

tax themselves, and should be emancipated from the dominion of prejudice as well as from that of Charles. He knew that those who, with the best intentions, overlooked these schemes of reform, and contented themselves with pulling down the king and imprisoning the malignants, acted like the heedless brothers in his own poem who, in their eagerness to disperse the train of the sorcerer, neglected the means of liberating the captive. They thought only of conquering when they should have thought of disenchanting.

"Oh, ye mistook, ye should have snatch'd his wand,
And bound him fast; without his rod revers'd,
And backward mutters of dissevering power,
We cannot free the Lady that sits here
In stony fetters fix'd, and motionless."¹

To reverse the rod, to spell the charm backward, to break the ties which bound a stupefied people to the seat of enchantment, was the noble aim of Milton. To this all his public conduct was directed. For this he joined the Presbyterians; for this he forsook them. He fought their perilous battle, but he turned away with disdain from their insolent triumph. He saw that they, like those whom they had vanquished, were hostile to the liberty of thought. He therefore joined the Independents, and called upon Cromwell to break the secular chain, and to save free conscience from the paw of the Presbyterian wolf.² With a view to the same great object, he attacked the licensing system,³ in that sublime treatise which every statesman should wear as a sign upon his hand and as frontlets between his eyes.⁴ His attacks were, in general, directed less against particular abuses

1. *Comus*, l. 815.

2. By the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant, Presbyterianism became the established religion of England as well as of Scotland.

3. One of Milton's finest prose efforts is the *Areopagitica*, a speech for the freedom of unlicensed printing—i.e., for the freedom of the press from censorship.

4. See *Exodus* viii. 9; *Deut.* vi. 8.