

**TIMBER OR DISCOVERIES, MADE
UPON MEN AND MATTER, AS THEY
HAVE FLOWED OUT OF HIS DAILY
READINGS; OR HAD THEIR REFLUX TO
HIS PECULIAR NOTIONS OF THE TIMES**

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Timber or Discoveries, Made upon Men and Matter, as They Have Flowed out of His Daily Readings; Or Had Their Reflux to His Peculiar Notions of the Times by Ben Jonson & Felix E. Schelling

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BEN JONSON & FELIX E. SCHELLING

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Ben Jonson

TIMBER

OR

DISCOVERIES

MADE UPON MEN AND MATTER

EDITED

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

FELIX E. SCHELLING

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF PENNSYLVANIA

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

(RECAP)

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INTRODUCTION.

I. SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF BEN JONSON.

(Compiled chiefly from his *Conversations with Drummond*, *Symond's Life*,
and *Ward's English Dramatic Literature*.)

BEN JONSON was born in the year 1573. He came of a border family of Anandale, and was the posthumous son of a minister who had "losed all his estate under Queen Marie, having been cast into prison and forfeited." (*Conversations with Drummond*.) His widow marrying again, Jonson was "brought up poorly," but "put to school" at Westminster, and there befriended by the learned antiquary Camden. Fuller states that from Westminster Jonson went to [St. John's College], Cambridge. If so, he remained but a short time; for he afterwards told Drummond that "he was Master of Arts in both Universities by their favor, not his study." The trade of his step-father, that of a bricklayer, proving distasteful, Jonson enlisted as a soldier, and relates that, "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." It seems likely that Jonson was again in England in 1592, and married while yet under age. He told Drummond that "his wife was a shrew, yet honest." He had several children by her, none of whom survived him.

The beginning of Jonson's career as a dramatist cannot be fixed with certainty; but the advances of money made to him by Philip Henslow, the manager and stage-broker, in 1597, prove that he was a recognized playwright by that

time, doing 'prentice-work, according to the custom of his age, in the reconstruction and adaptation of earlier plays. The pleasing tradition that Jonson owed his introduction to a dramatic career to the good offices of Shakespeare is not susceptible of proof; although his first dramatic success, *Every Man in his Humor*, was acted in 1598 by the Lord Chamberlain's Servants, Shakespeare's company, and Shakespeare was himself an actor in it. The notion that Jonson and Shakespeare lived in a state of rivalry and enmity is based upon no evidence worthy of a moment's consideration. (See the notes, especially 23* and 23²⁸.)

In this year Jonson had the misfortune to kill a fellow-actor, in a duel, for which he was tried at Old Bailey, convicted on his own confession, and, pleading his clergy, escaped capital punishment with a brand upon the thumb of his left hand and forfeit of goods and chattels. While in prison he became converted to the Roman Church, and remained of that faith for twelve years. The duel severed his connection with Henslow and drew him into writing for Shakespeare's rival company.

In 1599 Queen Elizabeth witnessed Jonson's next play, *Every Man out of his Humor*, the first of the series of dramatic satires, which were soon to involve their author in internecine warfare with his fellow-craftsmen. During the next three years Jonson was a leading combatant in what is known as "The War of the Theatres," *Cynthia's Revels* giving the affront, the *Poetaster*, Marston and Dekker's *Satiromastix*, and many other plays continuing the battle. Notwithstanding Jonson's "aggressive and egotistic personality," and the gall and venom of both parties, it may be doubted if the terrors of these literary frays were such as the historians of literature would have us believe. At all events the collaboration of Dekker and Jonson in the pageants attending the accession of James, and the fervent dedication of Marston's *Malcontent* to Jonson in 1604, preclude the possibility of