

THE BEST OF THE OLL #51

Percey Bysshe Shelley, "On Liberty" (1810-22)
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*"Oh, vain endeavour! If on his own high will, a
willing slave, He has enthroned the oppression and
the oppressor. What if earth can clothe and feed
Amplest millions at their need, And power in thought
be as the tree within the seed?"*



Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

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Editor's Introduction

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was one of the leading English romantic poets of the early 19th century. His circle included other poets such as Lord Byron, his father in law the radical political theorist William Godwin, and his wife Mary Shelley the author of the novel *Frankenstein, the Modern Prometheus* (1818). He was a radical liberal in his political and social views and a sceptic concerning religion. Many of his works were not published in his lifetime because of their radical content. A theme in his work was the nature of liberty and the behavior of tyrants who thwarted the individual's natural desire to be free. This comes out in many of his poems like "Ozymandias" (1818) and essays such as "A Philosophical View of Reform" (1820).

This collection of Shelley's writings contains his "Declaration of Rights" (1812), numerous poems on the topics of liberty and oppression, and extracts from some of his dramas which were written between 1810 (when he was 18) and his death in 1822 just before he turned 30. Several are direct responses to events going on around him such as the Napoleonic wars, the struggle for independence of the Spanish colonies in North America and the Greeks against Turkish rule, and the Peterloo massacre of protesters in England. Other works are more philosophical and historical where he ponders the rise of liberty over a couple of thousand years as in his "Ode to Liberty" (1820) or the fleeting nature of tyranny as in the ruins of the statue of the ruler "Ozymandias" (1818) which lie broken in sands of an unnamed desert.

Shelley pays special attention to the revolutionary movements of his own day, namely the American and French Revolutions, the ideological and political forces of which he depicts in terms of fire, lightning, tempests, and floods, which he believed would eventually sweep away the empires of the kings and tyrants of his own day. The sole empire which would remain, he thought, would be that of the free individual: "Man who man would be, Must rule the empire of himself; in it Must be supreme .. being himself alone." ("Political Greatness")

"Ye can tell That which slavery is, too well— For its very name has grown To an echo of your own. 'Tis to work and have such pay As just keeps life from day to day In your limbs, as in a cell For the tyrants' use to dwell, 'So that ye for them are made Loom, and plough, and sword, and spade, With or without your own will bent To their defence and nourishment.

What art thou Freedom? O! could slaves Answer from their living graves This demand—tyrants would flee Like a dream's dim imagery: Thou art not, as impostors say, A shadow soon to pass away, A superstition, and a name Echoing from the cave of Fame. For the labourer thou art bread, And a comely table spread From his daily labour come In a neat and happy home... Thou art Justice—ne'er for gold May thy righteous laws be sold As laws are in England—thou Shield'st alike the high and low."

Shelley on Liberty (1810-22)¹

WAR (1810) [CPW]

“Monarchs of earth! thine is the baleful deed, Thine are the crimes for which thy subjects bleed. Ah! when will come the sacred fated time, When man unsullied by his leaders' crime, Despising wealth, ambition, pomp, and pride, Will stretch him fearless by his foe-men's side? Ah! when will come the time, when o'er the plain No more shall death and desolation reign?”

Ambition, power, and avarice, now have hurled
Death, fate, and ruin, on a bleeding world.
See! on yon heath what countless victims lie,
Hark! what loud shrieks ascend through yonder sky;
Tell then the cause, 'tis sure the avenger's rage [5]
Has swept these myriads from life's crowded stage:
Hark to that groan, an anguished hero dies,
He shudders in death's latest agonies;
Yet does a fleeting hectic flush his cheek,
Yet does his parting breath essay to speak— [10]
'Oh God! my wife, my children—Monarch thou
For whose support this fainting frame lies low;
For whose support in distant lands I bleed,
Let his friends' welfare be the warrior's meed.
He hears me not—ah! no—kings cannot hear, [15]
For passion's voice has dulled their listless ear.
To thee, then, mighty God, I lift my moan,
Thou wilt not scorn a suppliant's anguished groan.
Oh! now I die—but still is death's fierce pain—
God hears my prayer—we meet, we meet again.' [20]
He spake, reclined him on death's bloody bed,
And with a parting groan his spirit fled.
Oppressors of mankind to YOU we owe
The baleful streams from whence these miseries flow;
For you how many a mother weeps her son, [25]

Snatched from life's course ere half his race was run!
For you how many a widow drops a tear,
In silent anguish, on her husband's bier!
'Is it then Thine, Almighty Power,' she cries,
'Whence tears of endless sorrow dim these eyes?' [30]
Is this the system which Thy powerful sway,
Which else in shapeless chaos sleeping lay,
Formed and approved?—it cannot be—but oh!
Forgive me, Heaven, my brain is warped by woe.'
'Tis not—He never bade the war-note swell, [35]
He never triumphed in the work of hell—
Monarchs of earth! thine is the baleful deed,
Thine are the crimes for which thy subjects bleed.
Ah! when will come the sacred fated time,
When man unsullied by his leaders' crime, [40]
Despising wealth, ambition, pomp, and pride,
Will stretch him fearless by his foe-men's side?
Ah! when will come the time, when o'er the plain
No more shall death and desolation reign?
When will the sun smile on the bloodless field, [45]
And the stern warrior's arm the sickle wield?
Not whilst some King, in cold ambition's dreams,
Plans for the field of death his plodding schemes;
Not whilst for private pique the public fall,
And one frail mortal's mandate governs all. [50]
Swelled with command and mad with dizzying sway;
Who sees unmoved his myriads fade away.
Careless who lives or dies—so that he gains
Some trivial point for which he took the pains.
What then are Kings?—I see the trembling crowd, [55]
I hear their fulsome clamours echoed loud;
Their stern oppressor pleased appears awhile,
But April's sunshine is a Monarch's smile—
Kings are but dust—the last eventful day
Will level all and make them lose their sway; [60]
Will dash the sceptre from the Monarch's hand,
And from the warrior's grasp wrest the ensanguined brand.
Oh! Peace, soft Peace, art thou for ever gone,
Is thy fair form indeed for ever flown?
And love and concord hast thou swept away, [65]
As if incongruous with thy parted sway?
Alas, I fear thou hast, for none appear.
Now o'er the palsied earth stalks giant Fear,
With War, and Woe, and Terror, in his train;—
List'ning he pauses on the embattled plain, [70]
Then speeding swiftly o'er the ensanguined heath,
Has left the frightful work to Hell and Death.
See! gory Ruin yokes his blood-stained car,

¹We have taken Shelley's texts from a variety of sources and used the following abbreviations to indicate where they can be located: PP = *Posthumous Poems* (1824), edited by Shelley's wife Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley; CPW = *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, edited by Thomas Hutchinson (1914); WVP = *The Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley in Verse and Prose*, edited by Harry Buxton Forman (1880). Line numbers are indicated in square brackets.

He scents the battle's carnage from afar;
 Hell and Destruction mark his mad career, [75]
 He tracks the rapid step of hurrying Fear;
 Whilst ruined towns and smoking cities tell,
 That thy work, Monarch, is the work of Hell.
 'It is thy work!' I hear a voice repeat,
 Shakes the broad basis of thy bloodstained seat; [80]
 And at the orphan's sigh, the widow's moan,
 Totters the fabric of thy guilt-stained throne—
 'It is thy work, O Monarch;' now the sound
 Fainter and fainter, yet is borne around,
 Yet to enthusiast ears the murmurs tell [85]
 That Heaven, indignant at the work of Hell,
 Will soon the cause, the hated cause remove,
 Which tears from earth peace, innocence, and love.

TO DEATH (1810) [CPW]

Death! where is thy victory?
 To triumph whilst I die,
 To triumph whilst thine ebon wing
 Enfolds my shuddering soul?
 O Death! where is thy sting? [5]
 Not when the tides of murder roll,
 When nations groan, that kings may bask in bliss,
 Death! canst thou boast a victory such as this—
 When in his hour of pomp and power
 His blow the mightiest murderer gave, [10]
 Mid Nature's cries the sacrifice
 Of millions to glut the grave;
 When sunk the Tyrant Desolation's slave;
 Or Freedom's life-blood streamed upon thy shrine;
 Stern Tyrant, couldst thou boast a victory such as
 mine? [15]

To know in dissolution's void
 That mortals' baubles sunk decay;
 That everything, but Love, destroyed
 Must perish with its kindred clay,—
 Perish Ambition's crown, [20]
 Perish her sceptred sway:
 From Death's pale front fades Pride's fastidious frown.
 In Death's damp vault the lurid fires decay,
 That Envy lights at heaven-born Virtue's beam—
 That all the cares subside, [25]
 Which lurk beneath the tide
 Of life's unquiet stream;—
 Yes! this is victory!
 And on yon rock, whose dark form glooms the sky,
 To stretch these pale limbs, when the soul is fled; [30]
 To baffle the lean passions of their prey,
 To sleep within the palace of the dead!
 Oh! not the King, around whose dazzling throne
 His countless courtiers mock the words they say,
 Triumphs amid the bud of glory blown, [35]
 As I in this cold bed, and faint expiring groan!

Tremble, ye proud, whose grandeur mocks the woe
 Which props the column of unnatural state!
 You the plainings, faint and low,
 From Misery's tortured soul that flow, [40]
 Shall usher to your fate.

Tremble, ye conquerors, at whose fell command
 The war-fiend riots o'er a peaceful land!
 You Desolation's gory throng
 Shall bear from Victory along [45]
 To that mysterious strand.

DECLARATION OF RIGHTS (1812-13) [WVP]²

“GOVERNMENT has no rights; it is a delegation from several individuals for the purpose of securing their own. It is therefore just, only so far as it exists by their consent, useful only so far as it operates to their well-being.”

GOVERNMENT has no rights; it is a delegation from several individuals for the purpose of securing their own. It is therefore just, only so far as it exists by their consent, useful only so far as it operates to their well-being.

2. IF these individuals think that the form of government which they, or their forefathers constituted is ill adapted to produce their happiness, they have a right to change it.

3. Government is devised for the security of rights. The rights of man are liberty, and all equal participation of the commonage of nature.

4. As the benefit of the governed, is, or ought to be the origin of government, no men can have any authority that does not expressly emanate from their will.

5. Though all governments are not so bad as that of Turkey, yet none are so good as they might be; the majority of every country have a right to perfect their government, the minority should not disturb them, they ought to secede, and form their own system in their own way.

6. All have a right to an equal share in the benefits, and burdens of Government. Any disabilities for opinion, imply by their existence, barefaced tyranny on the side of government, ignorant slavishness on the side of the governed.

7. The rights of man in the present state of society, are only to be secured by some degree of coercion to be exercised on their violator. The sufferer has a right that the degree of coercion employed be as slight as possible.

8. It may be considered as a plain proof of the hollowness of any proposition, if power be used to

enforce instead of reason to persuade its admission. Government is never supported by fraud until it cannot be supported by reason.

9. No man has a right to disturb the public peace, by personally resisting the execution of a law however bad. He ought to acquiesce, using at the same time the utmost powers of his reason, to promote its repeal.

10. A man must have a right to act in a certain manner before it can be his duty. He may, before he ought.

11. A man has a right to think as his reason directs, it is a duty he owes to himself to think with freedom, that he may act from conviction.

12. A man has a right to unrestricted liberty of discussion, falsehood is a scorpion that will sting itself to death.

13. A man has not only a right to express his thoughts, but it is his duty to do so.

14. No law has a right to discourage the practice of truth. A man ought to speak the truth on every occasion, a duty can never be criminal, what is not criminal cannot be injurious.

15. Law cannot make what is in its nature virtuous or innocent, to be criminal, any more than it can make what is criminal to be innocent. Government cannot make a law, it can only pronounce that which was the law before its organisation, viz. the moral result of the imperishable relations of things.

16. The present generation cannot bind their posterity. The few cannot promise for the many.

17. No man has a right to do an evil thing that good may come.

18. Expediency is inadmissible in morals. Politics are only sound when conducted on principles of morality. They are, in fact, the morals of nations.

19. Man has no right to kill his brother, it is no excuse that he does so in uniform. He only adds the infamy of servitude to the crime of murder.

20. Man, whatever be his country, has the same rights in one place as another, the rights of universal citizenship.

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² *The Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley in Verse and Prose*, Vol. 5 *The Prose Works in Four Volumes*, vol. 1 "Declaration of Rights", pp. 392-99.

what is criminal to be innocent.
Government cannot make a law, it can only pronounce that which was the law before its organisation, viz. the moral result of the imperishable relations of things.”

21. The government of a country ought to be perfectly indifferent to every opinion. Religious differences, the bloodiest and most rancorous of all, spring from partiality.

22. A delegation of individuals, for the purpose of securing their rights, can have no undelegated power of restraining the expression of their opinion.

23. Belief is involuntary; nothing involuntary is meritorious or reprehensible. A man ought not to be considered worse or better for his belief.

24. A Christian, a Deist, a Turk, and a Jew, have equal rights: they are men and brethren.

25. If a person's religious ideas correspond not with your own, love him nevertheless. How different would yours have been, had the chance of birth placed you in Tartary or India!

26. Those who believe that Heaven is, what earth has been, a monopoly in the hands of a favored few, would do well to reconsider their opinion: if they find that it came from their priest or their grandmother, they could not do better than reject it.

27. No man has a right to be respected for any other possessions, but those of virtue and talents. Titles are tinsel, power a corruptor, glory a bubble, and excessive wealth, a libel on its possessor.

28. No man has a right to monopolize more than he can enjoy; what the rich give to the poor, whilst millions are starving, is not a perfect favour, but an imperfect right.

29. Every man has a right to a certain degree of leisure and liberty, because it is his duty to attain a certain degree of knowledge. He may before he ought.

30. Sobriety of body and mind is necessary to those who would be free, because, without sobriety a high sense of philanthropy cannot actuate the heart, nor cool and determined courage, execute its dictates.

31. The only use of government is to repress the vices of man. If man were to day sinless, to-morrow he

would have a right to demand that government and all its evils should cease.

Man! thou whose rights are here declared, be no longer forgetful of the loftiness of thy destination. Think of thy rights; of those possessions which will give thee virtue and wisdom, by which thou mayest arrive at happiness and freedom. They are decimated to thee by one who knows thy dignity, for every hour does his heart swell with honorable pride in the contemplation of what thou mayest attain, by one who is not forgetful of thy degeneracy, for every moment brings home to him the bitter conviction of what thou art.

Awake!-arise!-or be for ever fallen.

TO THE REPUBLICANS OF NORTH AMERICA (1812) [CPW]

1.
Brothers! between you and me
Whirlwinds sweep and billows roar:
Yet in spirit oft I see
On thy wild and winding shore
Freedom's bloodless banners wave,— [5]
Feel the pulses of the brave
Unextinguished in the grave,—
See them drenched in sacred gore,—
Catch the warrior's gasping breath
Murmuring 'Liberty or death!' [10]

2.
Shout aloud! Let every slave,
Crouching at Corruption's throne,
Start into a man, and brave
Racks and chains without a groan:
And the castle's heartless glow, [15]
And the hovel's vice and woe,
Fade like gaudy flowers that blow—
Weeds that peep, and then are gone
Whilst, from misery's ashes risen,
Love shall burst the captive's prison. [20]

3.
Cotopaxi! bid the sound
Through thy sister mountains ring,
Till each valley smile around
At the blissful welcoming!
And, O thou stern Ocean deep, [25]
Thou whose foamy billows sweep
Shores where thousands wake to weep

Whilst they curse a villain king,
On the winds that fan thy breast
Bear thou news of Freedom's rest! [30]

4.

Can the daystar dawn of love,
Where the flag of war unfurled
Floats with crimson stain above
The fabric of a ruined world?
Never but to vengeance driven [35]
When the patriot's spirit shriven
Seeks in death its native Heaven!
There, to desolation hurled,
Widowed love may watch thy bier,
Balm thee with its dying tear. [40]

SONNET: ON LAUNCHING SOME BOTTLES
FILLED WITH KNOWLEDGE INTO THE
BRISTOL CHANNEL (AUGUST, 1812) [CPW]

Vessels of heavenly medicine! may the breeze
Auspicious waft your dark green forms to shore;
Safe may ye stem the wide surrounding roar
Of the wild whirlwinds and the raging seas;
And oh! if Liberty e'er deigned to stoop [5]
From yonder lowly throne her crownless brow,
Sure she will breathe around your emerald group
The fairest breezes of her West that blow.
Yes! she will waft ye to some freeborn soul
Whose eye-beam, kindling as it meets your freight, [10]
Her heaven-born flame in suffering Earth will light,
Until its radiance gleams from pole to pole,
And tyrant-hearts with powerless envy burst
To see their night of ignorance dispersed.

FEELINGS OF A REPUBLICAN ON THE FALL
ON BONAPARTE (1816) [CPW]

I hated thee, fallen tyrant! I did groan
To think that a most unambitious slave,
Like thou, shouldst dance and revel on the grave
Of Liberty. Thou mightst have built thy throne
Where it had stood even now: thou didst prefer [5]
A frail and bloody pomp which Time has swept
In fragments towards Oblivion. Massacre,
For this I prayed, would on thy sleep have crept,
Treason and Slavery, Rapine, Fear, and Lust,
And stifled thee, their minister. I know [10]
Too late, since thou and France are in the dust,

That Virtue owns a more eternal foe
Than Force or Fraud: old Custom, legal Crime,
And bloody Faith the foulest birth of Time.

QUEEN MAB. A PHILOSOPHICAL POEM,
WITH NOTES (1813) [CPW]

*“War is the statesman's game, the
priest's delight, The lawyer's jest, the
hired assassin's trade, And, to those
royal murderers, whose mean thrones
Are bought by crimes of treachery and
gore, The bread they eat, the staff on
which they lean.”*

4.

War is the statesman's game, the priest's delight,
The lawyer's jest, the hired assassin's trade,
And, to those royal murderers, whose mean thrones
[170]
Are bought by crimes of treachery and gore,
The bread they eat, the staff on which they lean.
Guards, garbed in blood-red livery, surround
Their palaces, participate the crimes
That force defends, and from a nation's rage [175]
Secure the crown, which all the curses reach
That famine, frenzy, woe and penury breathe.
These are the hired bravos who defend
The tyrant's throne—the bullies of his fear:
These are the sinks and channels of worst vice, [180]
The refuse of society, the dregs
Of all that is most vile: their cold hearts blend
Deceit with sternness, ignorance with pride,
All that is mean and villanous, with rage
Which hopelessness of good, and self-contempt, [185]
Alone might kindle; they are decked in wealth,
Honour and power, then are sent abroad
To do their work. The pestilence that stalks
In gloomy triumph through some eastern land
Is less destroying. They cajole with gold, [190]
And promises of fame, the thoughtless youth
Already crushed with servitude: he knows
His wretchedness too late, and cherishes
Repentance for his ruin, when his doom
Is sealed in gold and blood! [195]
Those too the tyrant serve, who, skilled to snare
The feet of Justice in the toils of law,

Stand, ready to oppress the weaker still;
And right or wrong will vindicate for gold,
Sneering at public virtue, which beneath [200]
Their pitiless tread lies torn and trampled, where
Honour sits smiling at the sale of truth.

'Then grave and hoary-headed hypocrites,
Without a hope, a passion, or a love,
Who, through a life of luxury and lies, [205]
Have crept by flattery to the seats of power,
Support the system whence their honours flow...
They have three words:—well tyrants know their use,
Well pay them for the loan, with usury
Torn from a bleeding world!—God, Hell, and Heaven.
[210]

A vengeful, pitiless, and almighty fiend,
Whose mercy is a nickname for the rage
Of tameless tigers hungering for blood.
Hell, a red gulf of everlasting fire,
Where poisonous and undying worms prolong [215]
Eternal misery to those hapless slaves
Whose life has been a penance for its crimes.
And Heaven, a meed for those who dare belie
Their human nature, quake, believe, and cringe
Before the mockeries of earthly power. [220]

'These tools the tyrant tempers to his work,
Wields in his wrath, and as he wills destroys,
Omnipotent in wickedness: the while
Youth springs, age moulders, manhood tamely does
His bidding, bribed by short-lived joys to lend [225]
Force to the weakness of his trembling arm.

'They rise, they fall; one generation comes
Yielding its harvest to destruction's scythe.
It fades, another blossoms: yet behold!
Red glows the tyrant's stamp-mark on its bloom, [230]
Withering and cankering deep its passive prime.
He has invented lying words and modes,
Empty and vain as his own coreless heart;
Evasive meanings, nothings of much sound,
To lure the heedless victim to the toils [235]
Spread round the valley of its paradise.

'Look to thyself, priest, conqueror, or prince!
Whether thy trade is falsehood, and thy lusts
Deep wallow in the earnings of the poor,
With whom thy Master was:—or thou delight'st [240]
In numbering o'er the myriads of thy slain,
All misery weighing nothing in the scale
Against thy short-lived fame: or thou dost load
With cowardice and crime the groaning land,
A pomp-fed king. Look to thy wretched self! [245]

Ay, art thou not the veriest slave that e'er
Crawled on the loathing earth? Are not thy days
Days of unsatisfying listlessness?
Dost thou not cry, ere night's long rack is o'er,
"When will the morning come?" Is not thy youth [250]
A vain and feverish dream of sensualism?
Thy manhood blighted with unripe disease?
Are not thy views of unregretted death
Drear, comfortless, and horrible? Thy mind,
Is it not morbid as thy nerveless frame, [255]
Incapable of judgement, hope, or love?
And dost thou wish the errors to survive
That bar thee from all sympathies of good,
After the miserable interest
Thou hold'st in their protraction? When the grave
[260]
Has swallowed up thy memory and thyself,
Dost thou desire the bane that poisons earth
To twine its roots around thy confined clay,
Spring from thy bones, and blossom on thy tomb,
That of its fruit thy babes may eat and die? [265]

THE REVOLT OF ISLAM. A POEM IN TWELVE CANTOS (1817) [CPW]

Canto 4

5.
Thus madness came again,—a milder madness, [1450]
Which darkened nought but time's unquiet flow
With supernatural shades of clinging sadness;
That gentle Hermit, in my helpless woe,
By my sick couch was busy to and fro,
Like a strong spirit ministrant of good: [1455]
When I was healed, he led me forth to show
The wonders of his sylvan solitude,
And we together sate by that isle-fretted flood.

6.
He knew his soothing words to weave with skill
From all my madness told; like mine own heart, [1460]
Of Cythna would he question me, until
That thrilling name had ceased to make me start,
From his familiar lips—it was not art,
Of wisdom and of justice when he spoke—
When mid soft looks of pity, there would dart [1465]
A glance as keen as is the lightning's stroke
When it doth rive the knots of some ancestral oak.

7.

Thus slowly from my brain the darkness rolled,
My thoughts their due array did re-assume
Through the enchantments of that Hermit old; [1470]
Then I bethought me of the glorious doom
Of those who sternly struggle to relume
The lamp of Hope o'er man's bewildered lot,
And, sitting by the waters, in the gloom
Of eve, to that friend's heart I told my thought—
[1475]
That heart which had grown old, but had corrupted
not.

8.

That hoary man had spent his livelong age
In converse with the dead, who leave the stamp
Of ever-burning thoughts on many a page,
When they are gone into the senseless damp [1480]
Of graves;—his spirit thus became a lamp
Of splendour, like to those on which it fed;
Through peopled haunts, the City and the Camp,
Deep thirst for knowledge had his footsteps led,
And all the ways of men among mankind he read.
[1485]

9.

But custom maketh blind and obdurate
The loftiest hearts;—he had beheld the woe
In which mankind was bound, but deemed that fate
Which made them abject, would preserve them so;
And in such faith, some steadfast joy to know, [1490]
He sought this cell: but when fame went abroad
That one in Argolis did undergo
Torture for liberty, and that the crowd
High truths from gifted lips had heard and understood;

10.

And that the multitude was gathering wide,— [1495]
His spirit leaped within his aged frame;
In lonely peace he could no more abide,
But to the land on which the victor's flame
Had fed, my native land, the Hermit came:
Each heart was there a shield, and every tongue [1500]
Was as a sword of truth—young Laon's name
Rallied their secret hopes, though tyrants sung
Hymns of triumphant joy our scattered tribes among.

11.

He came to the lone column on the rock,
And with his sweet and mighty eloquence [1505]
The hearts of those who watched it did unlock,
And made them melt in tears of penitence.
They gave him entrance free to bear me thence.

'Since this,' the old man said, 'seven years are spent,
While slowly truth on thy benighted sense [1510]
Has crept; the hope which wildered it has lent
Meanwhile, to me the power of a sublime intent.

12.

'Yes, from the records of my youthful state,
And from the lore of bards and sages old,
From whatsoever my wakened thoughts create [1515]
Out of the hopes of thine aspirings bold,
Have I collected language to unfold
Truth to my countrymen; from shore to shore
Doctrines of human power my words have told,
They have been heard, and men aspire to more [1520]
Than they have ever gained or ever lost of yore.

13.

'In secret chambers parents read, and weep,
My writings to their babes, no longer blind;
And young men gather when their tyrants sleep,
And vows of faith each to the other bind; [1525]
And marriageable maidens, who have pined
With love, till life seemed melting through their look,
A warmer zeal, a nobler hope, now find;
And every bosom thus is rapt and shook,
Like autumn's myriad leaves in one swoln mountain-
brook. [1530]

14.

'The tyrants of the Golden City tremble
At voices which are heard about the streets;
The ministers of fraud can scarce dissemble
The lies of their own heart, but when one meets
Another at the shrine, he inly weets, [1535]
Though he says nothing, that the truth is known;
Murderers are pale upon the judgement-seats,
And gold grows vile even to the wealthy crone,
And laughter fills the Fane, and curses shake the
Throne.

15.

'Kind thoughts, and mighty hopes, and gentle deeds
[1540]
Abound, for fearless love, and the pure law
Of mild equality and peace, succeeds
To faiths which long have held the world in awe,
Bloody and false, and cold:—as whirlpools draw
All wrecks of Ocean to their chasm, the sway [1545]
Of thy strong genius, Laon, which foresaw
This hope, compels all spirits to obey,
Which round thy secret strength now throng in wide
array.

16.
'For I have been thy passive instrument'—
(As thus the old man spake, his countenance [1550]
Gleamed on me like a spirit's)—'thou hast lent
To me, to all, the power to advance
Towards this unforeseen deliverance
From our ancestral chains—ay, thou didst rear
That lamp of hope on high, which time nor chance
[1555]
Nor change may not extinguish, and my share
Of good, was o'er the world its gathered beams to bear.

17.
'But I, alas! am both unknown and old,
And though the woof of wisdom I know well
To dye in hues of language, I am cold [1560]
In seeming, and the hopes which inly dwell,
My manners note that I did long repel;
But Laon's name to the tumultuous throng
Were like the star whose beams the waves compel
And tempests, and his soul-subduing tongue [1565]
Were as a lance to quell the mailed crest of wrong.

***“18. 'Perchance blood need not flow, if
thou at length Wouldst rise, perchance
the very slaves would spare Their
brethren and themselves; great is the
strength Of words—for lately did a
maiden fair, Who from her childhood
has been taught to bear The Tyrant's
heaviest yoke, arise, and make Her sex
the law of truth and freedom hear, And
with these quiet words—"for thine own
sake I prithee spare me;"—did with
ruth so take.”***

18.
'Perchance blood need not flow, if thou at length
Wouldst rise, perchance the very slaves would spare
Their brethren and themselves; great is the strength
Of words—for lately did a maiden fair, [1570]
Who from her childhood has been taught to bear
The Tyrant's heaviest yoke, arise, and make
Her sex the law of truth and freedom hear,
And with these quiet words—"for thine own sake

I prithee spare me;"—did with ruth so take [1575]

19.
'All hearts, that even the torturer who had bound
Her meek calm frame, ere it was yet impaled,
Loosened her, weeping then; nor could be found
One human hand to harm her—unassailed
Therefore she walks through the great City, veiled
[1580]
In virtue's adamantine eloquence,
'Gainst scorn, and death and pain thus trebly mailed,
And blending, in the smiles of that defence,
The Serpent and the Dove, Wisdom and Innocence.

20.
'The wild-eyed women throng around her path: [1585]
From their luxurious dungeons, from the dust
Of meaner thralls, from the oppressor's wrath,
Or the caresses of his sated lust
They congregate:—in her they put their trust;
The tyrants send their armed slaves to quell [1590]
Her power;—they, even like a thunder-gust
Caught by some forest, bend beneath the spell
Of that young maiden's speech, and to their chiefs
rebel.

21.
'Thus she doth equal laws and justice teach
To woman, outraged and polluted long; [1595]
Gathering the sweetest fruit in human reach
For those fair hands now free, while armed wrong
Trembles before her look, though it be strong;
Thousands thus dwell beside her, virgins bright,
And matrons with their babes, a stately throng! [1600]
Lovers renew the vows which they did plight
In early faith, and hearts long parted now unite,

22.
'And homeless orphans find a home near her,
And those poor victims of the proud, no less,
Fair wrecks, on whom the smiling world with stir,
[1605]
Thrusts the redemption of its wickedness:—
In squalid huts, and in its palaces
Sits Lust alone, while o'er the land is borne
Her voice, whose awful sweetness doth repress
All evil, and her foes relenting turn, [1610]
And cast the vote of love in hope's abandoned urn.

23.
'So in the populous City, a young maiden
Has baffled Havoc of the prey which he
Marks as his own, whene'er with chains o'erladen

Men make them arms to hurl down tyranny,— [1615]
False arbiter between the bound and free;
And o'er the land, in hamlets and in towns
The multitudes collect tumultuously,
And throng in arms; but tyranny disowns
Their claim, and gathers strength around its trembling
thrones. [1620]

24.

'Blood soon, although unwillingly, to shed
The free cannot forbear—the Queen of Slaves,
The hoodwinked Angel of the blind and dead,
Custom, with iron mace points to the graves
Where her own standard desolately waves [1625]
Over the dust of Prophets and of Kings.
Many yet stand in her array—"she paves
Her path with human hearts," and o'er it flings
The wildering gloom of her immeasurable wings.

Canto 9

***“Like Earth's own voice lifted
unconquerably To all her children, the
unbounded mirth, The glorious joy of
thy name—Liberty! They heard!”***

3.

"The many ships spotting the dark blue deep
With snowy sails, fled fast as ours came nigh,
In fear and wonder; and on every steep
Thousands did gaze, they heard the startling cry,
[3490]
Like Earth's own voice lifted unconquerably
To all her children, the unbounded mirth,
The glorious joy of thy name—Liberty!
They heard!—As o'er the mountains of the earth
From peak to peak leap on the beams of Morning's
birth: [3495]

4.

'So from that cry over the boundless hills
Sudden was caught one universal sound,
Like a volcano's voice, whose thunder fills
Remotest skies,—such glorious madness found
A path through human hearts with stream which
drowned [3500]
Its struggling fears and cares, dark Custom's brood;
They knew not whence it came, but felt around
A wide contagion poured—they called aloud
On Liberty—that name lived on the sunny flood.

OZYMANDIAS (1818) [CPW]

***“My name is Ozymandias, king of
kings: Look on my works, ye Mighty,
and despair!’ Nothing beside remains.
Round the decay Of that colossal
wreck, boundless and bare The lone
and level sands stretch far away.”***

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert...Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command, [5]
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: [10]
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

PROMETHEUS UNBOUND. A LYRICAL
DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS (1818) [CPW]

*“Whilst my beloved race is trampled
down By his thought-executing
ministers. Such is the tyrant's
recompense: 'tis just: He who is evil
can receive no good”*

ACT 1

PROMETHEUS:

Evil minds [380]
Change good to their own nature. I gave all
He has; and in return he chains me here
Years, ages, night and day: whether the Sun
Split my parched skin, or in the moony night
The crystal-winged snow cling round my hair: [385]
Whilst my beloved race is trampled down
By his thought-executing ministers.
Such is the tyrant's recompense: 'tis just:
He who is evil can receive no good;
And for a world bestowed, or a friend lost, [390]
He can feel hate, fear, shame; not gratitude:
He but requites me for his own misdeed.
Kindness to such is keen reproach, which breaks
With bitter stings the light sleep of Revenge.
Submission, thou dost know I cannot try: [395]
For what submission but that fatal word,
The death-seal of mankind's captivity,
Like the Sicilian's hair-suspended sword,
Which trembles o'er his crown, would he accept,
Or could I yield? Which yet I will not yield. [400]
Let others flatter Crime, where it sits throned
In brief Omnipotence: secure are they:
For Justice, when triumphant, will weep down
Pity, not punishment, on her own wrongs,
Too much avenged by those who err. I wait, [405]
Enduring thus, the retributive hour
Which since we spake is even nearer now.
But hark, the hell-hounds clamour: fear delay:
Behold! Heaven lowers under thy Father's frown.

MERCURY:

Oh, that we might be spared; I to inflict [410]
And thou to suffer! Once more answer me:
Thou knowest not the period of Jove's power?

PROMETHEUS:

I know but this, that it must come.

MERCURY:

Alas!

Thou canst not count thy years to come of pain?

PROMETHEUS:

They last while Jove must reign: nor more, nor less
[415]
Do I desire or fear.

PROMETHEUS:

Ah woe!

Ah woe! Alas! pain, pain ever, for ever! [635]
I close my tearless eyes, but see more clear
Thy works within my woe-illumed mind,
Thou subtle tyrant! Peace is in the grave.
The grave hides all things beautiful and good:
I am a God and cannot find it there, [640]
Nor would I seek it: for, though dread revenge,
This is defeat, fierce king, not victory.
The sights with which thou torturest gird my soul
With new endurance, till the hour arrives
When they shall be no types of things which are. [645]

PANTHEA:

Alas! what sawest thou more?

PROMETHEUS:

There are two woes:
To speak, and to behold; thou spare me one.
Names are there, Nature's sacred watchwords, they
Were borne aloft in bright emblazonry;
The nations thronged around, and cried aloud, [650]
As with one voice, Truth, liberty, and love!
Suddenly fierce confusion fell from heaven
Among them: there was strife, deceit, and fear:
Tyrants rushed in, and did divide the spoil.
This was the shadow of the truth I saw. [655]

SCENE 3.4

PROMETHEUS:

We feel what thou hast heard and seen: yet speak. [97]

SPIRIT OF THE HOUR:

Soon as the sound had ceased whose thunder filled
The abysses of the sky and the wide earth,
There was a change: the impalpable thin air [100]
And the all-circling sunlight were transformed,
As if the sense of love dissolved in them

Had folded itself round the sphered world.
My vision then grew clear, and I could see
Into the mysteries of the universe: [105]

...

*“And behold, thrones were kingless,
and men walked One with the other
even as spirits do, None fawned, none
trampled; hate, disdain, or fear, Self-
love or self-contempt, on human brows
No more inscribed, as o'er the gate of
hell, 'All hope abandon ye who enter
here;' None frowned, none trembled,
none with eager fear Gazed on
another's eye of cold command, Until
the subject of a tyrant's will Became,
worse fate, the abject of his own, Which
spurred him, like an outspent horse, to
death.”*

I wandering went
Among the haunts and dwellings of mankind,
And first was disappointed not to see
Such mighty change as I had felt within
Expressed in outward things; but soon I looked, [130]
And behold, thrones were kingless, and men walked
One with the other even as spirits do,
None fawned, none trampled; hate, disdain, or fear;
Self-love or self-contempt, on human brows
No more inscribed, as o'er the gate of hell, [135]
'All hope abandon ye who enter here;'
None frowned, none trembled, none with eager fear
Gazed on another's eye of cold command,
Until the subject of a tyrant's will
Became, worse fate, the abject of his own, [140]
Which spurred him, like an outspent horse, to death.
None wrought his lips in truth-entangling lines
Which smiled the lie his tongue disdained to speak;
None, with firm sneer, trod out in his own heart
The sparks of love and hope till there remained [145]
Those bitter ashes, a soul self-consumed,
And the wretch crept a vampire among men,
Infecting all with his own hideous ill;

None talked that common, false, cold, hollow talk
Which makes the heart deny the "yes" it breathes,
[150]
Yet question that unmeant hypocrisy
With such a self-mistrust as has no name.
And women, too, frank, beautiful, and kind
As the free heaven which rains fresh light and dew
On the wide earth, past; gentle radiant forms, [155]
From custom's evil taint exempt and pure;
Speaking the wisdom once they could not think,
Looking emotions once they feared to feel,
And changed to all which once they dared not be,
Yet being now, made earth like heaven; nor pride,
[160]
Nor jealousy, nor envy, nor ill shame,
The bitterest of those drops of treasured gall,
Spoiled the sweet taste of the nepenthe, love.

*“Thrones, altars, judgement-seats, and
prisons; wherein, And beside which, by
wretched men were borne Sceptres,
tiaras, swords, and chains, and tomes
Of reasoned wrong, glozed on by
ignorance, Were like those monstrous
and barbaric shapes, The ghosts of a
no-more-remembered fame, Which,
from their unworn obelisks, look forth
In triumph o'er the palaces and tombs
Of those who were their conquerors”*

Thrones, altars, judgement-seats, and prisons; wherein,
And beside which, by wretched men were borne [165]
Sceptres, tiaras, swords, and chains, and tomes
Of reasoned wrong, glozed on by ignorance,
Were like those monstrous and barbaric shapes,
The ghosts of a no-more-remembered fame,
Which, from their unworn obelisks, look forth [170]
In triumph o'er the palaces and tombs
Of those who were their conquerors: mouldering
round,
These imaged to the pride of kings and priests
A dark yet mighty faith, a power as wide
As is the world it wasted, and are now [175]
But an astonishment; even so the tools
And emblems of its last captivity,

Amid the dwellings of the peopled earth,
 Stand, not o'erthrown, but unregarded now.
 And those foul shapes, abhorred by god and man,—
 [180]
 Which, under many a name and many a form
 Strange, savage, ghastly, dark and execrable,
 Were Jupiter, the tyrant of the world;
 And which the nations, panic-stricken, served
 With blood, and hearts broken by long hope, and love
 [185]
 Dragged to his altars soiled and garlandless,
 And slain among men's unreclaiming tears,
 Flattering the thing they feared, which fear was hate,—
 Frown, mouldering fast, o'er their abandoned shrines:
 The painted veil, by those who were, called life, [190]
 Which mimicked, as with colours idly spread,
 All men believed and hoped, is torn aside;
 The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains
 Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
 Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless, [195]
 Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
 Over himself; just, gentle, wise; but man
 Passionless?—no, yet free from guilt or pain,
 Which were, for his will made or suffered them,
 Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves, [200]
 From chance, and death, and mutability,
 The clogs of that which else might oversoar
 The loftiest star of unascended heaven,
 Pinnacled dim in the intense inane.

AN ODE WRITTEN OCTOBER, 1819, BEFORE
 THE SPANIARDS HAD RECOVERED THEIR
 LIBERTY (1819) [CPW]

Arise, arise, arise!
 There is blood on the earth that denies ye bread;
 Be your wounds like eyes
 To weep for the dead, the dead, the dead.
 What other grief were it just to pay? [5]
 Your sons, your wives, your brethren, were they;
 Who said they were slain on the battle day?

Awaken, awaken, awaken!
 The slave and the tyrant are twin-born foes;
 Be the cold chains shaken [10]
 To the dust where your kindred repose, repose:
 Their bones in the grave will start and move,
 When they hear the voices of those they love,
 Most loud in the holy combat above.

Wave, wave high the banner! [15]

When Freedom is riding to conquest by:
 Though the slaves that fan her
 Be Famine and Toil, giving sigh for sigh.
 And ye who attend her imperial car,
 Lift not your hands in the banded war, [20]
 But in her defence whose children ye are.

Glory, glory, glory,
 To those who have greatly suffered and done!
 Never name in story
 Was greater than that which ye shall have won. [25]
 Conquerors have conquered their foes alone,
 Whose revenge, pride, and power they have
 overthrown
 Ride ye, more victorious, over your own.

Bind, bind every brow
 With crownlets of violet, ivy, and pine: [30]
 Hide the blood-stains now
 With hues which sweet Nature has made divine:
 Green strength, azure hope, and eternity:
 But let not the pansy among them be;
 Ye were injured, and that means memory. [35]

THE MASK OF ANARCHY. WRITTEN ON THE
 OCCASION OF THE MASSACRE AT
 MANCHESTER (1819) [CPW]

*“39. 'What is Freedom?—ye can tell
 That which slavery is, too well— For its
 very name has grown To an echo of
 your own. 40. 'Tis to work and have
 such pay As just keeps life from day to
 day In your limbs, as in a cell For the
 tyrants' use to dwell, 41. 'So that ye for
 them are made Loom, and plough, and
 sword, and spade, With or without your
 own will bent To their defence and
 nourishment.’”*

37.
 'Men of England, heirs of Glory,
 Heroes of unwritten story,
 Nurslings of one mighty Mother,

Hopes of her; and one another; [150]

38.

'Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number,
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you—
Ye are many—they are few. [155]

39.

'What is Freedom?—ye can tell
That which slavery is, too well—
For its very name has grown
To an echo of your own.

40.

"Tis to work and have such pay [160]
As just keeps life from day to day
In your limbs, as in a cell
For the tyrants' use to dwell,

41.

'So that ye for them are made
Loom, and plough, and sword, and spade, [165]
With or without your own will bent
To their defence and nourishment.

42.

"Tis to see your children weak
With their mothers pine and peak,
When the winter winds are bleak,— [170]
They are dying whilst I speak.

43.

"Tis to hunger for such diet
As the rich man in his riot
Casts to the fat dogs that lie
Surfeiting beneath his eye; [175]

44.

"Tis to let the Ghost of Gold
Take from Toil a thousandfold
More than e'er its substance could
In the tyrannies of old.

***“45. 'Paper coin—that forgery Of the
title-deeds, which ye Hold to something
of the worth Of the inheritance of
Earth.”***

45.

'Paper coin—that forgery [180]
Of the title-deeds, which ye
Hold to something of the worth
Of the inheritance of Earth.

46.

"Tis to be a slave in soul
And to hold no strong control [185]
Over your own wills, but be
All that others make of ye.

47.

'And at length when ye complain
With a murmur weak and vain
'Tis to see the Tyrant's crew [190]
Ride over your wives and you
Blood is on the grass like dew.

48.

'Then it is to feel revenge
Fiercely thirsting to exchange
Blood for blood—and wrong for wrong— [195]
Do not thus when ye are strong.

49.

'Birds find rest, in narrow nest
When weary of their winged quest;
Beasts find fare, in woody lair
When storm and snow are in the air. [200]

50.

'Asses, swine, have litter spread
And with fitting food are fed;
All things have a home but one—
Thou, Oh, Englishman, hast none!

51.

'This is Slavery—savage men, [205]
Or wild beasts within a den
Would endure not as ye do—
But such ills they never knew.

52.

'What art thou Freedom? O! could slaves
Answer from their living graves [210]
This demand—tyrants would flee
Like a dream's dim imagery:

53.

'Thou art not, as impostors say,
A shadow soon to pass away,
A superstition, and a name [215]

Echoing from the cave of Fame.

54.

'For the labourer thou art bread,
And a comely table spread
From his daily labour come
In a neat and happy home. [220]

55.

Thou art clothes, and fire, and food
For the trampled multitude—
No—in countries that are free
Such starvation cannot be
As in England now we see. [225]

56.

'To the rich thou art a check,
When his foot is on the neck
Of his victim, thou dost make
That he treads upon a snake.

57.

Thou art Justice—ne'er for gold [230]
May thy righteous laws be sold
As laws are in England—thou
Shield'st alike the high and low.

***“52. 'What art thou Freedom? O! could
slaves Answer from their living graves
This demand—tyrants would flee Like
a dream's dim imagery: 53. 'Thou art
not, as impostors say, A shadow soon
to pass away, A superstition, and a
name Echoing from the cave of Fame.
54. For the labourer thou art bread,
And a comely table spread From his
daily labour come In a neat and happy
home... 57. Thou art Justice—ne'er for
gold May thy righteous laws be sold As
laws are in England—thou Shield'st
alike the high and low.”***

58.

'Thou art Wisdom—Freemen never
Dream that God will damn for ever [235]
All who think those things untrue
Of which Priests make such ado.

59.

'Thou art Peace—never by thee
Would blood and treasure wasted be
As tyrants wasted them, when all [240]
Leagued to quench thy flame in Gaul.

60.

'What if English toil and blood
Was poured forth, even as a flood?
It availed, Oh, Liberty,
To dim, but not extinguish thee. [245]

61.

'Thou art Love—the rich have kissed
Thy feet, and like him following Christ,
Give their substance to the free
And through the rough world follow thee,

62.

'Or turn their wealth to arms, and make [250]
War for thy beloved sake
On wealth, and war, and fraud—whence they
Drew the power which is their prey.

63.

'Science, Poetry, and Thought
Are thy lamps; they make the lot [255]
Of the dwellers in a cot
So serene, they curse it not.

64.

'Spirit, Patience, Gentleness,
All that can adorn and bless
Art thou—let deeds, not words, express [260]
Thine exceeding loveliness.

65.

'Let a great Assembly be
Of the fearless and the free
On some spot of English ground
Where the plains stretch wide around. [265]

66.

'Let the blue sky overhead,
The green earth on which ye tread,
All that must eternal be
Witness the solemnity.

67.

'From the corners uttermost [270]
Of the bounds of English coast;
From every hut, village, and town
Where those who live and suffer moan
For others' misery or their own,

68.

'From the workhouse and the prison [275]
Where pale as corpses newly risen,
Women, children, young and old
Groan for pain, and weep for cold—

69.

'From the haunts of daily life
Where is waged the daily strife [280]
With common wants and common cares
Which sows the human heart with tares—

70.

'Lastly from the palaces
Where the murmur of distress
Echoes, like the distant sound [285]
Of a wind alive around

71.

'Those prison halls of wealth and fashion,
Where some few feel such compassion
For those who groan, and toil, and wail
As must make their brethren pale— [290]

72.

'Ye who suffer woes untold,
Or to feel, or to behold
Your lost country bought and sold
With a price of blood and gold—

73.

'Let a vast assembly be, [295]
And with great solemnity
Declare with measured words that ye
Are, as God has made ye, free—

74.

'Be your strong and simple words
Keen to wound as sharpened swords, [300]
And wide as targes let them be,
With their shade to cover ye.

75.

'Let the tyrants pour around
With a quick and startling sound,
Like the loosening of a sea, [305]

Troops of armed emblazonry.

76.

'Let the charged artillery drive
Till the dead air seems alive
With the clash of clanging wheels,
And the tramp of horses' heels. [310]

77.

'Let the fixed bayonet
Gleam with sharp desire to wet
Its bright point in English blood
Looking keen as one for food.

78.

Let the horsemen's scimitars [315]
Wheel and flash, like sphereless stars
Thirsting to eclipse their burning
In a sea of death and mourning.

79.

'Stand ye calm and resolute,
Like a forest close and mute, [320]
With folded arms and looks which are
Weapons of unvanquished war,

80.

'And let Panic, who outspeeds
The career of armed steeds
Pass, a disregarded shade [325]
Through your phalanx undismayed.

*“81. 'Let the laws of your own land,
Good or ill, between ye stand Hand to
hand, and foot to foot, Arbiters of the
dispute, 82. 'The old laws of England—
they Whose reverend heads with age are
gray, Children of a wiser day; And
whose solemn voice must be Thine own
echo—Liberty!... 91. 'Rise like Lions
after slumber In unvanquishable
number— Shake your chains to earth
like dew Which in sleep had fallen on
you— Ye are many—they are few.’”*

81.

'Let the laws of your own land,
Good or ill, between ye stand
Hand to hand, and foot to foot,
Arbiters of the dispute, [330]

82.

'The old laws of England—they
Whose reverend heads with age are gray,
Children of a wiser day;
And whose solemn voice must be
Thine own echo—Liberty! [335]

83.

'On those who first should violate
Such sacred heralds in their state
Rest the blood that must ensue,
And it will not rest on you.

84.

'And if then the tyrants dare [340]
Let them ride among you there,
Slash, and stab, and maim, and hew,—
What they like, that let them do.

85.

'With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise, [345]
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away.

86.

Then they will return with shame
To the place from which they came,
And the blood thus shed will speak [350]
In hot blushes on their cheek.

87.

'Every woman in the land
Will point at them as they stand—
They will hardly dare to greet
Their acquaintance in the street. [355]

88.

'And the bold, true warriors
Who have hugged Danger in wars
Will turn to those who would be free,
Ashamed of such base company.

89.

'And that slaughter to the Nation [360]
Shall steam up like inspiration,

Eloquent, oracular;
A volcano heard afar.

90.

'And these words shall then become
Like Oppression's thundered doom [365]
Ringing through each heart and brain,
Heard again—again—again—

91.

'Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number—
Shake your chains to earth like dew [370]
Which in sleep had fallen on you—
Ye are many—they are few.'

LINES WRITTEN DURING THE CASTLEREAGH ADMINISTRATION (1819) [CPW]

1.

Corpses are cold in the tomb;
Stones on the pavement are dumb;
Abortions are dead in the womb,
And their mothers look pale—like the death-white
shore
Of Albion, free no more. [5]

2.

Her sons are as stones in the way—
They are masses of senseless clay—
They are trodden, and move not away,—
The abortion with which SHE travaileth
Is Liberty, smitten to death. [10]

3.

Then trample and dance, thou Oppressor!
For thy victim is no redresser;
Thou art sole lord and possessor
Of her corpses, and clods, and abortions—they pave
Thy path to the grave. [15]

4.

Hearest thou the festival din
Of Death, and Destruction, and Sin,
And Wealth crying "Havoc!" within?
'Tis the bacchanal triumph that makes Truth dumb,
Thine Epithalamium. [20]

5.

Ay, marry thy ghastly wife!
Let Fear and Disquiet and Strife

Spread thy couch in the chamber of Life!
Marry Ruin, thou Tyrant! and Hell be thy guide
To the bed of the bride! [25]

ODE TO LIBERTY (1820) [CPW]

Yet, Freedom, yet, thy banner, torn but flying,
Streams like a thunder-storm against the wind.—
BYRON.

1.
A glorious people vibrated again
The lightning of the nations: Liberty
From heart to heart, from tower to tower, o'er Spain,
Scattering contagious fire into the sky,
Gleamed. My soul spurned the chains of its dismay, [5]
And in the rapid plumes of song
Clothed itself, sublime and strong;
As a young eagle soars the morning clouds among,
Hovering inverse o'er its accustomed prey;
Till from its station in the Heaven of fame [10]
The Spirit's whirlwind rapped it, and the ray
Of the remotest sphere of living flame
Which paves the void was from behind it flung,
As foam from a ship's swiftness, when there came
A voice out of the deep: I will record the same. [15]

2.
The Sun and the serenest Moon sprang forth:
The burning stars of the abyss were hurled
Into the depths of Heaven. The daedal earth,
That island in the ocean of the world,
Hung in its cloud of all-sustaining air: [20]
But this divinest universe
Was yet a chaos and a curse,
For thou wert not: but, power from worst producing
worse,
The spirit of the beasts was kindled there,
And of the birds, and of the watery forms, [25]
And there was war among them, and despair
Within them, raging without truce or terms:
The bosom of their violated nurse
Groaned, for beasts warred on beasts, and worms on
worms,
And men on men; each heart was as a hell of storms.
[30]

3.
Man, the imperial shape, then multiplied
His generations under the pavilion
Of the Sun's throne: palace and pyramid,

Temple and prison, to many a swarming million
Were, as to mountain-wolves their ragged caves. [35]
This human living multitude
Was savage, cunning, blind, and rude,
For thou wert not; but o'er the populous solitude,
Like one fierce cloud over a waste of waves,
Hung Tyranny; beneath, sate deified [40]
The sister-pest, congregator of slaves;
Into the shadow of her pinions wide
Anarchs and priests, who feed on gold and blood
Till with the stain their inmost souls are dyed,
Drove the astonished herds of men from every side.
[45]

*“For thou (Liberty) wert not; but o'er
the populous solitude, Like one fierce
cloud over a waste of waves, Hung
Tyranny; beneath, sate deified The
sister-pest, congregator of slaves;”*

4.
The nodding promontories, and blue isles,
And cloud-like mountains, and dividuous waves
Of Greece, basked glorious in the open smiles
Of favouring Heaven: from their enchanted caves
Prophetic echoes flung dim melody. [50]
On the unapprehensive wild
The vine, the corn, the olive mild,
Grew savage yet, to human use unreconciled;
And, like unfolded flowers beneath the sea,
Like the man's thought dark in the infant's brain, [55]
Like aught that is which wraps what is to be,
Art's deathless dreams lay veiled by many a vein
Of Parian stone; and, yet a speechless child,
Verse murmured, and Philosophy did strain
Her lidless eyes for thee; when o'er the Aegean main
[60]

5.
Athens arose: a city such as vision
Builds from the purple crags and silver towers
Of battlemented cloud, as in derision
Of kingliest masonry: the ocean-floors
Pave it; the evening sky pavilions it; [65]
Its portals are inhabited
By thunder-zoned winds, each head
Within its cloudy wings with sun-fire garlanded,—
A divine work! Athens, diviner yet,
Gleamed with its crest of columns, on the will [70]
Of man, as on a mount of diamond, set;

For thou wert, and thine all-creative skill
Peopled, with forms that mock the eternal dead
In marble immortality, that hill
Which was thine earliest throne and latest oracle. [75]

6.
Within the surface of Time's fleeting river
Its wrinkled image lies, as then it lay
Immovably unquiet, and for ever
It trembles, but it cannot pass away!
The voices of thy bards and sages thunder [80]
With an earth-awakening blast
Through the caverns of the past:
(Religion veils her eyes; Oppression shrinks aghast:)
A winged sound of joy, and love, and wonder,
Which soars where Expectation never flew, [85]
Rending the veil of space and time asunder!
One ocean feeds the clouds, and streams, and dew;
One Sun illumines Heaven; one Spirit vast
With life and love makes chaos ever new,
As Athens doth the world with thy delight renew. [90]

7.
Then Rome was, and from thy deep bosom fairest,
Like a wolf-cub from a Cadmaean Maenad,
She drew the milk of greatness, though thy dearest
From that Elysian food was yet unweaned;
And many a deed of terrible uprightness [95]
By thy sweet love was sanctified;
And in thy smile, and by thy side,
Saintly Camillus lived, and firm Atilius died.
But when tears stained thy robe of vestal-whiteness,
And gold profaned thy Capitoline throne, [100]
Thou didst desert, with spirit-winged lightness,
The senate of the tyrants: they sunk prone
Slaves of one tyrant: Palatinus sighed
Faint echoes of Ionian song; that tone
Thou didst delay to hear, lamenting to disown [105]

8.
From what Hyrcanian glen or frozen hill,
Or piny promontory of the Arctic main,
Or utmost islet inaccessible,
Didst thou lament the ruin of thy reign,
Teaching the woods and waves, and desert rocks, [100]
And every Naiad's ice-cold urn,
To talk in echoes sad and stern
Of that sublimest lore which man had dared unlearn?
For neither didst thou watch the wizard flocks
Of the Scald's dreams, nor haunt the Druid's sleep.
[105]
What if the tears rained through thy shattered locks

Were quickly dried? for thou didst groan, not weep,
When from its sea of death, to kill and burn,
The Galilean serpent forth did creep,
And made thy world an undistinguishable heap. [120]

*“A thousand years the Earth cried,
'Where art thou?' And then the shadow
of thy coming fell On Saxon Alfred's
olive-cinctured brow: And many a
warrior-peopled citadel.”*

9.
A thousand years the Earth cried, 'Where art thou?'
And then the shadow of thy coming fell
On Saxon Alfred's olive-cinctured brow:
And many a warrior-peopled citadel.
Like rocks which fire lifts out of the flat deep, [125]
Arose in sacred Italy,
Frowning o'er the tempestuous sea
Of kings, and priests, and slaves, in tower-crowned
majesty;
That multitudinous anarchy did sweep
And burst around their walls, like idle foam, [130]
Whilst from the human spirit's deepest deep
Strange melody with love and awe struck dumb
Dissonant arms; and Art, which cannot die,
With divine wand traced on our earthly home
Fit imagery to pave Heaven's everlasting dome. [135]

10.
Thou huntress swifter than the Moon! thou terror
Of the world's wolves! thou bearer of the quiver,
Whose sunlike shafts pierce tempest-winged Error,
As light may pierce the clouds when they dis sever
In the calm regions of the orient day! [140]
Luther caught thy wakening glance;
Like lightning, from his leaden lance
Reflected, it dissolved the visions of the trance
In which, as in a tomb, the nations lay;
And England's prophets hailed thee as their queen,
[145]
In songs whose music cannot pass away,
Though it must flow forever: not unseen
Before the spirit-sighted countenance
Of Milton didst thou pass, from the sad scene
Beyond whose night he saw, with a dejected mien.
[150]

11.
The eager hours and unreluctant years

As on a dawn-illuminated mountain stood.
Trampling to silence their loud hopes and fears,
Darkening each other with their multitude,
And cried aloud, 'Liberty!' Indignation [155]
Answered Pity from her cave;
Death grew pale within the grave,
And Desolation howled to the destroyer, Save!
When like Heaven's Sun girt by the exhalation
Of its own glorious light, thou didst arise. [160]
Chasing thy foes from nation unto nation
Like shadows: as if day had cloven the skies
At dreaming midnight o'er the western wave,
Men started, staggering with a glad surprise,
Under the lightnings of thine unfamiliar eyes. [165]

12.

Thou Heaven of earth! what spells could pall thee then
In ominous eclipse? a thousand years
Bred from the slime of deep Oppression's den.
Dyed all thy liquid light with blood and tears.
Till thy sweet stars could weep the stain away; [170]
How like Bacchanals of blood
Round France, the ghastly vintage, stood
Destruction's sceptred slaves, and Folly's mitred brood!
When one, like them, but mightier far than they,
The Anarch of thine own bewildered powers, [175]
Rose: armies mingled in obscure array,
Like clouds with clouds, darkening the sacred bowers
Of serene Heaven. He, by the past pursued,
Rests with those dead, but unforgotten hours,
Whose ghosts scare victor kings in their ancestral
towers. [180]

13.

England yet sleeps: was she not called of old?
Spain calls her now, as with its thrilling thunder
Vesuvius wakens Aetna, and the cold
Snow-crag by its reply are cloven in sunder:
O'er the lit waves every Aeolian isle [185]
From Pithecusa to Pelorus
Howls, and leaps, and glares in chorus:
They cry, 'Be dim; ye lamps of Heaven suspended o'er
us!
Her chains are threads of gold, she need but smile
And they dissolve; but Spain's were links of steel, [190]
Till bit to dust by virtue's keenest file.
Twins of a single destiny! appeal
To the eternal years enthroned before us
In the dim West; impress us from a seal,
All ye have thought and done! Time cannot dare
conceal. [195]

14.

Tomb of Arminius! render up thy dead
Till, like a standard from a watch-tower's staff,
His soul may stream over the tyrant's head;
Thy victory shall be his epitaph,
Wild Bacchanal of truth's mysterious wine, [200]
King-deluded Germany,
His dead spirit lives in thee.
Why do we fear or hope? thou art already free!
And thou, lost Paradise of this divine
And glorious world! thou flowery wilderness! [205]
Thou island of eternity! thou shrine
Where Desolation, clothed with loveliness,
Worships the thing thou wert! O Italy,
Gather thy blood into thy heart; repress
The beasts who make their dens thy sacred palaces.
[210]

***“Oh, that the free would stamp the
impious name Of KING into the dust!
or write it there, So that this blot upon
the page of fame Were as a serpent's
path, which the light air Erases, and the
flat sands close behind!”***

15.

Oh, that the free would stamp the impious name
Of KING into the dust! or write it there,
So that this blot upon the page of fame
Were as a serpent's path, which the light air
Erases, and the flat sands close behind! [215]
Ye the oracle have heard:
Lift the victory-flashing sword.
And cut the snaky knots of this foul gordian word,
Which, weak itself as stubble, yet can bind
Into a mass, irrefragably firm, [220]
The axes and the rods which awe mankind;
The sound has poison in it, 'tis the sperm
Of what makes life foul, cankerous, and abhorred;
Disdain not thou, at thine appointed term,
To set thine armed heel on this reluctant worm. [225]

16.

Oh, that the wise from their bright minds would kindle
Such lamps within the dome of this dim world,
That the pale name of PRIEST might shrink and
dwindle
Into the hell from which it first was hurled,
A scoff of impious pride from fiends impure; [230]
Till human thoughts might kneel alone,
Each before the judgement-throne

Of its own aweless soul, or of the Power unknown!
Oh, that the words which make the thoughts obscure
From which they spring, as clouds of glimmering dew
[235]

From a white lake blot Heaven's blue portraiture,
Were stripped of their thin masks and various hue
And frowns and smiles and splendours not their own,
Till in the nakedness of false and true
They stand before their Lord, each to receive its due!
[240]

***“If on his own high will, a willing
slave, He has enthroned the oppression
and the oppressor What if earth can
clothe and feed Amplest millions at
their need, And power in thought be as
the tree within the seed?”***

17.
He who taught man to vanquish whatsoever
Can be between the cradle and the grave
Crowned him the King of Life. Oh, vain endeavour!
If on his own high will, a willing slave,
He has enthroned the oppression and the oppressor
[245]
What if earth can clothe and feed
Amplest millions at their need,
And power in thought be as the tree within the seed?
Or what if Art, an ardent intercessor,
Driving on fiery wings to Nature's throne, [250]
Checks the great mother stooping to caress her,
And cries: 'Give me, thy child, dominion
Over all height and depth'? if Life can breed
New wants, and wealth from those who toil and groan,
Rend of thy gifts and hers a thousandfold for one!
[255]

18.
Come thou, but lead out of the inmost cave
Of man's deep spirit, as the morning-star
Beckons the Sun from the Eoan wave,
Wisdom. I hear the pennons of her car
Self-moving, like cloud charioted by flame; [260]
Comes she not, and come ye not,
Rulers of eternal thought,
To judge, with solemn truth, life's ill-apportioned lot?
Blind Love, and equal Justice, and the Fame
Of what has been, the Hope of what will be? [265]
O Liberty! if such could be thy name
Wert thou disjoined from these, or they from thee:

If thine or theirs were treasures to be bought
By blood or tears, have not the wise and free
Wept tears, and blood like tears?—The solemn
harmony [270]

19.
Paused, and the Spirit of that mighty singing
To its abyss was suddenly withdrawn;
Then, as a wild swan, when sublimely winging
Its path athwart the thunder-smoke of dawn,
Sinks headlong through the aerial golden light [275]
On the heavy-sounding plain,
When the bolt has pierced its brain;
As summer clouds dissolve, unburthened of their rain;
As a far taper fades with fading night,
As a brief insect dies with dying day,— [280]
My song, its pinions disarrayed of might,
Drooped; o'er it closed the echoes far away
Of the great voice which did its flight sustain,
As waves which lately paved his watery way
Hiss round a drowner's head in their tempestuous play.
[285]

HELLAS. A LYRICAL DRAMA (1821) [CPW]

***“In the great morning of the world,
The Spirit of God with might unfurled
The flag of Freedom over Chaos, And
all its banded anarchs fled, Like
vultures frightened from Imaus, Before
an earthquake's tread.”***

CHORUS:
Breathe low, low
The spell of the mighty mistress now!
When Conscience lulls her sated snake,
And Tyrants sleep, let Freedom wake. [30]
Breathe low—low
The words which, like secret fire, shall flow
Through the veins of the frozen earth—low, low!

SEMICHORUS 1:
Life may change, but it may fly not;
Hope may vanish, but can die not; [35]
Truth be veiled, but still it burneth;
Love repulsed,—but it returneth!

SEMICHORUS 2:

Yet were life a charnel where
Hope lay confined with Despair;
Yet were truth a sacred lie, [40]
Love were lust—

SEMICHORUS 1:

If Liberty
Lent not life its soul of light,
Hope its iris of delight,
Truth its prophet's robe to wear,
Love its power to give and bear. [45]

CHORUS:

In the great morning of the world,
The Spirit of God with might unfurled
The flag of Freedom over Chaos,
And all its banded anarchs fled,
Like vultures frighted from Imaus, [50]
Before an earthquake's tread.—
So from Time's tempestuous dawn
Freedom's splendour burst and shone:—
Thermopylae and Marathon
Caught like mountains beacon-lighted, [55]
The springing Fire.—The winged glory
On Philippi half-alighted,
Like an eagle on a promontory.
Its unwearied wings could fan
The quenchless ashes of Milan. [60]
From age to age, from man to man,
It lived; and lit from land to land
Florence, Albion, Switzerland.

Then night fell; and, as from night,
Reassuming fiery flight, [65]
From the West swift Freedom came,
Against the curse of Heaven and doom.
A second sun arrayed in flame,
To burn, to kindle, to illumine.
From far Atlantis its young beams [70]
Chased the shadows and the dreams.
France, with all her sanguine steams,
Hid, but quenched it not; again
Through clouds its shafts of glory rain
From utmost Germany to Spain. [75]
As an eagle fed with morning
Scorns the embattled tempest's warning,
When she seeks her aerie hanging
In the mountain-cedar's hair,
And her brood expect the clanging [80]
Of her wings through the wild air,
Sick with famine:—Freedom, so
To what of Greece remaineth now

Returns; her hoary ruins glow
Like Orient mountains lost in day; [85]
Beneath the safety of her wings
Her renovated nurslings prey,
And in the naked lightnings
Of truth they purge their dazzled eyes.
Let Freedom leave—where'er she flies, [90]
A Desert, or a Paradise:
Let the beautiful and the brave
Share her glory, or a grave.

SONNET II. POLITICAL GREATNESS (1824)
[PP & CPW]

*“What are numbers knit By force or
custom? Man who man would be, Must
rule the empire of himself; in it Must
be supreme, establishing his throne On
vanquished will, quelling the anarchy
Of hopes and fears, being himself
alone.”*

Nor happiness, nor majesty, nor fame,
Nor peace, nor strength, nor skill in arms or arts,
Shepherd those herds whom tyranny makes tame;
Verse echoes not one beating of their hearts,
History is but the shadow of their shame,
Art veils her glass, or from the pageant starts
As to oblivion their blind millions fleet,
Staining that Heaven with obscene imagery
Of their own likeness. What are numbers knit
By force or custom? Man who man would be,
Must rule the empire of himself; in it
Must be supreme, establishing his throne
On vanquished will, quelling the anarchy
Of hopes and fears, being himself alone.

LIBERTY (1824) [PP & CPW]

*“4. From billow and mountain and
exhalation The sunlight is darted
through vapour and blast; From spirit
to spirit, from nation to nation, From
city to hamlet thy dawning is cast,—
And tyrants and slaves are like
shadows of night In the van of the
morning light.”*

1.
The fiery mountains answer each other;
Their thunderings are echoed from zone to zone;
The tempestuous oceans awake one another,
And the ice-rocks are shaken round Winter's throne,
When the clarion of the Typhoon is blown. [5]
2.
From a single cloud the lightening flashes,
Whilst a thousand isles are illumined around,
Earthquake is trampling one city to ashes,
An hundred are shuddering and tottering; the sound
Is bellowing underground. [10]
3.
But keener thy gaze than the lightening's glare,
And swifter thy step than the earthquake's tramp;
Thou deafenest the rage of the ocean; thy stare
Makes blind the volcanoes; the sun's bright lamp
To thine is a fen-fire damp. [15]
4.
From billow and mountain and exhalation
The sunlight is darted through vapour and blast;
From spirit to spirit, from nation to nation,
From city to hamlet thy dawning is cast,—
And tyrants and slaves are like shadows of night [20]
In the van of the morning light.

SONG TO THE MEN OF ENGLAND (1839)
[CPW]

*“5. The seed ye sow, another reaps; The
wealth ye find, another keeps; The
robes ye weave, another wears; The
arms ye forge; another bears.
6. Sow seed,—but let no tyrant reap;
Find wealth,—let no impostor heap;
Weave robes,—let not the idle wear;
Forge arms,—in your defence to bear.*

1.
Men of England, wherefore plough
For the lords who lay ye low?
Wherefore weave with toil and care
The rich robes your tyrants wear?
2.
Wherefore feed, and clothe, and save, [5]
From the cradle to the grave,
Those ungrateful drones who would
Drain your sweat—nay, drink your blood?
3.
Wherefore, Bees of England, forge
Many a weapon, chain, and scourge, [10]
That these stingless drones may spoil
The forced produce of your toil?
4.
Have ye leisure, comfort, calm,
Shelter, food, love's gentle balm?
Or what is it ye buy so dear [15]
With your pain and with your fear?
5.
The seed ye sow, another reaps;
The wealth ye find, another keeps;
The robes ye weave, another wears;
The arms ye forge; another bears. [20]
6.
Sow seed,—but let no tyrant reap;
Find wealth,—let no impostor heap;
Weave robes,—let not the idle wear;
Forge arms,—in your defence to bear.

7.
Shrink to your cellars, holes, and cells; [25]
In halls ye deck another dwells.
Why shake the chains ye wrought? Ye see
The steel ye tempered glance on ye.

8.
With plough and spade, and hoe and loom,
Trace your grave, and build your tomb, [30]
And weave your winding-sheet, till fair
England be your sepulchre.

SONNET: ENGLAND IN 1819 (1839) [CPW]

An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying king,—
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn,—mud from a muddy spring,—
Rulers who neither see, nor feel, nor know,
But leech-like to their fainting country cling, [5]
Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow,—
A people starved and stabbed in the untilled field,—
An army, which liberticide and prey
Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield,—
Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay; [10]
Religion Christless, Godless—a book sealed;
A Senate,—Time's worst statute, unrepealed,—
Are graves from which a glorious Phantom may
Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.

FRAGMENT: "WHAT MEN GAIN FAIRLY" (1839) [CPW]

What men gain fairly—that they should possess,
And children may inherit idleness,
From him who earns it—This is understood;
Private injustice may be general good.
But he who gains by base and armed wrong, [5]
Or guilty fraud, or base compliances,
May be despoiled; even as a stolen dress
Is stripped from a convicted thief; and he
Left in the nakedness of infamy.

A NEW NATIONAL ANTHEM (1839) [CPW]

1.
God prosper, speed, and save,
God raise from England's grave

Her murdered Queen!
Pave with swift victory
The steps of Liberty, [5]
Whom Britons own to be
Immortal Queen.

2.
See, she comes throned on high,
On swift Eternity!
God save the Queen! [10]
Millions on millions wait,
Firm, rapid, and elate,
On her majestic state!
God save the Queen!

3.
She is Thine own pure soul [15]
Moulding the mighty whole,—
God save the Queen!
She is Thine own deep love
Rained down from Heaven above,—
Wherever she rest or move, [20]
God save our Queen!

4.
'Wilder her enemies
In their own dark disguise,—
God save our Queen!
All earthly things that dare [25]
Her sacred name to bear,
Strip them, as kings are, bare;
God save the Queen!

5.
Be her eternal throne
Built in our hearts alone— [30]
God save the Queen!
Let the oppressor hold
Canopied seats of gold;
She sits enthroned of old
O'er our hearts Queen. [35]

6.
Lips touched by seraphim
Breathe out the choral hymn
'God save the Queen!'
Sweet as if angels sang,
Loud as that trumpet's clang [40]
Wakening the world's dead gang,—
God save the Queen!

Further Information

SOURCE

The editions used for this extract: PP = Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Posthumous Poems* (London: John and Henry L. Hunt, 1824). [Edited by Shelley's wife Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley.] Online at the OLL <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/268>>.

CPW = *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, including materials never before printed in any edition of the poems*. Edited with textual notes by Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford University Press, 1914). PDF from Internet Archive <<http://www.archive.org/details/completopoeticalshel>>; HTML from Project Gutenberg <<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4800>>.

WVP = *The Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley in Verse and Prose. Now First Brought Together with Many Pieces Not Before Published*. Edited with Prefaces Notes and Appendices by Harry Buxton Forman. In Eight Volumes. (London: Reeves and Turner, 1880). PDF from Google Books.

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Other works by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/person/161>>.

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[Ludwig von Mises, “Liberty and Property” (1958)]



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