

## II.

### BEN JONSON IN EDINBURGH IN THE YEAR M.DC.XVIII.

By DAVID LAING, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

On three several occasions, so long ago as the years 1828, 1832, and 1843, I brought the name of BEN JONSON before the Society in connexion with the Hawthornden Manuscripts. (See the articles in the "Archæologia Scotica," vol. iv. pp. 62, 69, 241-270, 399.) The portion of the first two communications relating to Jonson was afterwards reprinted in a separate volume for the Shakspeare Society, under this title, "Notes of Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden, January M.DC.XIX." London, 1842. 8vo.

A few days since, while engaged in looking over some of the old City Treasurers' accounts, Mr Adam, the city accountant, was kind enough to point out an entry respecting a banquet given by the Magis-

trates of Edinburgh to the English dramatist. As the notice is interesting in itself, and reflects honour on our civic rulers in what is called "the good old times," I take the earliest opportunity of submitting it to the Society, with such additional notices as a further search in their records has enabled me to discover.

Jonson's visit to Scotland must have been in the summer of 1618. He was under the impression that John Taylor, known as the "Water-Poet," had been sent hither to scorn him. Now, we know that Taylor left London on the 14th of July, and reached Edinburgh on the 13th of August 1618; and in his "Pennylesse Pilgrimage," first printed in 1623, he tells us he met his "long approved and assured good friend Master Benjamin Johnson," the day before he returned South, and "at my taking leave of him, he gave me a piece of gold of two and twenty shillings, to drink his health in England." Taylor adds,—“So with a friendly farewell, I left him as well as I hope neuer to see him in a worse estate: for he is amongst Noblemen and Gentlemen that knowe his true worth and their oune honours, where, with much respectiue loue, he is worthily entertained.”

Jonson also wrote an account of his own Journey to Scotland, and "all his adventures," but this, unfortunately, was among his papers which were consumed by a fire, as we learn from his "Execration upon Vulcan," a poem supposed to have been written in the year 1629. We must therefore rest contented in gleaning such casual notices as the following. How these notices should have been overlooked, either by myself or others, in examining the Council Records, I cannot conceive.

*Council Register.*

(Vol. xiii.  
fol. 39.)

Precept  
Gild  
Jonsoun burges  
and gildbrother.

Vigesimo quinto Septembris J<sup>m</sup> v<sup>jc</sup> decimo octauo.

Ordanis the Deyne of Gild to mak Benjamyn  
Jonsoun inglisman burges and gildbrother in  
communi forma.

(Ib. fol. 42.)

Precept  
Ainslie  
Thesaurer.

Decimo sexto Octobris J<sup>m</sup> v<sup>jc</sup> decimo octauo.

Ordanis the Thesaurer to pay to James Ainslie  
laite Baillie twa hundreth tuentic ane pund sex

schillingis four pennyis debursit be him vpon  
the denner maid to Benjamin Jo<sup>n</sup>stoun conforme  
to the Act maid thairanent and compt given in  
of the same.

The entry in the Treasurer's Accounts to which I alluded is as follows :—

“ *Item* thair aucht to be allowed to the compter payit  
be him to James Ainslie baillie for expenses debursit  
upone ane bancquett maid to Benjamin Johnstoune con-  
forme to ane act of Counsell of the dait the (blank) day  
of November 1618. ij<sup>c</sup> xxj lib. vj<sup>s</sup> viij<sup>d</sup>.”  
(£221, 6s. 8d.)

The Provost at that time was Sir William Nisbet of the Dean.

What might we not have given had there been present an “*Illustrated Times*” or “*News*” reporter, to have preserved the speeches and represented the persons assembled at this festive banquet! But printed newspapers were not then in existence. I wonder, however, that some of our artists should not have thought of the words of Collins's Ode,

“ Then will I dress once more the faded bower  
Where Jonson sat in Drummond's classic shade ;

or have represented him at the Cross, accompanied by the Provost, and some of the citizens, his brother burgesses of Edinburgh.

I do not find from the Register of Burgesses that Jonson appeared, in the usual form, armed with a corslet, to take the customary oath; but from the Dean of Guild's accounts, it appears that his burgess-ticket was written and ornamented with more than ordinary care.

“ *Item*, the twentie day of Januar J<sup>m</sup> vj<sup>c</sup> and nyntene zeiris geivin at direction of the Counsell to Alexander Patersone for wrytting and gilt-  
ing of Benjamine Johnestounes burges ticket being thryes written.

xiiij lib. vj<sup>s</sup> viij<sup>d</sup>.”