TO
THE MOST NOBLE AND MOST EQUALLY
SISTERS
THE TWO FAMOUS UNIVERSITIES
FOR THEIR LOVE

AND ACCEPTANCE
SHOWN TO HIS POEME IN THE PRESENTATION

Ben. Jonson
THE GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGER
DEDICATES BOTH IT AND HIMSELF.

Next
Euer (most equall Sisters) had any man a wit so profeniency excellent, as that it could raise it selfe; but there must come both matter, occasion, commenders, and favourers to it: If this be true, and that the fortune of all writers doth daily prove it, it behoves the carefull to provide, well, toward these accidents; and, having acquired them, to preserve that part of reputation most tenderly, wherein the benefit of a friend is also defended. Hence is it, that if now render my selfe grateful, and am studious to inflifie the bounty of your aid: to which, though your very authority were satisfying, yet, it being an age, wherein Poetic, and the Professors of it beare foul, on all sides, there will a reason be look'd for in the subject. It is certaine, nor can it with any fore-head be oppr'd, that the too-much licence of Poetales, in this time, hath much deform'd their Mistrie; that, every day, their manifold, and manifest ignorance, doth sicke unnatural reproches upon her: But for their penury, it were an all of the greatest infutice, either to let the learned suffer, or so divine a skill (which indeed should not be attempted with unclean hands) to fall, under the least contempt. For, if men will impartially, and not a-squint, looke toward the office, and function of a Poet, they will easily conclude to themselves; the imposibility of any man's being the good Poet, without first being a good man. He that is said to be able to informe young-men to all good disciplines, inflame groome-men to all great virtues, keep old-men in their best and supreme state, or as they decline to child-hood, recreate them to their first strength; that comes forth the interpreter, and arbiter of nature, a teacher of things divine, no lesse then humane, a master in manners; and can alone (or with a few) effect the business of man-kind: this, I take him, is no subject for pride, and ignorance to exercise their railing rhetoric upon. But, it will here be hastily answered, that the writers of these days are other things; that, not only their manners, but their natures are inverted; and nothing remaining with them of the dignity of Poet, but the abused name, which every Scribe warpis: that now, especially in dramatick, or as they term it, stage-poetic, nothing but ribaldry, profanation, blasphemy, all licence of offence to God, and man, is practis'd. I dare not deny a great part of this (and am sorry, I dare not) because in some mens abominable features (and would they had never boasted the lights) it is over-true: But, that all are embarqu'd in this bold adventure for hell, is a most uncharitable thought, and, yesterd., a more malicious slander. For my particular, I can (and from a most clear conscience) affirm, that 1 have ever trembled to think of the least profaneness; have loathed the use of such foule, and unwashed bas-dry, as is now made the food of the scene. And, how sooner I cannot escape, from some, the imputation of sharptness, but that they will say, I have taken a pride,
or lust, to be bitter, and not my yongest infant but bath
come into the world with all his teeth; I would ake of
these supercilious politiques, what nation, societie, or
generall order, or state had provok'd? what publique
person? whether I have not (in all these) prefer'd their
dignitie, as mine owne person, safe? My works are,
read, allow'd; (I speake of those that are entirely mine)
look into them: What broad reproves have ye did?
Where have beene particular? Where personall except
to a mimick, cheated, bawd, or buffet, creatures.
(for their infelicies) worthy to be tax'd? Yet, to which
of these so pointingly, as he might not, either ingeniously
have confess'd, or wisely disembl's his disease? But it is
not reputation can make men guiltie, much lese entitle
me, to other mens crimes. I know, that nothing can be
so innocently writ, or carried, but may be made obnoxious
to construction, wary, whil'st I heare mine innocence about me; I fear it not. Application is now,
grown a trade with many; and there are, that propose
to have a key for the decrypting of every thing: but let
wife and noble persons take heed how they be too credulous,
or give leave to these invading interpreters, to be
outer familiar with their names; who cunningly, and of-
ten, set their own virulent malice, under other mens
simplest meanings. As for those, that will (by faults
which charitie hath rak'd up, or common benefic concea-
c'd) make themselves a name with the multitude, or
to draw their rude, and baseless clap, care not whose
living face they intrench, with their petulant files;
may they doe it, without a rival, for me: I booke rather
to live grand in obscuritie, then share with them,
in so preposterous a fame. Nor can I blame the wishes
of those seuerous, and wise patriots, who providing the
hurt these licentious spirits may doe in a plate, desire
rather to see fools, and duells, and those antique re-
tiques of barbarisme retur'd, with all other ridiculous,
and exploded follies: then behold the wounds of private
men, princes, and nations. For, as Horace
makes Tristia speake, among these.

Sibi quisquis timet, quantum sit intactus, & odi

And men may insufficiently 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 miscelanea, enter-ludes, what learned or liberall
soufl's doth not already abhor: where nothing but the
full of the time is vited, and that with such impropriety of phrase, such plenty of folleciines, such dearth
of sense, so bold prolepsies, so rockt metaphor's, with
brothery, able to violate the care of a pagan, and blasphemy,
to turne the blood of a christian to water. If not
but be serious in a case of this nature, wherein my
fame, and the reputations of divers boncs, and learned
are the question, when a Name, so full of authority, antiquity, and all great marks, is through their influence,
become the lowest scorn of the age: and these men jux-
tised to the petulancy of every vernacular Orator, that
were wont to be the care of Kings, and happiest Mon-
archs. This it is, that bath not only rapt me to pre-
Pp

fent
sent indignation, but made me studious, heretofore, and by all my actions, to stand off, from them: which may most appear in this my latest work, which you, most learned Arbitresses, have seen, judged, and to my crowne approved, wherein I have laboured, for their instruction, and amendment, to reduce, not only the ancient forms, but manners of the scene, the easiness, the propriety, the innocence, and left the doctrine, which is the principal end of poetic, to inform men, in the best reason of living. And though my catastrophe may, in the strict rigour of comicke law, meet with censure, as turning back to my promise; if desire the learned, and charitable critic, to have so much faith in me, to think it was done off industry: For, with what ease I could have varied it, neuer his scale (but that I feare to boast my owne faculty) I could here insert. But my special ayme being to put the prattle in their mouths, that come out, we never punish vice in our enterludes, &c. I take the more liberty: though not without some lines of example, drawnne even in the ancients themselves, the goings out of whose comedies are not alwaies joyfull, but oft-times, the bawd, the servants, the virgins, yea, and the masters are mullet: and fitly, it being the office of a comicke Poet, to imitate injustice, and instruct to life, as well as puritie of language, or stirre up gentle affections. To which, I shall take the occasion else-where to speake. For the present (most reverenced SISTERS) as I have cared to be thankfull for your affections past, and here made the understanding acquainted with some groound

ground of your favours; let me not despare their continuance, to the maturing of some worshiper fruits: wherein, if my Muses be true to me, I shall raise the despis'd head of poëticke againe, and stripping her out of those rotten and base rags, wherewith the Times have adulterated her form, restore her to her primitive habit, feature, and manner, and render her worthy to be embrac'd, and kind of all the great and master-spirits of our world. As for the wife, and flatterfull, who never affected an art, worthy of celebration, or are so inward with their owne virtuous natures, as they worthy feare her; and think, a high point of policy, to keepe her in contempt with their declamatory, and witty insinuones: where shall out of such rage incite her servants (who are in a genus iritabile) to spout inke in their faces, that shall cease, farther then their narrow, into their famous; and not 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 will deserving of themselves in chiefe, and then of all man-kind.

Pp 2