

**TIMBER: OR,
DISCOVERIES MADE
UPON MEN AND MATTER**

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Timber: Or, Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matter by Ben Jonson & Felix E. Schelling

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BEN JONSON & FELIX E. SCHELLING

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"Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing. . . . To conclude of him: as he has given us the most correct plays, so in the precepts which he has laid down in his *Discoveries*, we have as many and profitable rules for perfecting the stage, as any wherewith the French can furnish us."

JOHN DRYDEN, *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*.

"The quaintly named *Explorata or Discoveries* and *Timber* [form] a collection of notes, varying from a mere aphorism to a respectable essay. In these latter a singular power of writing prose appears. . . . There can be no greater contrast than exists between the prose style usual at that time—a *style tourmenté*, choked with quotation, twisted in every direction by allusion and conceit, and marred by perpetual confusions of English with classical grammar—and the straightforward, vigorous English of these *Discoveries*. . . . Here is found the prose character of Shakespeare, which, if less magniloquent than that in verse, has a greater touch of sheer sincerity."

SAINTSBURY, *History of Elizabethan Literature*, pp. 218-219.

"Jonson's notes or observations on men and morals, on principles and on facts, are superior to Bacon's in truth of insight, in breadth of view, in vigor of reflection, and in concision of eloquence. The dry, curt style of the statesman, docked and trimmed into sentences that are regularly snapped off or snipped down at the close of each deliverance, is as alien and as far from the fresh and vigorous spontaneity of the poet's as is the trimming and hedging morality of the essay on 'simulation and dissimulation' from the spirit and instinct of the man who 'of all things loved to be called honest.' . . ."

"At the very opening of these *Explorata or Discoveries*, we find ourselves in so high and so pure an atmosphere of feeling and of thought that we cannot but recognize and rejoice in the presence and the influence of one of the noblest, manliest, most honest and most helpful natures that ever dignified and glorified a powerful intelligence and an admirable genius."

SWINBURNE, *A Study of Ben Jonson*, pp. 129-130

Ben Jonson

TIMBER

OR

DISCOVERIES

MADE UPON MEN AND MATTER

EDITED

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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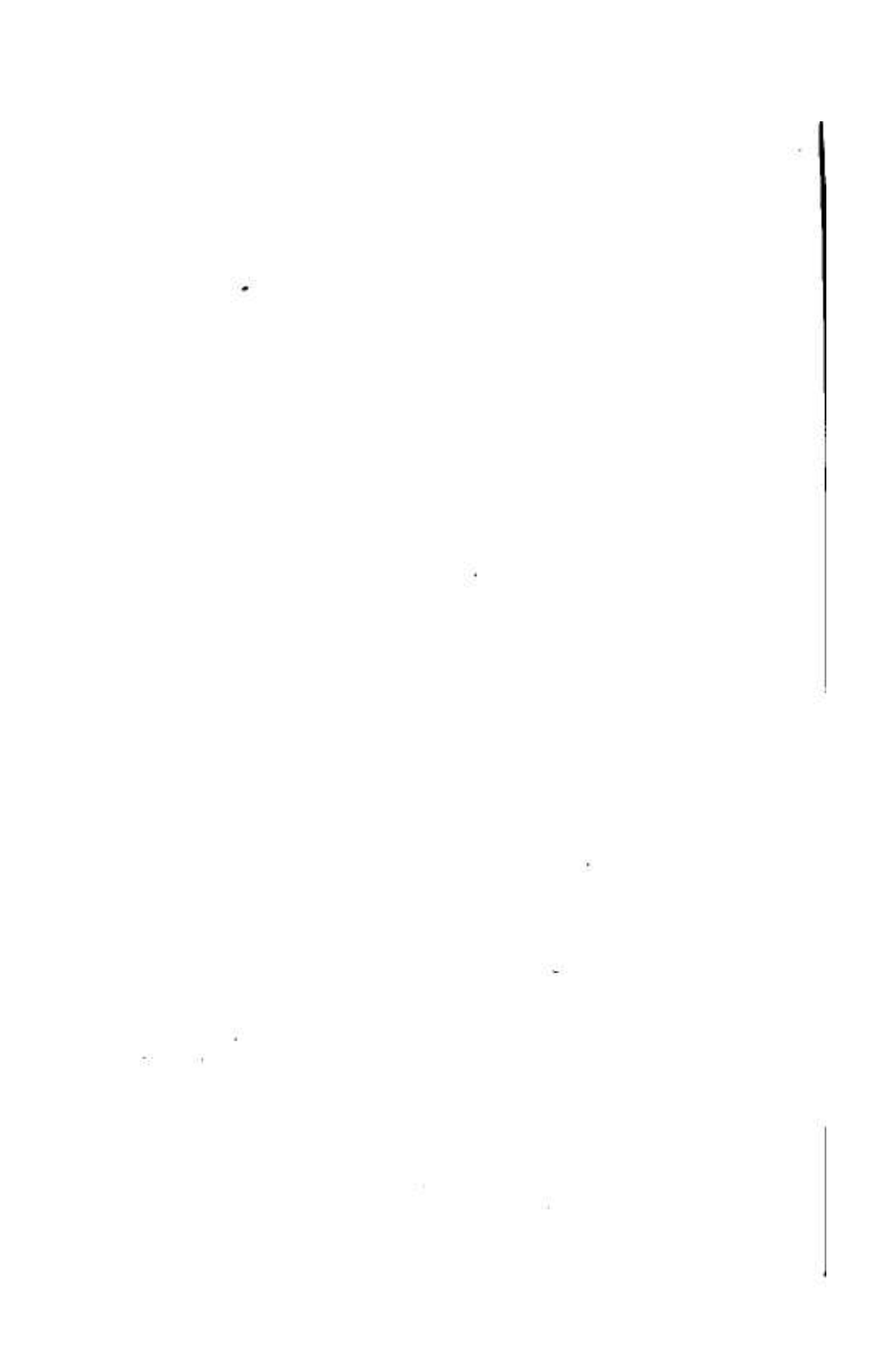
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TO
THE MEMORY OF
MY TEACHER, COLLEAGUE, AND FRIEND
JOHN GEORGE REPPLIER McELROY



P R E F A C E.

THE *Discoveries* of Ben Jonson deserve attention for two reasons: as one of the best examples of later Elizabethan prose, and as one of the earliest conscious efforts at simple literary presentment. A higher claim is to be found in the sound sense, discriminating judgment, and lofty moral sentiment with which the work is pervaded, and in the inexplicable and inexcusable neglect that has suffered so rare an English classic to remain practically inedited, and, until quite recently, all but unknown. The memory of the man has been long since reclaimed from ignorant and perverse detraction, and his literary achievements acknowledged to be surpassed alone by the master who has surpassed all; but there remains yet somewhat to a complete knowledge of "one of the noblest, manliest, most honest and most helpful natures that ever dignified and glorified a powerful intelligence and an admirable genius." (Swinburne, *A Study of Ben Jonson*, p. 130.)

Although the evident disorder of many parts of the *Discoveries* suggests and courts rearrangement, I have preferred to follow the original order throughout, and to depart as little as possible from the readings of the edition of 1641. It was found necessary to use greater freedom with the punctuation. Variants from the folio in Whalley, Gifford,

Colonel Cunningham's edition and Professor Morley's, will be found under the notes, together with emendations of Mr. Swinburne and others.

While as many references as possible have been verified, the notes of the present edition do not pretend to have exhausted the allusions with which the text is literally bristling. If any apology be deemed necessary, I can but urge the words of so capable and scholarly a critic as William Gifford (*Works of Jonson*, ed. Cunningham, ii. p. 51) : "The variety and extent of Jonson's reading are altogether surprising ; nothing seems to have been too poor and trifling, too recondite and profound, for his insatiable curiosity and thirst for knowledge. It is but seldom, and even then accidentally, that I can fall in with him : the general range of his wide and desultory track is to me nearly imperceptible."

It gives me much pleasure to record my obligations to the courtesy and the scholarship of Dr. Horace Howard Furness of Philadelphia, Professor Albert S. Cook of Yale University, Mr. Charlton T. Lewis of New York, Dr. Paul Shorey of Bryn Mawr College, Mr. William R. Thayer of Concord, Mass., and Mr. Joseph Jacobs, of London, England. Nor is my indebtedness less to my colleagues, Dr. Oswald Seidensticker, Professor William A. Lamberton, Dr. Morton W. Easton, Dr. Hermann V. Hilprecht, Dr. Morris Jastrow, Jr., and Dr. William Romaine Newbold.

F. E. S.

PHILADELPHIA, December, 1891.