

Much of our liberty is nothing more than a tacit agreement to look at things through the spectacles of the omnipotent majority. Religion is translated into the language of sectarian dogmas; civil government is colored by party views; and social customs, whether of native growth or adopted from some centre of fashion, can only be slighted at the expense of reputation.

If such is the case now, it was doubly true in the last century, when men were fighting for the freedom of the press, and before Catholic Emancipation and the abolition of slavery had been thought of.

But at the beginning of the present century, Shelley with the trumpet of prophecy heralded the dawn of a new day of freedom. At that time, "England lay bound under the darkest spells of Tory government and religious intolerance." Shelley hated oppression; as a boy he resisted the petty tyrannies prevailing at Eaton; at Oxford he refused to be mentally shackled by the curriculum, and so conducted himself as to be expelled. As he grew older, this hatred became a passion. He did not denounce religion, for his life was spent in acts truly religious; he opposed the popular view insisted on to the exclusion of all others, "the bigotry, intolerance, and persecution committed for ages in the name of a pure and a holy faith." He did not attack law and justice, but the oppressive government that overtaxed the poor and deprived him of his children. He hated the conventionalities of society, yet he himself said, "Social enjoyment is the alpha and omega of existence." Though in those days of bigotry there were few signs of the mighty changes that have since had beginning, he saw them with the eye of a prophet.

"If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

So turning to the old Greek myth he sang in "Prometheus Unbound" the decay of despotism and the growth of intellectual and religious liberty. Prometheus had defended man when Zeus wished to sweep the whole race from the earth. He had taught them to build houses, to use fire, to cure diseases, and had given them Hope, the foundation of Freedom. As a punishment for this interference Zeus had chained him to a rock, tortured by demons, yet looking forward to his enemy's destruction. At this point Shelley takes up the story, and regarding Prometheus as the champion of liberty, or the embodiment of love to man, and Zeus as the author of oppression of all

kinds, in the release of the victim he works out the triumph of individual liberty in a future golden age.

At the beginning of the drama men are slaves whom Zeus

"Requites for knee-worship, prayer, and praise,  
And toil, and hecatombs of broken hearts,  
With fear and self contempt, and broken hope."

But when at last the champion of liberty is loosed, when Tyranny is hurled to the deep by mighty Demagorgon, and his throne stands vacant forever,

"Man remains

Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man  
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,

The king

Over himself, just, gentle, wise."

Then Prometheus is united to his loved Asia, the Love of Man to the Love of Nature; then the "golden time" comes, when love, virtue, and justice reign supreme, and "the earth is made one brotherhood."

"Thrones were kingless, and men walked  
One with another even as spirits do;  
None wrought his lips in truth-entangling lines  
Which smiled the lie his heart disdained to speak;  
None, with firm sneer trod out in his own heart  
The sparks of love and hope that there remained;  
None talked that common, false, cold, hollow talk  
That makes the heart deny the *yes* it breathes."

Then had passed away

"Thrones, altars, judgment-seats, and prisons,  
Sceptres, tiaras, swords, and chains, and tomes  
Of reasoned wrong glazed on by ignorance."

Such is the general scope of this wonderful poem of which we have given the barest outline. It has grown in public estimation as freedom of thought has grown, for it is as fully the expression of the Liberalism of the nineteenth century as "Paradise Lost" is of the higher Puritanism of the seventeenth.

To attempt any criticism of the style of "the god-like Shelley" is almost like attempting to follow the eagle in its flight above the clouds; one thing, however, we can safely affirm: he who has not read this drama has but an imperfect idea of the majesty and melody of English poetry. Shelley is undoubtedly our greatest master of rhythm. His verse is not the laughing, rippling brook: it is the ceaseless swell of the mighty ocean.

This is seen in "Prometheus Unbound." There are no jars, no straining after smoothness; but the flood of melody pours on, "a perpetual Orphic