwells there and inhabiteth the house?
> There is my friendship to be made, within,
> With what can love me again: not with the walls,
> Doors, windows, architraves, the frieze and cornice.
> My end is lost in loving of a face,
> An eye, lip, nose, hand, foot, or other part,
> Whose all is but a statue, if the mind
> Move not, which only can make the return.
> The end of love is to have two made one
> In will and in affection, that the minds
> Be first inoculated, not the bodies.

To these fine sentiments, Beaufort, lying in Lætitia's lap, cries:—

> Give me the body, if it be a good one.

Meanwhile Lovel's sober eloquence wins on Frances; and, as he continues speaking, her froward temper gradually yields to gentle affections:—

> How am I changed! By what alchemy
> Of love, or language, am I thus translated?

When he has delivered his oration, she exclaims :—

> O speak, and speak for ever; let mine ear
> Be feasted still and filled with this banquet!
> No sense can ever surfeit on such truth!
> It is the marrow of all lovers' tenets.

Her friends cackle and gossip round her; but she sits entranced, soliloquising to herself:—

> Where have I lived, in heresy, so long,
> Out of the congregation of Love,
> And stood irregular, by all his canons?
> . . . . . .
> What penance shall I do to be received,
> And reconciled to the church of Love?
> Go on procession, barefoot, to his image,
> And say some hundred penitential verses,
> There, out of Chaucer's Troilus and Cressid?

Carrying on the same strain of hyperbolical repentance, she exclaims :—

> Love and his mother,
> I'll build them several churches, shrines, and altars,
> And overhead I'll have in the glass windows
> The story of this day be painted round,
> For the poor laity of love to read.

Some of these speeches by the Lady Frampul are uttered aside; others, overheard, procure for her a further character for irony and waywardness. Least of all does her lover suppose that he has been so clever as to win her heart. And when in the next act he defends the thesis of valour, it is with no belief in his good fortune. On the second point it may be said that he declaims to even better purpose :—

> The things true valour's exercised about,
> Are poverty, restraint, captivity,
> Banishment, loss of children, long disease;
> The least is death.

That man is not valiant who is merely ready to fight or to die:—

> The manner of it
> Renders a man himself. A valiant man
> Ought not to undergo, or tempt a danger,
> But worthily, and by selected ways:
> He undertakes with reason, not by chance.

As in the case of love, so also in that of courage, Jonson sets himself to prove that reason and the intellectual part of man elicit virtue from mere appetite or humour. His ideal of manliness is that expressed by Cæsar in 'The Poetaster'; his knight is one who—

> Can becalm
> All sea of humour with the marble trident
> Of his strong spirit.

I have dwelt at some length upon this comedy, partly because of its strangeness, but also because it exhibits Jonson in a somewhat unaccustomed light. To match Lovel's rhapsody on love we must go back to the splendid declamation upon poetry in the first version of 'Every Man in his Humour.' Nor, on the whole, is any character in Jonson's comedies so worthy of respect and beautifully toned as this one.

As years advanced, troubles gathered round Ben Jonson. He had never been provident; and now that sickness and old age exhausted his mental powers, he was entirely dependent on his pension and the liberality of friends. In the autumn of 1631 the City of London passed a resolution to the effect that his salary as Chronologer should be stopped until he presented 'some fruits of his labour in that his place.' A letter announcing their decision to his friend, the Earl of

Newcastle, contains this characteristic sentence: 'Yesterday the barbarous Court of Aldermen have withdrawn their chandlerly pension for verjuice and mustard, 33*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.*' The loss of this pension was soon afterwards followed by another stroke of ill-fortune. At the New Year's festivities of 1632, the King's masque, which had been usually supplied by Jonson, was ordered from Mr. Aurelian Townsend. Thus he lost the gratuity of some 40*l.* which the Court paid its poet on these occasions. We know from a private letter written to Sir John Puckering by a Mr. Pory that Ben Jonson was 'for this time discarded by reason of the predominant power of his antagonist, Inigo Jones.' They had long been in the habit of working together on the Whitehall entertainments, Jonson providing the libretto and Jones the invention of stage-machinery. But the relations between the two artists were never cordial. It is impossible that Jones should have forgiven a certain remark made by the free-spoken poet to Prince Charles, nor was he the man to brook Jonson's assumption of superiority in their joint undertakings. It appears, however, that he waited until the Laureate fell ill and out of sight, in order to take his revenge. The immediate occasion of his declared hostility was Jonson's publication of the masque 'Chloridia' in 1630, when the names of 'the inventors Ben Jonson, Inigo Jones' appeared upon the title-page. Mr. Pory's letter informs us that the architect was angry with the poet 'for putting his own name before his in the title-page, which Ben Jonson has made the subject of a bitter satire or two against Inigo.' The satires in question may still be read under the titles of 'An Expostulation

with Inigo Jones,' &c. They prove that Jonson, even on a sick-bed, retained the gall and venom of his earlier controversies; but their artistic merit is small.

No department of literary history is more tedious and repulsive than that which belongs to the quarrels of authors and their kind. I shall, therefore, break the thread of chronological development in order to have done with this ignoble subject. In 1633 Jonson gave his comedy 'The Tale of a Tub' to the stage, with a savagely satirical caricature of Inigo Jones under the transparent pseudonym of Vitruvius Hoop. This part was cut out by authority, and in the comedy as we possess it only a faint trace of the satire remains. The office-book of the Master of the Revels, whose duty it was to license plays for acting, contains an entry to the effect that: 'Vitruvius Hoop's part [was] wholly struck out, and the motion of a tub, by command from my Lord Chamberlain; exceptions being taken against it by Inigo Jones, surveyor of the King's Works, as a personal injury unto him.' There is considerable uncertainty as to the date when 'The Tale of a Tub' was composed. This comedy has been referred to an early period of Jonson's career as playwright, and has also been claimed as one of his dotages. But, considering how slight its merits are, the problem of its date of composition, though interesting to the curious in style and to masters of antiquarian research, may be omitted here. No student who wishes to see Jonson at his best need take the pains to travel through its labyrinth of errors. Even Gifford admits that 'The Tale of a Tub' 'has no great pretensions to notice,' while less indulgent critics will not fail to call it an uninteresting play. All that was

mechanical in Jonson's plot-construction, all that was awkward in his treatment of comic incident, and superficial in his delineation of character, is exemplified in this which I should still desire to regard as the latest product of his enfeebled brain.

The chief event of 1632 was the representation of 'The Magnetic Lady' by the King's Men. This play has a certain value in the history of Jonson's life, inasmuch as he declared it to be the last of his cycle of comedies upon the humours. Having begun with 'Every Man in his Humour' and 'Every Man out of his Humour,' he styled 'The Magnetic Lady' by a subtitle, 'The Humours Reconciled.' To note so much is sufficient. No one can be now expected to take interest in the plot of this spasmodically wooden comedy. It exhibits, indeed, the method of the erewhile potent puppet-maker, but the vein of humour is exhausted, and the breath of mental life has passed from its stiff personages. A certain mechanical command of theatrical resources seems to have survived all intellectual decline in Jonson's genius; and of this faculty 'The Magnetic Lady' exhibits sufficient to make its failure as a work of art well-nigh pathetic.

The destitution to which Jonson was now reduced awoke the interest of many old friends, and among these the Earl (afterwards Duke) of Newcastle proved himself a generous patron. We possess some letters from the poet to that nobleman, one of which is touching in its manly appeal for help: 'I send no borrowing epistle to provoke your lordship, for I have neither fortune to repay, nor security to engage that will be taken; but I make a most humble petition to your lordship's bounty to

succour my present necessities this good time of Easter, and it shall conclude all begging requests hereafter on the behalf of your truest beadsman and most thankful servant, B. J.' Two entertainments, in the years 1633 and 1634, were produced for the earl upon the occasion of royal visits to Welbeck and Bolsover. It appears that Charles, possibly at Lord Newcastle's request, commanded the City to continue their payment of 100 nobles to Jonson as Chronologer in the autumn of 1634.

From this date till August 6, 1637, when Jonson died, we know but little of his life and doings. A few verses of occasion, including a 'New Year's Gift' to King Charles upon the opening of the year 1634–5, were the last fruits of his pen; and the remaining thirty-two months of his existence were probably passed in the gloom of a sick bed-chamber. There is not, however, any reason to suppose that he was in actual need, or that the kind offices of friends were wanting. The enthusiastic elegies by several authors, published under the title of 'Jonsonus Virbius,' six months after his decease, prove that up to the very end he must have been a living celebrity and an honoured person in his generation. When I pass to consider his position of influence in the seventeenth century, I shall revert to these encomiastic poems. The next paragraphs of this chapter must be devoted to the problem of a dramatic pastoral which was found among Jonson's papers after his death.

It has been generally taken for granted that 'The Sad Shepherd' was composed by Jonson in 1637—that is to say, a few months before his death. The assumption rests upon a line in the prologue:—

He that hath feasted you these forty years:

which carries the author's career as playwright back to its right date of 1597. Yet there are grave difficulties in the way of our supposing that Jonson's 'bed-rid muse' was capable of so vigorous an effort. This pastoral, as we possess it, consists of a prologue, two acts, and part of a third, together with the carefully developed arguments for the first three acts, from which it appears that the whole play would have been composed of five acts. At Hawthornden he told Drummond that he had 'a pastoral entitled "The May Lord,"' and added some details regarding its personages. It is tempting to conjecture that 'The May Lord' and 'The Sad Shepherd' were one and the same play, upon the alteration of which, or its completion for the stage, Jonson was working when death cut short his thread. Had 'The May Lord' been finished when he went to Scotland in 1618, it seems singular that he should not have brought it before the public during the period of his attempts to earn money late in life by play-writing. Had it been destroyed together with other MSS. in the burning of his library, it seems no less strange that he should not have mentioned it in 'An Execration upon Vulcan.' I have sometimes entertained the thought that the double difficulty involved in either identifying 'The Sad Shepherd' with the completed, but now lost, 'May Lord,' or in supposing 'The Sad Shepherd' to have been the product of Jonson's latest and disease-ruined old age, might be explained by his habit of composing first in prose. Upon this theory 'The May Lord' would have been digested throughout in prose before 1618, but only versified up to the point where it now stops abruptly. In 1637 the bed-ridden poet would have

resumed his work of versification, and have begun by altering a line in the prologue to suit the later date. The change of title is a small matter; and if some of the names mentioned by Jonson to Drummond, as Ethra and Mogibel, do not appear in 'The Sad Shepherd,' this again is a trifle in comparison with the critical impossibility of believing that a paralysed, bed-ridden poet, who had been silent for two whole years, should suddenly have conceived and partly executed a masterpiece worthy of his prime. The hypothesis I have advanced will also serve to explain the imperfection of the piece, as we possess it. Those persons into whose hands the MS. fell, and who prepared it for publication, may have thought it worth while to print the versified fragment so far as it went, together with the argument of the first three acts, not sending the prose version of the whole drama to press. This method of dealing with MS. would have been natural in that age, which was far less scrupulous in the discharge of literary duties than ours. It might even have been justified if Jonson, in his redaction of 1637, had introduced alterations of names and minor details, causing the prose version to disagree with the versified fragment. Of course, a careful editor in our days would print both prose and verse *in extenso;* but such accuracy was by no means in the manner of the Jacobean period.

Whatever opinion may be formed upon this question of its composition, all will agree that 'The Sad Shepherd' illustrates Jonson's qualities at their best. It is distinguished by powerful brain-work in the weaving of the plot, by sharply-indented character-delineation, and by learning, judiciously, if somewhat

ponderously, applied. But there is more than that to notice. What Gifford styles a 'bright and sunny ray' of poetry, genuine though thin, pervades it. The choice of the names Æglamour and Earinë for the rustic hero and heroine was happy. The latter gives a grace to every verse in which we find it:—

> But she,
> As chaste as was her name, Earinë,
> Died undeflowered.

Notice, too, how it introduces harmony into the discord of her lover's sorrow:—

> Earinë,
> Who had her very being and her name
> With the first knots or buddings of the spring,
> Born with the primrose or the violet
> Or earliest roses blown.

I need hardly remind my readers that, in Greek, Earinë means the maiden of the spring. Jonson, if I am right, borrowed this name from one of Martial's epigrams. The opening lines of the pastoral, in which the Sad Shepherd tracks his mistress by the flowers which sprang upon her footsteps, have the same charm of vernal melody:—

> Here was she wont to go! and here! and here!
> Just where those daisies, pinks, and violets grow:
> The world may find the spring by following her;
> For other print her airy steps ne'er left.
> Her treading would not bend a blade of grass,
> Or shake the downy blow-ball from his stalk!
> But like the soft west wind she shot along,
> And where she went, the flowers took thickest root,
> As she had sowed them with her amorous foot.

But with these quotations we have rifled nearly all the honey of the pastoral romance. It is to be regretted

that such beauties should be mingled with bad taste and pedantry. Æglamour draws a picture of the drowned Earinë's corpse cast up by the waves, 'tainted as themselves, all pale and bloodless.' Then he declares that he will—

> Make them mad
> To see how I will hug it in mine arms!
> And hang upon her looks, dwell on her eyes,
> Feed round about her lips, and eat her kisses,
> Suck off her drowned flesh!

Surely a shrimp or a lobster might express its passion after this wise! So much for the lapses into bad taste. For the pedantry, we have only to listen to an old shepherd of Sherwood discoursing familiarly of—

> What they call
> The lovers' scriptures, Heliodores or Tatii,
> Longi, Eustathii, Prodromi.

A couple at least of these names would puzzle an Ireland or Craven scholar.

Such blemishes might have been passed over had not critics like Gifford and Hallam chosen to praise 'The Sad Shepherd' for its propriety. The latter prefers it to Fletcher's 'Faithful Shepherdess.' It is, indeed, true that the plot is far more regular, well-knit, and varied than that of Fletcher's pastoral. Terms of venery and allusions to rural toils and sports are introduced with careful realism, and it is probable that the play would act well. None of these qualifications are to be found in 'The Faithful Shepherdess,' which is as lamely constructed, as devoid of actual rusticity, and as dreamy as can well be. But what words can be found to express the superiority of Fletcher's poetry

or to describe the stupidity of the critic who does not discern it? From beginning to end of that enchanted romance our ears are charmed with lyrical music of matchless facility, and our minds delighted with situations of visionary beauty. It must be conceded that Fletcher blurred the imaginative purity of his conception by faults of taste and some absolutely offensive passages. Yet these can be detached from a scheme so loosely put together, and the sylvan poetry remains, worthy almost to be ranked with the divine melodies of Tasso's 'Aminta.' Granting that both Fletcher's and Jonson's pastorals will not stand the test of reality, it is surely better to wander with the former in the glades of Arcady than with Jonson in a theatrical Sherwood Forest.

Great interest was excited by the death of Jonson. Society felt that with him the last of the heroic generation, of those whom Dryden subsequently called 'the giant race before the flood,' had passed away. Verses were poured upon his grave, and a sum of money was collected for the purpose of erecting to his memory a stately tomb. The troubles of the rebellion intervened to check this design, and Jonson's monument is the plain slab in Westminster Abbey, on which Sir John Young, of Great Milton, caused the words 'O rare Ben Jonson!' to be engraved.[1] From the collection of commendatory poems compiled by Gifford and the book of elegies called 'Jonsonus Virbius,' selections might be made which prove beyond all doubt the high esteem of his contemporaries. Poets, scholars, and men of fashion

[1] The famous 'rare Ben Jonson' is said to have been first uttered after the appearance of *Bartholomew Fair*.

vied in praise; nor was it merely admiration for the playwright, but love of the man too, which prompted such lines as those of Shirley, Cleveland, Beaumont, Fletcher, Selden, Chapman, Waller, Donne, Field, Marston, Cartwright, Marmion, May, Herrick, Ford, Lord Buckhurst, Falkland, and a host of lesser bards. They are all set to one strain, and combine to celebrate 'the king of poets,' 'the English Horace,' 'immortal Ben,' 'thrice honoured father,' 'best of English poets,' 'him who can never be forgotten.' It was the age of compliments; but these verses bear notes of genuine sympathy and real friendship, which are rare in the eulogistic lucubrations of the day. The panegyrists do not always hit the right mark, as when they laud Jonson's 'noble thefts, successful piracies,' hinting that the Greek and Latin muses were honoured by his depredations. But there are better things to be found embedded in the mass of more uncritical encomiums, and of these I will select a few examples. Shirley, who has been unreasonably represented as a foe of Jonson, writes :—

> But he is dead : time, envious of that bliss
> Which we possessed in that great brain of his,
> By putting out this light, hath darkened all
> The sphere of Poesy, and we let fall
> At best unworthy elegies on his hearse.

Beaumont contrasts his studied drama with the ephemeral products of the popular stage :—

> But thou hast squared thy rules by what is good,
> And art three ages yet from understood ;
> And I daresay in it there lies much wit
> Lost till the readers can grow up to it.

Waller opens his memorial poem with two felicitously

felt but obscurely worded couplets on the nature of Jonson's world-embracing comedy :—

> Mirror of poets, mirror of our age!
> Which, her whole face beholding on thy stage,
> Pleased and displeased with her own faults, endures
> A remedy like those whom music cures.

The best and ripest, however, are Herrick's verses on the decadence of the drama :—

> After the rare arch-poet Jonson died,
> The sock grew loathsome, and the buskin's pride,
> Together with the stage's glory, stood
> Each like a poor and pitied widowhood.
> The cirque profaned was; and all postures racked:
> For men did strut and stride and stare, not act.
> Then temper flew from words; and men did squeak,
> Look red, and blow and bluster, but not speak.
> No holy rage or frantic fires did stir,
> Or flash about the spacious theatre.
> No clap of hands, or shout, or praises-proof
> Did crack the play-house sides or cleave her roof.
> Artless the scene was; and that monstrous sin
> Of deep and arrant ignorance came in;
> Such ignorance as theirs was, who once hissed
> At thy unequalled play, the Alchemist:
> Oh fie upon them! Lastly too, all wit
> In utter darkness did, and still will sit;
> Sleeping the luckless age out, till that she
> Her resurrection has again with thee.

With these quotations I must leave a theme, the fulness of which renders its adequate treatment in a book of this dimension impossible. It remains to be observed that while the other greatest poets of the age founded no acknowledged school, Jonson's 'sons' or pupils carried on the traditions of his art with considerable success. Marmion, Randolph, Brome, and Cartwright were no

inconsiderable inheritors of his dramatic style. Herrick developed, with even a larger share of lyric inspiration, the suggestions of his lighter muse. Finally, those who have most deeply studied Jonson and most truly felt his power, will hesitate the longest before pronouncing a decisive judgment on the place he occupies among the foremost poets of our literature. One thing, however, can be considered as certain in any estimate which we may form. His throne is not with the Olympians but with the Titans; not with those who share the divine gifts of creative imagination and inevitable instinct, but with those who compel our admiration by their untiring energy and giant strength of intellectual muscle. What we most marvel at in his writings, is the prodigious brain-work of the man, the stuff of constant and inexhaustible cerebration they contain. Moreover, we shall not be far wrong in saying that, of all the English poets of the past, he alone, with Milton and Gray, deserves the name of a great and widely learned scholar.

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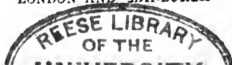

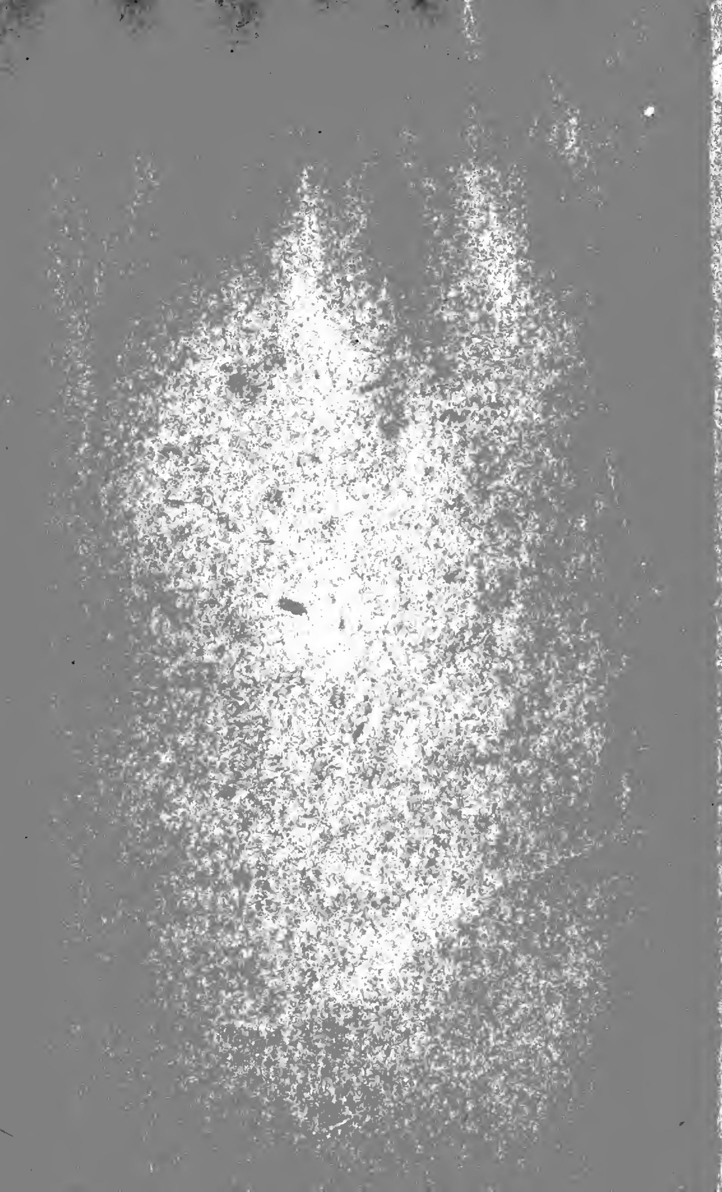

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