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978-1-107-64187-7 - Ben Jonson: The Sad Shepherd or a Tale of Robin Hood

Frontmatter

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**Cambridge Plain Texts**

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THE SAD SHEPHERD

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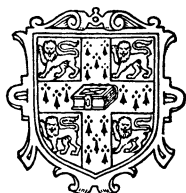
BEN JONSON

*The*

SAD SHEPHERD

OR

A TALE OF  
ROBIN HOOD



CAMBRIDGE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

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## NOTE

BEN JONSON (1572–1637) was equipped by his early life with unacademic learning and a coarse and shrewd knowledge of the world. To these two gifts his work owes its distinctive flavour; and a third gift, genius, enabled him to turn them to surprising account. His disgust at the less inspired excesses of Elizabethan style and his hostility towards the higher flights of Elizabethan imagination naturally led him, living in a later and more critical age, to his main literary task—the foundation of modern English comedy. But twice at least he suspended his critical severity to admirable purpose: in that fierce outburst of passionate disgust and disillusionment, *Volpone*; and in *The Sad Shepherd*.

*The Sad Shepherd* is, however, in keeping with Jonson's other work; and its high place among English pastorals is due to his characteristic qualities—learning and knowledge of the world. The realistic details of country life, and especially of hunting, on the one hand, and the humour and good-nature of the play, at once robust and chivalrous, on the other, give life to this story of Robin Hood in spite of the cramping convention within which it is told. Its spirit and point of view are not unlike those of *The Tempest*; the touching, but unsentimental and half humorous, episode of Amie and Karolin is the Jonsonian equivalent of Ferdinand and Miranda, and Mother Maudlin the witch is a more fragile Caliban. This impression is strengthened by the opinion of Dr Greg and others that *The Sad Shepherd* was written late in Jonson's life.

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## NOTE

It appeared for the first time after his death, in the second volume of his works, and with a separate title-page dated 1641. It is not complete; but each act is preceded by a scenario ("The Argument"), and that for the Third Act carries the plot some way further than it goes in the play itself. The text that follows is taken from the First Edition; but the spelling and punctuation have been modernized, misprints corrected, and a few other alterations, which are noted in a list at the end of the book, made. The original stage-directions have been kept, but it has been necessary to supplement them, and in a few places re-arrange them slightly. I have omitted the Argument, except the concluding part of it, which is printed at the end of the text. There is an invaluable critical edition of *The Sad Shepherd* by W. W. Greg (Bang, *Materialien zur Kunde des älteren Englischen Dramas*, Band XI, 1905).

L. J. POTTS

*March* 1929