

Four Epochs

Dyer D. Lum

1889

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I.—THEOCRATIC.

The reign of terror is the reign of gods,
When fear sits regnant upon conscience's throne,
When trembling manhood kneels as mute as stone,
When warrior chieftains cringe 'neath priestly rods,
When valor earns rewards in churchyard sods,
When but one law to statecraft's art is known
(To gods are given full action o'er their own),
And life grows dark when'er the pontiff nods.
For god hath spoken! who will dare gainsay
The awful words that lips divine may speak?
Or yet for freedom frienzied strength display
When priests command the vengeance Jove can wreak?
Ay! god hath spoken—and his slaves obey,
Though heaven re-echoes with the martyrs' shriek.

II.-AUTOCRATIC.

Upon Time's stage another scene unrolls,
The monarch follows thearch on the throne,
While priestly robes adorn the courtly zone
Of flatterers to pledge the people's souls,
As tyranny still on relentless flows
Its course, and answer makes, when people groan,
"Render to Caesar, as to god, his own!"
And priest and levite cry: "Thy will controls"!
The king hath spoken from the royal seat
Of consecrated power, and freedom waits;
For god hath signed authority's estreat,
And Law and Gospel (Power's twin advocates),
With adulation's slavish smile, repeat:
"God holds the powers that be legitimate."

III.—DEMOCRATIC.

Still freedom is to history unknown,
Though art may carve it statues, pen relate
Its rising power, or priest's hands consecrate
The craft (now unto greater wisdom grown)

That reaps the harvest royal hands had sown,
Where o'er the fallen throne still stands the state,
Where "we the people" liberty—debate,
Where major force calls minor rights its "own,"
Where millions slave that idlers may amass,
Where greed and lust in childhood's earning share,
Where priest and levite still the robbed ones pass,
Where Want and Labor, yoked and harnessed, bear,
With bending backs like an o'erladen ass,
Civilization's glory and despair.

IV—ANARCHY.

The thearch's god, in free thought's current blown,
With royal monarch's from their thrones outcast,
Lies buried in the desert of the past,
Leaving the oligarchs of trade alone
To stem the torrent rising o'er the throne
They have usurped, but trembling and aghast
To hear denied by freedom's bugle-blast
Their right to call the means of life their own,
That rights are not derived through wealth or birth,
That property hath sanction but in use,
That church or state possess no mystic worth
Through statute-laws to consecrate abuse,
That equal rights in freemen's grasp henceforce
Dissolves protection's plea and law's excuse.

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