The works of Ben Jonson... with notes critical and explanatory, and a biographical memoir

Jonson Ben
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With Notes Critical and Explanatory, and a Biographical Memoir,

By W. Gifford, Esq.

The Muses' fairest light in no dark time;
The wonder of a learned age; the line
Which none can pass; the most proportion'd wit,
To nature, the best judge of what was fit;
The deepest, plainest, highest, clearest pen;
The voice most echo'd by consenting men;
The soul which answer'd best to all well said
By others, and which most requital made.

Cleveland.

Volume the Sixth.

Containing

The Magnetic Lady.
A Tale of a Tub.
The Sad Shepherd.
The Case is Altered.
Entertainments, &c.

London:

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1816.
THE

MAGNETIC LADY;

OR,

HUMOURS RECONCILED.

VOL. VI.
THE MAGNETIC LADY.] This comedy was brought out at the Black Friars in 1632, the license for performing it bearing date the 12th October of that year. "It was generally accounted (Langbaine says) an excellent play, though, in the poet's days, it found some enemies." So indeed did every thing written by Jonson; for "the envious Ben," (who was nevertheless more liberal, not to say lavish, of his praise than any writer before or since his time,) was unremittingly pursued by a hostile party who sickened at his triumphs, and insulted over his calamities.

Among Howell's Letters there is one to our author, which notices this play.

"Father Ben. Nulum fit magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiae; there's no great wit without some mixture of madness, so saith the philosopher, nor was he a fool who answered, nec parum sine mixtura stultitiae, nor small wit without some allay of foolishness. "Touching the first it is verified in you, for I find that you have been oftentimes mad: you were mad when you writ your Fox, and madder when you writ your Alchemist; you were mad when you writ Catiline, and stark mad when you writ Sejanus; but when you writ your Epigrams, and the Magnetic Lady, you were not so mad. Insomuch that I perceive there be degrees of madness in you. Excuse me that I am so free with you. The madness I mean is that divine fury, that heating and heightening spirit which Ovid speaks of."

This letter, which is dated West. 27th Jan. 1629, nearly two years previous to the date already assigned to the Magnetic Lady, might contribute to weaken our confidence in the official documents of sir H. Her bert, were not the discrepancy satisfactorily accounted for by Oldys. He tells us, in his manuscript notes to Langbaine, that Howell first published his letters without any dates, and that when he attempted to subjoin them, in his subsequent editions, he confounded the time: "hence," says he, "so many errors in their dates."

There is yet another circumstance to be mentioned respecting this play. On its first appearance it gave great offence by its oaths. For these, the actors were called before the High Commission Court, and severely censured. As the author was sick in bed, they boldly laid the fault on him; Jonson, however, completely justified himself from this atrocious charge, as did the Master of the Revels, on whom they had next the audacity to lay it; and the players then "humbly confessed, that they had themselves interpolated the offensive passages." For this curious
circumstance, which is important on many accounts, we are indebted to the Office-book of Sir Henry Herbert. See Shak. Vol. II. p. 380.

The Magnetic Lady was first published in the second fol. and bears date 1640, three years, at least, after Jonson's death: when the editor, as I should have remarked of all the plays collected in that volume, had forgotten how the author spelt his name. It had originally this motto subjoined to the title, to which it is not ill adapted,

\[ \textit{Jam lapides suus arbor agit, ferrumque tenetur} \\
\textit{Illecebres —} \quad \text{Claud. de Magnet.} \]
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Compass, a scholar mathematic.
Captain Ironside, his brother, a soldier.
Parson Palate, prelate of the parish.
Rut, physician to Lady Loadstone.
Tim. Item, his apothecary.
Sir Diaphanous Silkworm, a courtier.
Practice, a lawyer.
Sir Moth Interest, an usurer, or money-bawd.
Bias, a vi-politic, or sub-secretary.
Needle, the lady's steward and tailor.

Lady Loadstone, the Magnetic Lady.
Polish, her gossip and she-parasite.
Placentia, her niece.
Pleasance, her waiting-woman.
Keep, the niece's nurse.
Chair, the midwife.

Servant to sir Moth, Serjeants, &c.

The Chorus (Probee, Damplay, and Boy of the house) by way of Induction.

SCENE, London.