

**'BRAVE TRANSLUNARY
THINGS' FROM THE
WORKS IN PROSE AND
VERSE OF BEN JONSON**

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'Brave Translunary Things' from the Works in Prose and Verse of Ben Jonson by Alexander B. Grosart

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ALEXANDER B. GROSART

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The Elizabethan Library.



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BEN JONSON.

'O rare Ben Jonson !'

'Brave Translunary

Things' from the Works in

Prose and Verse of Ben

Jonson: Selected

by Alexander

B. Grosart



LONDON

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INTRODUCTION.

When we pass from SIDNEY to RALEIGH, and from RALEIGH to BACON, and from BACON to BRETON and SPENSER, and (as herein) from SPENSER and GREENE to BEN JONSON, and as by-and-by we shall to FULKE GREVILLE, LORD BROOKE, CAMDEN, SIR THOMAS SMITH, LORD HOWARD, and others of the 'spacious times of Elizabeth,' we are almost continuously among peers. Those of them who met at 'the Mermaid,' 'the Mitre,' and other renowned haunts, did so as equals in their Wit-combats. Even Shakespeare assumed no supremacy.

That 'rare Ben' was contemporaneously recognised as among the foremost, none will doubt who know the times. That he is not better known to-day is a loss immeasurable. It is safe to prophesy that the wrong and neglect will yet be redressed—e.g., it is surely a literary scandal that his 'Timber, or Discoveries of Men and Matter,' has not long since been critically edited and worthily reproduced. Mr. Swin-

burne, in his surpassingly brilliant 'Study of Ben Jonson' (1889), has indeed claimed more for the 'Discoveries' than conscience-ruled I can concede. For with all my allegiance to Mr. Swinburne—based on full and long-continued knowledge and experience of his infinite painstaking behind his ecstacy of eloquence—I cannot place the 'Discoveries' on a level with, much less above, Bacon's 'Essays.' But none the less, if neither in weight of thought nor in technique of workmanship is the later book to be compared with the earlier, it is an intellectual treasure—all the more that, like Selden's 'Table Talk,' we have therein Ben Jonson in undress (so to say), and chattily pouring out the fulness of his intellect, of his wit and wisdom, of his learning, and of his generous though uncouth nature. The 'Discoveries' is only one of many masterpieces, as our Selections will demonstrate. Of none of all our Worthies have I a deeper conviction that herein ingots of purest literary gold are furnished. The pity is that, rich as our little volume is, not the half or tenth part selected could be given.

It is curious to take note of things in 'rare Ben' that inevitably recall the later

Johnson, as he lives in Boswell. I must add, that if the earlier had the later's roughness and gruffness, and even arrogance o' times, he had also his vein of tenderness, as witness his exquisite poems on the loss of his children (p. 39 sq.). Beneath all his banter and license of wit also, he was a Christian man, as witness again his sacred poems (p. 185 sq.) and many autobiographic touches.

Recently Professor Masson has been telling us, that on the famous visit to Drummond of Hawthornden, Johnson was created a burges (or citizen) of Edinburgh. Thankful for this morsel, I wish some light had at the same time been shed on his love-passages there, of which we get a glimpse in his brilliant verses on leaving his 'picture' in Scotland with some 'fair lady' (p. 183). Surely, also, Scottish antiquaries ought to be able and willing to trace Johnson's Scottish lineage? The data known are definite enough to give a clue through the genealogical lines of the Annandale Johnstons, or Johnstones, whence his father and grandfather came, as it would seem. Long since, be it remembered, the late Dr. David Laing, of Edinburgh, worthily edited Drummond of Hawthornden's 'Notes of