

THREE MASQUES

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Three Masques by Ben Jonson

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BEN JONSON

**THREE
MASQUES**



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Three Masques

by
Ben Jonson

New York
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Edwin Francis Eggle

THE MASQUE OF OBERON
THE MASQUE OF BLACKNESS
THE MASQUE OF BEAUTY

To
LAURENCE HUTTON

in honor
of
long memories

W. C. B.

R. G. C.



BEN JONSON, a gentleman by birth, the grandson of a courtier of position, the intimate of notable men, and the agreeable admirer among noble women of his time, was the natural writer of their wedding masques, their epithalamiums, and the coronation vaudevilles for the court where he moved largely and with renown. That he should extol the goodness of James, the valor of Prince Henry of Wales, or the true and honorable fame of Queen Anne was no less a part of his poetic duty than of his official duty; and there is no doubt that he took poetic pleasure in celebrating the nuptials of Viscount Hadington and Lady Elizabeth Ratcliffe, or of "Robert, Earle of Essex and the Lady Frances second daughter of the most noble Earle of Suffolke," for Hymen is a fruitful inspiration to the poet. Among all these and others, and yet without his being a fellow of any rank or class of his time, Ben Jonson was a peer in his humor, outweighing in his worldly position even the wits of universities. Though subsidized by the court and extolling it with dignity, he always remained its critic and satirist, ever being a little more manly than courtly, a little more of a philosopher than a humorist, a little more critical than dramatic. In each respect he was big, overflowing with his powers the requirements of any rôle he played; and still in spite of his size he might have been greater if he had been less big.

It is this big, healthy, vital Jonson with "a mountain belly and a rocky face," who will remain one of the giants of his era, vying with Bacon for second place to the wonderful towering height of his companion Shakespeare, of whom we know so much more than of Jonson. The "little Latin and less Greek" of Avon's bard suggests the unencumbered spirit of his poesy in contrast with the scholarship of Jonson, whose lyric poetry is gentle and facile and limpid and yet does not swell from so godlike and freely weltering a brain. We