INTRODUCTION

The greatest of English dramatists except Shakespeare, the first literary dictator and poet-laureate, a writer of verse, prose, satire, and criticism who most potently of all the men of his time affected the subsequent course of English letters: such was Ben Jonson, and as such his strong personality assumes an interest to us almost unparalleled, at least in his age.

Ben Jonson came of the stock that was centuries after to give to the world Thomas Carlyle; for Jonson’s grandfather was of Annandale, over the Solway, whence he migrated to England. Jonson’s father lost his estate under Queen Mary, “having been cast into prison and forfeited.” He entered the church, but died a month before his illustrious son was born, leaving his widow and child in poverty. Jonson’s birthplace was Westminster, and the time of his birth early in 1573. He was thus nearly ten years Shakespeare’s junior, and less well off, if a trifle better born. But Jonson did not profit even by this slight advantage. His mother married beneath her, a wright or bricklayer, and Jonson was for a time apprenticed to the trade. As a youth he attracted the attention of the famous antiquary, William Camden, then usher at Westminster School, and there the poet laid the solid foundations of his classical learning. Jonson always held Camden in veneration, acknowledging that to him he owed,

All that I am in arts, all that I know;

and dedicating his first dramatic success, “Every Man in His Humour,” to him. It is doubtful whether Jonson ever went to either university, though Fuller says that he was “statutably admitted into St. John’s College, Cambridge.” He tells us that he took no degree, but was later “Master of Arts in both the universities, by their favour, not his study.” When a mere youth Jonson enlisted as a soldier, trailing his pike in Flanders in the protracted wars of William the Silent against the Spanish. Jonson was a large and raw-boned lad; he became by his own account in time exceedingly bulky. In chat with his friend William Drummond of Hawthornden,
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Jonson told how “in his service in the Low Countries he had, in the face of both the camps, killed an enemy, and taken opima spolia from him;” and how “since his coming to England, being appealed to the fields, he had killed his adversary which had hurt him in the arm and whose sword was ten inches longer than his.” Jonson’s reach may have made up for the lack of his sword; certainly his prowess lost nothing in the telling. Obviously Jonson was brave, combative, and not averse to talking of himself and his doings.

In 1592, Jonson returned from abroad penniless. Soon after he married, almost as early and quite as imprudently as Shakespeare. He told Drummond curtly that “his wife was a shrew, yet honest”; for some years he lived apart from her in the household of Lord Albay. Yet two touching epitaphs among Jonson’s Epigrams, “On my first daughter,” and “On my first son,” attest the warmth of the poet’s family affections. The daughter died in infancy, the son of the plague; another son grew up to manhood little credit to his father whom he survived. We know nothing beyond this of Jonson’s domestic life.

How soon Jonson drifted into what we now call grandly “the theatrical profession” we do not know. In 1593, Marlowe made his tragic exit from life, and Greene, Shakespeare’s other rival on the popular stage, had preceded Marlowe in an equally miserable death the year before. Shakespeare already had the running to himself. Jonson appears first in the employment of Philip Henslowe, the exploiter of several troupes of players, manager, and father-in-law of the famous actor, Edward Alleyn. From entries in Henslowe’s Diary, a species of theatrical account book which has been handed down to us, we know that Jonson was connected with the Admiral’s men; for he borrowed £4 of Henslowe, July 28, 1597, paying back 3s. 9d. on the same day on account of his “share” (in what is not altogether clear); while later, on December 3, of the same year, Henslowe advanced 20s. to him “upon a book which he showed the plot unto the company which he promised to deliver unto the company at Christmas next.” In the next August Jonson was in collaboration with Chettle and Porter in a play called “Hot Anger Soon Cold.” All this points to an association with Henslowe of some duration, as no mere tyro would be thus paid in advance upon mere promise. From allusions in Dekker’s play, “Satiromastix,” it appears that Jonson, like
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Shakespeare, began life as an actor, and that he "ambled in a leather pitch by a play-wagon" taking at one time the part of Hieronimo in Kyd's famous play, "The Spanish Tragedy." By the beginning of 1598, Jonson, though still in needy circumstances, had begun to receive recognition. Francis Meres—well known for his "Comparative Discourse of our English Poets with the Greek, Latin, and Italian Poets," printed in 1598, and for his mention therein of a dozen plays of Shakespeare by title—accords to Ben Jonson a place as one of "our best in tragedy," a matter of some surprise, as no known tragedy of Jonson from so early a date has come down to us. That Jonson was at work on tragedy, however, is proved by the entries in Henslowe of at least three tragedies, now lost, in which he had a hand. These are "Page of Plymouth," "King Robert II. of Scotland," and "Richard Crookback." But all of these came later, on his return to Henslowe, and range from August 1599 to June 1602.

Returning to the autumn of 1598, an event now happened to sever for a time Jonson's relations with Henslowe. In a letter to Alleyn, dated September 26 of that year, Henslowe writes: "I have lost one of my company that hurteth me greatly; that is Gabriel [Spencer], for he is slain in Hogsden fields by the hands of Benjamin Jonson, bricklayer." The last word is perhaps Henslowe's thrust at Jonson in his displeasure rather than a designation of his actual continuance at his trade up to this time. It is fair to Jonson to remark, however, that his adversary appears to have been a notorious fire-eater who had shortly before killed one Feeke in a similar squabble. Duelling was a frequent occurrence of the time among gentlemen and the nobility; it was an impudent breach of the peace on the part of a player. This duel is the one which Jonson described years after to Drummond, and for it Jonson was duly arraigned at Old Bailey, tried, and convicted. He was sent to prison and such goods and chattels as he had "were forfeited." It is a thought to give one pause that, but for the ancient law permitting convicted felons to plead, as it was called, the benefit of clergy, Jonson might have been hanged for this deed. The circumstance that the poet could read and write saved him; and he received only a brand of the letter "T," for Tyburn, on his left thumb. While in jail Jonson became a Roman Catholic; but he returned to the faith of the Church of England a dozen years later.

On his release, in disgrace with Henslowe and his former

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that of the braggart who is incidentally, and with delightfully
comic effect, a coward; Brainworm's humour is the finding
out of things to the end of fooling everybody: of course he is
fooled in the end himself. But it was not Jonson's theories
alone that made the success of "Every Man in His Humour."
The play is admirably written and each character is vividly
conceived, and with a firm touch based on observation of the
men of the London of the day. Jonson was neither in this,
his first great comedy (nor in any other play that he wrote),
a supine classicist, urging that English drama return to a
slavish adherence to classical conditions. He says as to the
laws of the old comedy (meaning by "laws," such matters as
the unities of time and place and the use of chorus): "I see
not then, but we should enjoy the same licence, or free power
to illustrate and heighten our invention as they [the ancients]
did; and not be tied to those strict and regular forms which
the niceness of a few, who are nothing but form, would thrust
upon us." "Every Man in His Humour" is written in prose,
and a novel practice which Jonson had of his predecessor in comedy,
John Lyly. Even the word "humour" seems to have been
employed in the Jonsonian sense by Chapman before Jonson's
use of it. Indeed, the comedy of humours itself is only a
heightened variety of the comedy of manners which represents
life, viewed at a satirical angle, and is the oldest and most
persistent species of comedy in the language. None the less,
Jonson's comedy merited its immediate success and marked
out a definite course in which comedy long continued to run.
To mention only Shakespeare's Falstaff and his rout, Bardolph,
Pistol, Dame Quickly, and the rest, whether in "Henry IV."
or in "The Merry Wives of Windsor," all are conceived in the
spirit of humours. So are the captains, Welsh, Scotch, and
Irish of "Henry V.," and Malvolio especially later; though
Shakespeare never employed the method of humours for an
important personage. It was not Jonson's fault that many
of his successors did precisely the thing that he had reprobated,
that is, degrade "the humour" into an oddity of speech, an
eccentricity of manner, of dress, or cut of beard. There was
an anonymous play called "Every Woman in Her Humour." Chapman wrote "A Humourous Day's Mirth," Day, "Humour
Out of Breath," Fletcher later, "The Humourous Lieutenant,"
and Jonson, besides "Every Man Out of His Humour,"
returned to the title in closing the cycle of his comedies in
"The Magnetic Lady or Humours Reconciled."
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With the performance of "Every Man Out of His Humour" in 1599, by Shakespeare's company once more at the Globe, we turn a new page in Jonson's career. Despite his many real virtues, if there is one feature more than any other that distinguishes Jonson, it is his arrogance; and to this may be added his self-righteousness, especially under criticism or satire. "Every Man Out of His Humour" is the first of three "comical satires" which Jonson contributed to what Dekker called the *postomachia* or war of the theatres as recent critics have named it. This play as a fabric of plot is a very slight affair; but as a satirical picture of the manners of the time, proceeding by means of vivid caricature, couched in witty and brilliant dialogue and sustained by that righteous indignation which must lie at the heart of all true satire—as a realisation, in short, of the classical ideal of comedy—there had been nothing like Jonson's comedy since the days of Aristophanes. "Every Man in His Humour," like the two plays that follow it, contains two kinds of attack, the critical or generally satiric, levelled at abuses and corruptions in the abstract; and the personal, in which specific application is made of all this in the lampooning of poets and others, Jonson's contemporaries. The method of personal attack by actual caricature of a person on the stage is almost as old as the drama. Aristophanes so lampooned Euripides in "The Acharnians" and Socrates in "The Clouds," to mention no other examples; and in English drama this kind of thing is alluded to again and again. What Jonson really did, was to raise the dramatic lampoon to an art, and make out of a casual burlesque and bit of mimicry a dramatic satire of literary pretensions and permanency. With the arrogant attitude mentioned above and his uncommon eloquence in scorn, vituperation, and invective, it is no wonder that Jonson soon involved himself in literary and even personal quarrels with his fellow-authors. The circumstances of the origin of this *postomachia* are far from clear, and those who have written on the topic, except of late, have not helped to make them clearer. The origin of the "war" has been referred to satirical references, apparently to Jonson, contained in "The Scourge of Villainy," a satire in regular form after the manner of the ancients by John Marston, a fellow playwright, subsequent friend and collaborator of Jonson's. On the other hand, epigrams of Jonson have been discovered (49, 68, and 100) variously charging "playwright" (reasonably identified with Marston) with scurrility, cowardice, and
plagiarism; though the dates of the epigrams cannot be ascertained with certainty. Jonson’s own statement of the matter to Drummond runs: “He had many quarrels with Marston, beat him, and took his pistol from him, wrote his *Poetaster* on him; the beginning[s] of them were that Marston represented him on the stage.” 1

Here at least we are on certain ground; and the principals of the quarrel are known. “Histriomastix,” a play revised by Marston in 1598, has been regarded as the one in which Jonson was thus “represented on the stage”; although the personage in question, Chrisogonus, a poet, satirist, and translator, poor but proud, and contemptuous of the common herd, seems rather a complimentary portrait of Jonson than a caricature. As to the personages actually ridiculed in “Every Man Out of His Humour,” Carlo Buffone was formerly thought certainly to be Marston, as he was described as “a public, scurrilous, and profane jester,” and elsewhere as the grand scourge or second untruss [that is, satirist], of the time” (Joseph Hall being by his own boast the first, and Marston’s work being entitled “The Scourge of Villainy”). Apparently we must now prefer for Carlo a notorious character named Charles Chester, of whom gossipy and inaccurate Aubrey relates that he was “a bold impertinent fellow . . . a perpetual talker and made a noise like a drum in a room. So one time at a tavern Sir Walter Raleigh beats him and seals up his mouth (that is his upper and his nether beard) with hard wax. From him Ben Jonson takes his Carlo Buffone [i.e., jester] in ‘Every Man in His Humour’ [sic].” Is it conceivable that after all Jonson was ridiculing Marston, and that the point of the satire consisted in an intentional confusion of “the grand scourge or second untruss” with “the scurrilous and profane” Chester?

We have digressed into detail in this particular case to exemplify the difficulties of criticism in its attempts to identify the allusions in these forgotten quarrels. We are on sounder ground of fact in recording other manifestations of Jonson’s enmity. In “The Case is Altered” there is clear ridicule in the character Antonio Balladino of Anthony Munday, pageant-poet of the city, translator of romances and playwright as well.

1 The best account of this whole subject is to be found in the edition of *Poetaster* and *Satiromastix* by J. H. Penniman in *Belles Lettres Series* shortly to appear. See also his earlier work, *The War of the Theatres*, 1892, and the excellent contributions to the subject by H. C. Hart in *Notes and Queries*, and in his edition of Jonson, 1906.
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In "Every Man in His Humour" there is certainly a caricature of Samuel Daniel, accepted poet of the court, sonneteer, and companion of men of fashion. These men held recognised positions to which Jonson felt his talents better entitled him; they were hence to him his natural enemies. It seems almost certain that he pursued both in the personages of his satire through "Every Man Out of His Humour," and "Cynthia's Revels," Daniel under the characters Fastidious Brisk and Hedon, Munday as Puntarvolo and Amorphus; but in these last we venture on quagmire once more. Jonson's literary rivalry of Daniel is traceable again and again, in the entertainments that welcomed King James on his way to London, in the masques at court, and in the pastoral drama. As to Jonson's personal ambitions with respect to these two men, it is notable that he became, not pageant-poet, but chronologer to the City of London; and that, on the accession of the new king, he came soon to triumph over Daniel as the accepted entertainer of royalty.

"Cynthia's Revels," the second "comical satire," was acted in 1600, and, as a play, is even more lengthy, elaborate, and impossible than "Every Man Out of His Humour." Here personal satire seems to have absorbed everything, and while much of the caricature is admirable, especially in the detail of witty and trenchantly satirical dialogue, the central idea of a fountain of self-love is not very well carried out, and the persons revert at times to abstractions, the action to allegory. It adds to our wonder that this difficult drama should have been acted by the Children of Queen Elizabeth's Chapel, among them Nathaniel Field with whom Jonson read Horace and Martial, and whom he taught later how to make plays. Another of these precocious little actors was Salathiel Pavy, who died before he was thirteen, already famed for taking the parts of old men. Him Jonson immortalised in one of the sweetest of his epitaphs. An interesting sidelight is this on the character of this redoubtable and rugged satirist, that he should thus have befriended and tenderly remembered these little theatrical waifs, some of whom (as we know) had been literally kidnapped to be pressed into the service of the theatre and whipped to the conning of their difficult parts. To the caricature of Daniel and Munday in "Cynthia's Revels" must be added Anaides (impudence), here assuredly Marston, and Asotus (the prodigal), interpreted as Lodge or, more perilously, Raleigh. Crites, like Asper-Macilente in "Every Man Out of
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His Humour," is Jonson's self-complaisant portrait of himself, the just, wholly admirable, and judicious scholar, holding his head high above the pack of the yelping curs of envy and detraction, but careless of their puny attacks on his perfections with only too mindful a neglect.

The third and last of the "comical satires" is "Poetaster," acted, once more, by the Children of the Chapel in 1601, and Jonson's only avowed contribution to the fray. According to the author's own account, this play was written in fifteen weeks on a report that his enemies had entrusted to Dekker the preparation of "Satiromastix, the Untrussing of the Humorous Poet," a dramatic attack upon himself. In this attempt to forestall his enemies Jonson succeeded, and "Poetaster" was an immediate and deserved success. While hardly more closely knit in structure than its earlier companion pieces, "Poetaster" is planned to lead up to the ludicrous final scene in which, after a device borrowed from the "Lexiphanes" of Lucian, the offending poetaster, Marston-Crispinus, is made to throw up the difficult words with which he had overburdened his stomach as well as overladen his vocabulary. In the end Crispinus with his fellow, Dekker-Demetrius, is bound over to keep the peace and never thenceforward "malign, traduce, or detract the person or writings of Quintus Horatius Flaccus [Jonson] or any other eminent man transcending you in merit." One of the most diverting personages in Jonson's comedy is Captain Tucca. "His peculiarity" has been well described by Ward as "a buoyant blackguardism which recovers itself instantaneously from the most complete exposure, and a picturesqueness of speech like that of a walking dictionary of slang."

It was this character, Captain Tucca, that Dekker hit upon in his reply, "Satiromastix," and he amplified him, turning his abusive vocabulary back upon Jonson and adding "an immodesty to his dialogue that did not enter into Jonson's conception." It has been held, altogether plausibly, that when Dekker was engaged professionally, so to speak, to write a dramatic reply to Jonson, he was at work on a species of chronicle history, dealing with the story of Walter Terill in the reign of William Rufus. This he hurriedly adapted to include the satirical characters suggested by "Poetaster," and fashioned to convey the satire of his reply. The absurdity of placing Horace in the court of a Norman king is the result. But Dekker's play is not without its palpable hits at the
arrogance, the literary pride, and self-righteousness of Jonson-Horace, whose "ningle" or pal, the absurd Asinius Bubo, has recently been shown to figure forth, in all likelihood, Jonson's friend, the poet Drayton. Slight and hastily adapted as is "Satiromastix," especially in a comparison with the better wrought and more significant satire of "Poetaster," the town awarded the palm to Dekker, not to Jonson; and Jonson gave over in consequence his practice of "comical satire." Though Jonson was cited to appear before the Lord Chief Justice to answer certain charges to the effect that he had attacked lawyers and soldiers in "Poetaster," nothing came of this complaint. It may be suspected that much of this furious clatter and give-and-take was pure playing to the gallery. The town was agog with the strife, and on no less an authority than Shakespeare ("Hamlet," ii. 2), we learn that the children's company (acting the plays of Jonson) did "so berattle the common stages . . . that many, wearing rapiers, are afraid of goose-quills, and dare scarce come thither."

Several other plays have been thought to bear a greater or less part in the war of the theatres. Among them the most important is a college play, entitled "The Return from Parnassus," dating 1601-02. In it a much-quoted passage makes Burbage, as a character, declare: "Why here's our fellow Shakespeare puts them all down; aye and Ben Jonson, too. O that Ben Jonson is a pestilent fellow; he brought up Horace, giving the poets a pill, but our fellow Shakespeare hath given him a purge that made him bewray his credit." Was Shakespeare then concerned in this war of the stages? And what could have been the nature of this "purge"? Among several suggestions, "Troilus and Cressida" has been thought by some to be the play in which Shakespeare thus "put down" his friend, Jonson. A wiser interpretation finds the "purge" in "Satiromastix," which, though not written by Shakespeare, was staged by his company, and therefore with his approval and under his direction as one of the leaders of that company.

The last years of the reign of Elizabeth thus saw Jonson recognised as a dramatist second only to Shakespeare, and not second even to him as a dramatic satirist. But Jonson now turned his talents to new fields. Plays on subjects derived from classical story and myth had held the stage from the beginning of the drama, so that Shakespeare was making no new departure when he wrote his "Julius Caesar" about 1600.
Therefore when Jonson staged "Sejanus," three years later and with Shakespeare's company once more, he was only following in the elder dramatist's footsteps. But Jonson's idea of a play on classical history, on the one hand, and Shakespeare's and the elder popular dramatists, on the other, were very different. Heywood some years before had put five straggling plays on the stage in quick succession, all derived from stories in Ovid and dramatised with little taste or discrimination. Shakespeare had a finer conception of form, but even he was contented to take all his ancient history from North's translation of Plutarch and dramatise his subject without further inquiry. Jonson was a scholar and a classical antiquarian. He reprobated this slipshod amateurishness, and wrote his "Sejanus" like a scholar, reading Tacitus, Suetonius, and other authorities, to be certain of his facts, his setting, and his atmosphere, and somewhat pedantically noting his authorities in the margin when he came to print. "Sejanus" is a tragedy of genuine dramatic power in which is told with discriminating taste the story of the haughty favourite of Tiberius with his tragical overthrow. Our drama presents no truer nor more painstaking representation of ancient Roman life than may be found in Jonson's "Sejanus" and "Catiline his Conspiracy," which followed in 1611. A passage in the address of the former play to the reader, in which Jonson refers to a collaboration in an earlier version, has led to the surmise that Shakespeare may have been that "worthier pen." There is no evidence to determine the matter.

In 1605, we find Jonson in active collaboration with Chapman and Marston in the admirable comedy of London life entitled "Eastward Hoe." In the previous year, Marston had dedicated his "Malcontent," in terms of fervid admiration, to Jonson; so that the wounds of the war of the theatres must have been long since healed. Between Jonson and Chapman there was the kinship of similar scholarly ideals. The two continued friends throughout life. "Eastward Hoe" achieved the extraordinary popularity represented in a demand for three issues in one year. But this was not due entirely to the merits of the play. In its earliest version a passage which an irritable courtier conceived to be derogatory to his nation, the Scots, sent both Chapman and Jonson to jail; but the matter was soon patched up, for by this time Jonson had influence at court.
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With the accession of King James, Jonson began his long and successful career as a writer of masques. He wrote more masques than all his competitors together, and they are of an extraordinary variety and poetic excellence. Jonson did not invent the masque; for such premeditated devices to set and frame, so to speak, a court ball had been known and practised in varying degrees of elaboration long before his time. But Jonson gave dramatic value to the masque, especially in his invention of the antimasque, a comedy or farcical element of relief, entrusted to professional players or dancers. He enhanced, as well, the beauty and dignity of those portions of the masque in which noble lords and ladies took their parts to create, by their gorgeous costumes and artistic grouping and evolutions, a sumptuous show. On the mechanical and scenic side Jonson had an inventive and ingenious partner in Inigo Jones, the royal architect, who more than any one man raised the standard of stage representation in the England of his day. Jonson continued active in the service of the court in the writing of masques and other entertainments far into the reign of King Charles; but, towards the end, a quarrel with Jones embittered his life, and the two testy old men appear to have become not only a constant irritation to each other, but intolerable bores at court. In "Hymenaei," "The Masque of Queens," "Love Freed from Ignorance," "Lovers made Men," "Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue," and many more will be found Jonson's aptitude, his taste, his poetry and inventiveness in these by-forms of the drama; while in "The Masque of Christmas," and "The Gipsies Metamorphosed" especially, is discoverable that power of broad comedy which, at court as well as in the city, was not the least element of Jonson's contemporary popularity.

But Jonson had by no means given up the popular stage when he turned to the amusement of King James. In 1605 "Volpone" was produced, "The Silent Woman" in 1609, "The Alchemist" in the following year. These comedies, with "Bartholomew Fair," 1614, represent Jonson at his height, and for constructive cleverness, character successfully conceived in the manner of caricature, wit and brilliancy of dialogue, they stand alone in English drama. "Volpone, or the Fox," is, in a sense, a transition play from the dramatic satires of the war of the theatres to the purer comedy represented in the plays named above. Its subject is a struggle of wit applied to chicanery; for among its dramatis personae,
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from the villainous Fox himself, his rascally servant Mosca, Voltore (the vulture), Corbaccio and Corvino (the big and the little raven), to Sir Politic Would-be and the rest, there is scarcely a virtuous character in the play. Question has been raised as to whether a story so forbidding can be considered a comedy, for, although the plot ends in the discomfiture and imprisonment of the most vicious, it involves no mortal catastrophe. But Jonson was on sound historical ground, for “Volpone” is conceived far more logically on the lines of the ancients’ theory of comedy than was ever the romantic drama of Shakespeare, however repulsive we may find a philosophy of life that facilely divides the world into the rogues and their dupes, and, identifying brains with roguery and innocence with folly, admires the former while inconsistently punishing them.

“The Silent Woman” is a gigantic farce of the most ingenious construction. The whole comedy hinges on a huge joke, played by a heartless nephew on his misanthropic uncle, who is induced to take to himself a wife, young, fair, and warranted silent, but who, in the end, turns out neither silent nor a woman at all. In “The Alchemist,” again, we have the utmost cleverness in construction, the whole fabric building climax on climax, witty, ingenious, and so plausibly presented that we forget its departures from the possibilities of life. In “The Alchemist” Jonson represented, none the less to the life, certain sharpers of the metropolis, revelling in their shrewdness and rascality and in the variety of the stupidity and wickedness of their victims. We may object to the fact that the only person in the play possessed of a scruple of honesty is discomfitted, and that the greatest scoundrel of all is approved in the end and rewarded. The comedy is so admirably written and contrived, the personages stand out with such lifelike distinctness in their several kinds, and the whole is animated with such verve and resourcefulness that “The Alchemist” is a new marvel every time it is read.

Lastly of this group comes the tremendous comedy, “Bartholomew Fair,” less clear cut, less definite, and less structurally worthy of praise than its three predecessors, but full of the keenest and cleverest of satire and inventive to a degree beyond any English comedy save some other of Jonson’s own. It is in “Bartholomew Fair” that we are presented to the immortal caricature of the Puritan, Zeal-in-the-Land Busy, and the Littlewits that group about him, and it is in this
extraordinary comedy that the humour of Jonson, always open to this danger, loosens into the Rabelaisian mode that so delighted King James in "The Gipsies Metamorphosed." Another comedy of less merit is "The Devil is an Ass," acted in 1616. It was the failure of this play that caused Jonson to give over writing for the public stage for a period of nearly ten years.

"Volpone" was laid as to scene in Venice. Whether because of the success of "Eastward Hoe" or for other reasons, the other three comedies declare in the words of the prologue to "The Alchemist":

Our scene is London, 'cause we would make known
No country's mirth is better than our own.

Indeed Jonson went further when he came to revise his plays for collected publication in his folio of 1616, he transferred the scene of "Every Man in His Humour" from Florence to London also, converting Signor Lorenzo di Pazzi to Old Kno'well, Prospero to Master Welborn, and Hespcrida to Dame Kitely "dwelling i' the Old Jewry."

In his comedies of London life, despite his trend towards caricature, Jonson has shown himself a genuine realist, drawing from the life about him with an experience and insight rare in any generation. A happy comparison has been suggested between Ben Jonson and Charles Dickens. Both were men of the people, lowly born and hardly bred. Each knew the London of his time as few men knew it; and each represented it intimately and in elaborate detail. Both men were at heart moralists, seeking the truth by the exaggerated methods of humour and caricature; perverse, even wrong-headed at times, but possessed of a true pathos and largeness of heart, and when all has been said—though the Elizabethan ran to satire, the Victorian to sentimentality—leaving the world better for the art that they practised in it.

In 1616, the year of the death of Shakespeare, Jonson collected his plays, his poetry, and his masques for publication in a collective edition. This was an unusual thing at the time and had been attempted by no dramatist before Jonson. This volume published, in a carefully revised text, all the plays thus far mentioned, excepting "The Case is Altered," which Jonson did not acknowledge, "Bartholomew Fair," and "The Devil is an Ass," which was written too late. It included likewise a book of some hundred and thirty odd Epigrams, in
which form of brief and pungent writing Jonson was an acknowledged master; "The Forest," a smaller collection of lyric and occasional verse and some ten *Masques* and *Entertainments*. In this same year Jonson was made poet laureate with a pension of one hundred marks a year. This, with his fees and returns from several noblemen, and the small earnings of his plays must have formed the bulk of his income. The poet appears to have done certain literary hack-work for others, as, for example, parts of the Punic Wars contributed to Raleigh's *History of the World*. We know from a story, little to the credit of either, that Jonson accompanied Raleigh's son abroad in the capacity of a tutor. In 1618 Jonson was granted the reversion of the office of Master of the Revels, a post for which he was peculiarly fitted; but he did not live to enjoy its perquisites. Jonson was honoured with degrees by both universities, though when and under what circumstances is not known. It has been said that he narrowly escaped the honour of knighthood, which the satirists of the day averred King James was wont to lavish with an indiscriminate hand. Worse men were made knights in his day than worthy Ben Jonson.

From 1616 to the close of the reign of King James, Jonson produced nothing for the stage. But he "prosecuted" what he calls "his wonted studies" with such assiduity that he became in reality, as by report, one of the most learned men of his time. Jonson's theory of authorship involved a wide acquaintance with books and "an ability," as he put it, "to convert the substance or riches of another poet to his own use." Accordingly Jonson read not only the Greek and Latin classics down to the lesser writers, but he acquainted himself especially with the Latin writings of his learned contemporaries, their prose as well as their poetry, their antiquities and curious lore as well as their more solid learning. Though a poor man, Jonson was an indefatigable collector of books. He told Drummond that "the Earl of Pembroke sent him £20 every first day of the new year to buy new books." Unhappily, in 1623, his library was destroyed by fire, an accident serio-comically described in his witty poem, "An Exeation upon Vulcan." Yet even now a book turns up from time to time on which is inscribed, in fair large Italian lettering, the name, Ben Jonson. With respect to Jonson's use of his material, Dryden said memorably of him: "[He] was not only a professed imitator of Horace, but a learned plagiarist of all the
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others; you track him everywhere in their snow. . . . But he has done his robberies so openly that one sees 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.” And yet it is but fair to say that Jonson prided himself, and justly, on his originality. In “Catiline,” he not only uses Sallust’s account of the conspiracy, but he models some of the speeches of Cicero on the Roman orator’s actual words. In “Poetaster,” he lifts a whole satire out of Horace and dramatises it effectively for his purposes. The sophist Libanius suggests the situation of “The Silent Woman”; a Latin comedy of Giordano Bruno, “Il Candelao,” the relation of the dupes and the sharpers in “The Alchemist,” the “Mostellaria” of Plautus, its admirable opening scene. But Jonson commonly bettered his sources, and putting the stamp of his sovereignty on whatever bullion he borrowed made it thenceforward to all time current and his own.

The lyric and especially the occasional poetry of Jonson has a peculiar merit. His theory demanded design and the perfection of literary finish. He was furthest from the rhapsodist and the careless singer of an idle day; and he believed that Apollo could only be worthily served in singing robes and laurel crowned. And yet many of Jonson’s lyrics will live as long as the language. Who does not know “Queen and huntress, chaste and fair,” “Drink to me only with thine eyes,” or “Still to be neat, still to be dressed”? Beautiful in form, deft and graceful in expression, with not a word too much or one that bears not its part in the total effect, there is yet about the lyrics of Jonson a certain stiffness and formality, a suspicion that they were not quite spontaneous and unbidden, but that they were carved, so to speak, with disproportionate labour by a potent man of letters whose habitual thought is on greater things. It is for these reasons that Jonson is even better in the epigram and in occasional verse where rhetorical finish and pointed wit less interfere with the spontaneity and emotion which we usually associate with lyrical poetry. There are no such epitaphs as Ben Jonson’s, witness the charming ones on his own children, on Salathiel Pavy, the child-actor, and many more; and this even though the rigid law of mine and thine must now restore to William Browne of Tavistock the famous lines beginning: “Underneath this sable hearse.” Jonson is unsurpassed, too, in the difficult poetry of compliment, seldom falling into fulsome
praise and disproportionate similitude, yet showing again and
again a generous appreciation of worth in others, a discriminat-
ing taste and a generous personal regard. There was no man
in England of his rank so well known and universally beloved
as Ben Jonson. The list of his friends, of those to whom he
had written verses, and those who had written verses to him,
includes the name of every man of prominence in the England
of King James. And the tone of many of these productions
discloses an affectionate familiarity that speaks for the amiable
personality and sound worth of the laureate. In 1619, growing
unwieldy through inactivity, Jonson hit upon the heroic
remedy of a journey afoot to Scotland. On his way thither
and back he was hospitably received at the houses of many
friends and by those to whom his friends had recommended
him. When he arrived in Edinburgh, the burgesses met to
grant him the freedom of the city, and Drummond, foremost
of Scottish poets, was proud to entertain him for weeks as his
guest at Hawthornden. Some of the noblest of Jonson’s
poems were inspired by friendship. Such is the fine “Ode to
the memory of Sir Lucius Cary and Sir Henry Moryson,” and
that admirable piece of critical insight and filial affection,
prefixed to the first Shakespeare folio, “To the memory of my
beloved master, William Shakespeare, and what he hath left
us,” to mention only these. Nor can the earlier “Epode,”
beginning “Not to know vice at all,” be matched in stately
gravity and gnomic wisdom in its own wise and stately age.

But if Jonson had deserted the stage after the publication
of his folio and up to the end of the reign of King James, he
was far from inactive; for year after year his inexhaustible
inventiveness continued to contribute to the masquing and
entertainment at court. In “The Golden Age Restored,”
Pallas turns the Iron Age with its attendant evils into statues
which sink out of sight; in “Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue,”
Atlas figures represented as an old man, his shoulders covered
with snow, and Comus, “the god of cheer or the belly,” is
one of the characters, a circumstance which an imaginative
boy of ten, named John Milton, was not to forget. “Pan’s
Anniversary,” late in the reign of James, proclaimed that
Jonson had not yet forgotten how to write exquisite lyrics,
and “The Gipsies Metamorphosed” displayed the old drollery
and broad humorous stroke still unimpaired and unmatchable.
These, too, and the earlier years of Charles were the days of
the Apollo Room of the Devil Tavern where Jonson presided,
the absolute monarch of English literary Bohemia. We hear of a room blazoned about with Jonson's own judicious *Lages Convivales* in letters of gold, of a company made up of the choicest spirits of the time, devotedly attached to their veteran dictator, his reminiscences, opinions, affections, and enmities. And we hear, too, of valorous potations; but, in the words of Herrick addressed to his master, Jonson, at the Devil Tavern, as at the Dog, the Triple Tun, and at the Mermaid,

We such clusters had
As made us nobly wild, not mad,
And yet each verse of thine
Outdid the meat, outdid the frolic wine.

But the patronage of the court failed in the days of King Charles, though Jonson was not without royal favours; and the old poet returned to the stage, producing, between 1625 and 1633, "The Staple of News," "The New Inn," "The Magnetic Lady," and "The Tale of a Tub," the last doubtless revised from a much earlier comedy. None of these plays met with any marked success, although the scathing generalisation of Dryden that designated them "Jonson's dotages" is unfair to their genuine merits. Thus the idea of an office for the gathering, proper dressing, and promulgation of news (wild flight of the fancy in its time) was an excellent subject for satire on the existing absurdities among newsmongers; although as much can hardly be said for "The Magnetic Lady," who, in her bounty, draws to her personages of differing humours to reconcile them in the end according to the alternative title, or "Humours Reconciled." These last plays of the old dramatist revert to caricature and the hard lines of allegory; the moralist is more than ever present, the satire degenerates into personal lampoon, especially of his sometime friend, Inigo Jones, who appears unworthily to have used his influence at court against the broken-down old poet. And now disease claimed Jonson, and he was bedridden for months. He had succeeded Middleton in 1628 as Chronologer to the City of London, but lost the post for not fulfilling its duties. King Charles befriended him, and even commissioned him to write still for the entertainment of the court; and he was not without the sustaining hand of noble patrons and devoted friends among the younger poets who were proud to be "sealed of the tribe of Ben."

Jonson died, August 6, 1637, and a second folio of his works,
Ben Jonson’s Plays

which he had been some time gathering, was printed in 1640, bearing in its various parts dates ranging from 1630 to 1642. It included all the plays mentioned in the foregoing paragraphs, excepting “The Case is Altered;” the masques, some fifteen, that date between 1617 and 1630; another collection of lyrics and occasional poetry called “Underwoods, including some further entertainments; a translation of “Horace’s Art of Poetry” (also published in a vicesimo quarto in 1640), and certain fragments and ingatherings which the poet would hardly have included himself. These last comprise the fragment (less than seventy lines) of a tragedy called “Mortimer his Fall,” and three acts of a pastoral drama of much beauty and poetic spirit, “The Sad Shepherd.” There is also the exceedingly interesting English Grammar “made by Ben Jonson for the benefit of all strangers out of his observation of the English language now spoken and in use,” in Latin and English; and Timber, or Discoveries “made upon men and matter as they have flowed out of his daily reading, or had their reflux to his peculiar notion of the times.” The Discoveries, as it is usually called, is a commonplace book such as many literary men have kept, in which their reading was chronicled, passages that took their fancy translated or transcribed, and their passing opinions noted. Many passages of Jonson’s Discoveries are literal translations from the authors he chanced to be reading, with the reference, noted or not, as the accident of the moment prescribed. At times he follows the line of Macchiavelli’s argument as to the nature and conduct of princes; at others he clarifies his own conception of poetry and poets by recourse to Aristotle. He finds a choice paragraph on eloquence in Seneca the elder and applies it to his own recollection of Bacon’s power as an orator; and another on facile and ready genius, and translates it, adapting it to his recollection of his fellow-playwright, Shakespeare. To call such passages—which Jonson never intended for publication—plagiarism, is to obscure the significance of words. To disparage his memory by citing them is a preposterous use of scholarship. Jonson’s prose, both in his dramas, in the descriptive comments of his masques, and in the Discoveries, is characterised by clarity and vigorous directness, nor is it wanting in a fine sense of form or in the subtler graces of diction.

When Jonson died there was a project for a handsome monument to his memory. But the Civil War was at hand,
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and the project failed. A memorial, not insufficient, was
carved on the stone covering his grave in one of the aisles of
Westminster Abbey:

"O rare Ben Jonson."

FELIX E. SCHELLING.

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The following is a complete list of his published works:—

DRAMAS.—Every Man in his Humour, 4to, 1601; The Case is Altered,
4to, 1609; Every Man out of his Humour, 4to, 1600; Cynthia's Revels,
4to, 1601; Poetaster, 4to, 1602; Sejanus, 4to, 1605; Eastward Ho (with
Chapman and Marston), 4to, 1605; Volpone, 4to, 1607; Epicoene, or the
Silent Woman, 4to, 1609 (?), fol., 1616; The Alchemist, 4to, 1612;
Catiline, his Conspiracy, 4to, 1611; Bartholomew Fayre, 4to, 1614 (?),
fol., 1631; The Divell is an Asse, fol., 1631; The Staple of Newes, fol.,
1631; The New Sun, 8vo, 1631, fol., 1692; The Magnetic Lady, or
Humours Reconcild, fol., 1640; A Tale of a Tub, fol., 1640; The Sad
Shepherd, or a Tale of Robin Hood, fol., 1641; Mortimer his Fall (fragment),
fol., 1640.

To Jonson have also been attributed additions to Kyd's Jeronymo, and
collaboration in The Widow with Fletcher and Middleton, and in the
Bloody Brother with Fletcher.

POEMS.—Epigrams, The Forrest, Underwoods, published in fols., 1616,
1640; Selections; Execration against Vulcan, and Epigrams, 1640;
C. Hor. Faccius his art of Poetry, Englished by Ben Jonson, 1640; Leges
Convivialis, fol., 1692. Other minor poems first appeared in Gifford's
dition of Works.

PROSE.—Timber, or Discoveries made upon Men and Matter, fol., 1641;
The English Grammar, made by Ben Jonson for the benefit of strangers,
fol., 1640.

Masques and Entertainments were published in the early folios.

WORKS.—Fol., 1616, vol. 2, 1640 (1631-41); fol., 1692, 1716-19, 1729;
edited by P. Whalley, 7 vols., 1756; by Gifford (with Memoir), 9 vols.,
1816, 1846; re-edited by F. Cunningham, 3 vols., 1871; in 9 vols., 1875;
by Barry Cornwall (with Memoir), 1838; by B. Nicholson (Mermaid
Series), with Introduction by C. H. Herford, 1893, etc.; Nine Plays, 1904;
ed. H. C. Hart (Standard Library), 1906, etc.; Plays and Poems, with
Introduction by H. Morley (Universal Library), 1885; Plays (7) and Poems
(Newnes), 1905; Poems, with Memoir by H. Bennett (Carlton Classics),
1907; Masques and Entertainments, ed. by H. Morley, 1890.

SELECTIONS.—J. A. Symonds, with Biographical and Critical Essay,
(Canterbury Poets), 1886; Grosart, Brave Translunary Things, 1893;
Arber, Jonson Anthology, 1901; Underwoods, Cambridge University
Press, 1905; Lyrics (Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher), The Chap Books,
No. 4, 1906; Songs (from Plays, Masques, etc.), with earliest known
Setting, Egremy Press, 1906.

LIFE.—See Memoirs affixed to Works; J. A. Symonds (English Worthies),
1886; Notes of Ben Jonson Conversations with Drummond of Hawthornden;
Shakespeare Society, 1842; ed. with Introduction and Notes by
P. Sidney, 1906; Swinburne, A Study of Ben Jonson, 1889.