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TO
THE MOST
NOBLE AND
MOST EQVALL
SISTERS

THE TWO FAMOVS
VNIVERSITIES
FOR THEIR LOVE

AND
ACCEPTANCE
SHEW'N TO HIS POEME IN THE
PRESENTATION

BEN. IONSON

THE GRATEFVLL ACKNOWLEDGER

DEDICATES
BOTH IT AND HIMSELFE.

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*N*ever (most equall SISTERS) had any man a wit so presently excellent, as that it could raise it selfe; but there must come both matter, occasion, commend-ers, and fauourers to it: If this be true, and that the fortune of all writers doth daily proue it, it beoues the careful to provide, well, toward these accidents; and, hauing acquir'd them, to preferue that part of reputation most tenderly, wherein the benefit of a friend is also defended. Hence is it, that I now render my selfe gratefull, and am studious to iustifie the bounty of your act: to which, though your mere authority were satisfying, yet, it being an age, wherein Poetrie, and the Professors of it beare so ill, on all sides, there will a reason bee look'd for in the subiect. It is certayne, nor can it with any fore-head be oppos'd, that the too-much licence of Poetasters, in this time, hath much deform'd their Mistris; that, euery day, their manifold, and manifest ignorance, doth sticke vnnaturall reproches vpon her: But for their petulancy, it were an act of the greatest iniustice, either to let the learned suffer; or so diuine a skill (which indeed should not bee attempted with vncleane hands) to fall, vnder the least contempt. For, if men will impartially, and not a-squint, looke toward the offices, and function of a Poet, they will easily conclude to themselues, the impossibility of any mans being the good Poet, without first being a good man. He that

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is said to be able to informe yong-men to all good disciplines, inflame growne-men to all great vertues, keepe old-men in their best and supreme state, or as they decline to child-hood, recouer them to their first strength; that comes forth the interpreter, and arbiter of nature, a teacher of things diuine, no lesse then humane, a master in manners; and can alone (or with a few) effect the businesse of man-kind: this, I take him, is no subiect for pride, and ignorance to exercise their rayling rhetorique vpon. But, it will here be hastily answer'd, that the writers of these dayes are other things; that, not only their manners, but their natures are inuerted; and nothing remayning with them of the dignitie of Poet, but the abused name, which euery Scribe vsurps: that now, especially in dramatick, or (as they terme it) stage-poetrie, nothing but ribaldry, profanation, blasphemy, all licence of offence to god, and man, is practis'd. I dare not denie a great part of this (and am sorry, I dare not) because in some mens abortiue features (and would they had neuer boasted the light) it is ouer-true: But, that all are embarqu'd in this bold aduventure for hell, is a most vncharitable thought, and, viter'd, a more malicious slander. For my particular, I can (and from a most cleare conscience) affirme, that I haue euer trembled to thinke toward the least prophanenesse; haue lothed the vse of such foule, and vn-wash'd baudry, as is now made the foode of the scene. And, howsoeuer I cannot escape, from some, the imputation of sharpnesse, but that they will say, I haue taken a pride,

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or lust, to be bitter, and not my youngest infant but hath come into the world with all his teeth; I would aske of these supercilious politiques, what nation, societie, or generall order, or state I haue prouok'd? what publique person? whether I haue not (in all these) prefer'd their dignitie, as mine owne person, safe? My workes are read, allow'd, (I speake of those that are intirely mine) looke into them: What broad reproofes haue I vs'd? Where haue I bene particular? Where personall? except to a mimick, cheater, bawd, or buffon, creatures. (for their insolencies) worthy to be tax'd? Yet, to which of these so pointingly, as he might not, either ingenuously haue confest, or wisely dissimble'd his disease? But it is not rumour can make men guiltie, much lesse entitle me, to other mens crimes. I know, that nothing can bee so innocently writ, or carryed, but may be made obnoxious to construction; may, whilst I beare mine innocence about mee, I feare it not. Application, is now, growne a trade with many; and there are, that professe to haue a key for the decyphering of euery thing: but let wise and noble persons take heed how they be too credulous, or giue leaue to these inuading interpreters, to be ouer-familiar with their fames, who cunningly, and often, utter their owne virulent malice, vnder other mens simplest meanings. As for those, that will (by faults which charitie hath rak'd vp, or common honestie conceal'd) make themselues a name with the multitude, or (to draw their rude, and beastly claps) care not whose liuing faces they intrench, with their petulant stiles;

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may they doe it, without a riual, for me: I choose rather to liue graud in obscuritie, then share with them, in so preposterous a fame. Nor can I blame the wishes of those seuer, and wiser patriots, who prouiding the hurts these licentious spirits may doe in a state, desire rather to see fooles, and deuils, and those antique reliques of barbarisme retriu'd, with all other ridiculous, and exploded follies: then behold the wounds of priuate men, of princes, and nations. For, as HORACE makes TREBATIVS speake, among these

—Sibi quisq; timet, quanquam est intactus, & odit.

And men may iustly impute such rages, if continu'd, to the writer, as his sports. The increase of which lust in liberty, together with the present trade of the stage, in all their misc' line enter-ludes, what learned or liberall soule doth not already abhor? where nothing but the filth of the time is vtter'd, and that with such impropriety of phrase, such plenty of solocismes, such dearth of sense, so bold prolepsis, so rackt metaphors, with brothelry, able to violate the eare of a pagan, and blasphemy, to turne the bloud of a christian to water. I cannot but be serious in a cause of this nature, wherein my fame, and the reputations of diuers honest, and learned are the question; when a Name, so full of authority, antiquity, and all great marke, is (through their insolence) become the lowest scorn of the age: and those men subiect to the petulancy of euery vernaculous Orator, that were wont to be the care of Kings, and happiest Monarchs. This it is, that hath not only rap't me to pre-

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sent indignation, but made me studious, heretofore, and, by all my actions, to stand off, from them: which may most appeare in this my latest worke (which you, most learned ARBITRESSES, haue seene, iudg'd, and to my crowne, approu'd) wherein I haue labour'd, for their instruction, and amendment, to reduce, not onely the ancient formes, but manners of the scene, the easinesse, the propriety, the innocence, and last the doctrine, which is the principall end of poesie, to informe men, in the best reason of liuing. And though my catastrophe may, in the strict rigour of comick law, meet with censure, as turning back to my promise; I desire the learned, and charitable critick to haue so much faith in me, to thinke it was done off industrie: For, with what ease I could haue varied it, neerer his scale (but that I feare to boast my owne faculty) I could here insert. But my speciall ayme being to put the snaffle in their mouths, that crie out, we neuer punish vice in our enterludes, &c. I tooke the more liberty; though not without some lines of example, drawne euen in the ancients themselues, the goings out of whose comedies are not alwaies ioyfull, but oft-times, the bawdes, the seruants, the riuals, yea, and the masters are multed: and fitly, it being the office of a comick-Poet, to imitate iustice, and instruct to life, as well as puritie of language, or stirre vp gentle affections. To which, I shall take the occasion else-where to speake. For the present (most reuerenced SISTERS) as I haue car'd to be thankefull for your affections past, and here made the vnderstanding acquainted with some
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ground of your fauours; let me not despaire their continuance, to the maturing of some worthier fruits: wherein, if my MUSES be true to me, I shall raise the despis'd head of poetrie againe, and stripping her out of those rotten and base rags, wherewith the Times haue adulterated her form, restore her to her primitiue habit, feature, and maiesty, and render her worthy to be imbraced, and kist, of all the great and master-Spirits of our world. As for the vile, and slothfull, who neuer affected an act, worthy of celebration, or are so inward with their owne vicious natures, as they worthily feare her; and thinke it a high point of policie, to keepe her in contempt with their declamatorie, and windy inuectiues: shee shall out of iust rage incite her seruants (who are genus irritable) to spout inke in their faces, that shall eate, farder then their marrow, into their fames; and not CINNAMVS the barber, with his arte, shall be able to take out the brands, but they shall line, and bee read, till the wretches dye, as things worst deseruing of themselues in chiefe, and
then of all man-
kind.