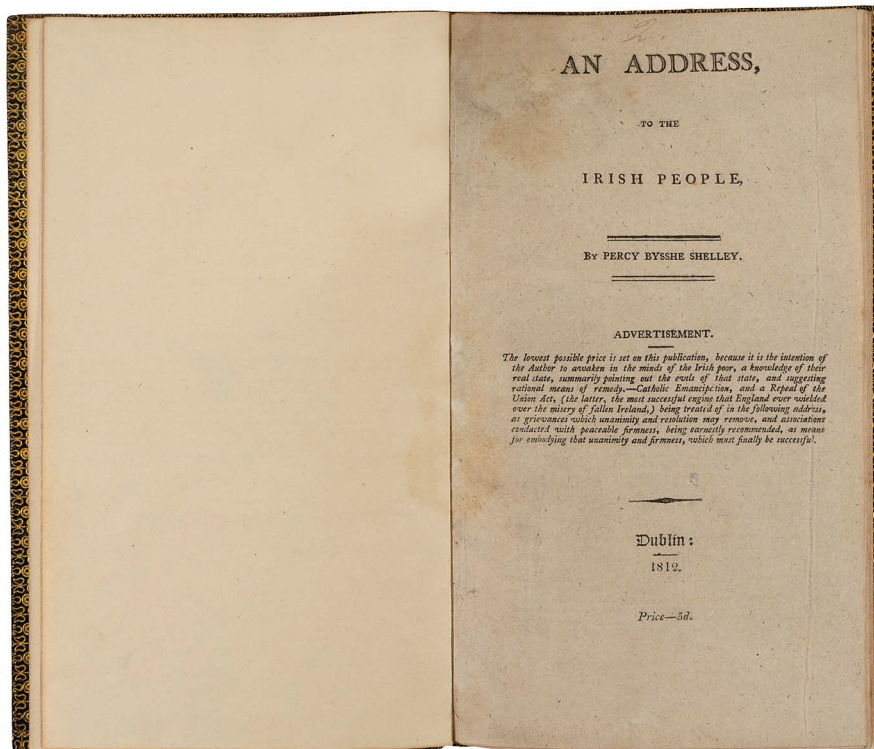


“I WILL PROMISE YOU LIBERTY AND HAPPINESS”



SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe (1792-1822)
An Address to the Irish People
Dublin: [Isaac Eaton], 1812.

First Edition. Small Octavo (210 x 120)., [2], 22 pp.

Some staining and possibly some neat minor repair work in the inner margin of the title-page (just visible on the verso of the title and possibly due to the holes caused by the stab-stitching weakening the inner margin), evenly browned throughout, neat crease along the fore-margin of the title-page, a few minor paper flaws in places and with some leaves lightly inked (due to the poor paper and ink quality noted by Shelley on the title-page), old manuscript tract volume number to the upper margin of the title-page, original stab stitching holes in the inner margin. Full green crushed-morocco by Riviere, spine lettered in gilt, gilt turn-ins, marbled endpapers.

Extremely rare.

Shelley's rare pamphlet addressed to Irish Catholics and arguing for the repealing of the Act of Union. Intentionally produced cheaply and aimed at the poorest members of society, Shelley himself distributed the work in the streets of Dublin and even threw copies to potential readers from the balcony of his apartments on Sackville Street. The work has long been famed for its rarity but has in recent years gained much attention as an important example of Shelley's political awakening and as an influence on his literary output, particularly *Queen Mab*.

The scarcity of this pamphlet is hardly surprising as Shelley advertises on the title-page that the work has been produced at the "lowest possible price... because the intention of the Author is to awaken in the minds of the Irish poor, a knowledge of their real state". Shelley calls for the repeal of the 1800 Act of Union on the grounds that it did not do enough to defend the rights of Irish Catholics. Shelley's characteristically staunch stance distanced him from Godwin who supported a more measured protest against the Act of Union. Richard Holmes captures this important period of Shelley's life and notes that on arriving in Dublin he quickly sought out the printer, Isaac Eaton, who produced 1500 copies of the pamphlet. Holmes goes on to state that Eaton produced the first sheets four days later which "were almost illegibly printed on bad paper" but that Shelley was delighted and sent the proofs to Miss Hitchener and stated that the work was "adapted to the lowest comprehension that can read". On the distribution of the pamphlet Holmes writes: "...the vigour with which Shelley undertook this is one of the most impressive features of his whole story. Scores of copies were mailed to prominent liberals... No less than sixty copies were sent out to public houses in the centre and surrounds of the city - an apt method in Dublin, which he had learnt from [Thomas] Paine's experiences. He hired a servant especially to distribute copies, with instructions to give them away and when to sell them, depending on the look of the potential customer. Shelley himself took copies into the street, throwing them into passing carriages and open windows, pushing them into the hands of beggars, drunkards and street ladies" (Richard Holmes, *Shelley, The Pursuit*, 1974).

Shelley's text has often been criticised for the (presumably unintentional) condescending tone of a noble Englishman addressing the poorest section of Irish society, he begins: "Fellow Men, I am not an Irishman, yet I can feel you. I hope there are none among you who will read this address with prejudice or levity, because it is made by an Englishman, indeed, I believe there are not. The Irish are a brave nation. They have a heart of liberty in their breasts, but they are much mistaken if they fancy a stranger cannot have as warm a one" (p. 1).

The text continues with much attention paid to the supposed predisposition of the Irish "to drink rather freely" (8) but does rise to a powerful note of revolutionary fervour: "Lose not a day, not an hour, not a moment. - Temperance, sobriety, charity and independence will give you wisdom; when you have those things, you may defy the tyrant. It is not going often to chapel, crossing yourselves, or confessing, that will make you virtuous, many a rascal has attended regularly at Mass, and many a good man has never gone at all... Do your work regularly and quickly, when you have done, read and talk; do not spend your money in idleness and drinking, which so far from doing good to your cause will do it harm... never quarrel between each other, be all of one mind as nearly as you can; do these things and I will promise you liberty and happiness" (p.19).

At the end of the main text Shelley provides a Postscript in which he remarks he has "now been a week in Dublin" and states that the work is to be published "in the cheapest possible form...and intelligible to the most uneducated minds".

Harold Orel has demonstrated that Shelley's interest in Irish affairs were far more than a fleeting interest in a hotly debated topic. Orel notes that Shelley's correspondence during 1811 and the beginning of 1812 highlight the extent to which Shelley was musing

on the problem of the side effects of the Union. Shelley had also already written the text of the *Address* (apart from the Postscript) before he left for Ireland rather than being fired compulsively by the situation when he arrived. Orel goes even further in arguing for the importance of Shelley's time and political activities in Ireland by arguing that his pamphleteering actually influenced Shelley's literary output in this period: "*Queen Mab*, for all its revolutionary ardour, was a logical development in the evolution of a pamphleteer who preached the benefits of reason and the cultivation of one's mind" (p.92). Orel concludes his essay by noting: "For Shelley, as for Auden's Yeats, Ireland was one of the forces – surely not the least important – that "hurt" him into poetry, and a recognition of his true subject-matter" (p.94). Harold Orel, "Shelley and the Irish Question", *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* (1996).

Provenance: Bookplate of the American book collector John Whipple Frothingham on the front flyleaf.

ABPC records only the Bradley Martin copy (April 30th, 1990 lot 3182, \$30,000). The Bradley Martin copy was the former Britwell Court Library copy which was sold at Sotheby's 29th March, 1971 (lot 409, sold for £1300 to Seven Gables, NYC). Prior to that copy the last to appear at auction was the unbound and uncut L.H. Silver copy at Sotheby's in November 1966 (£1700 to Fleming now Pforzheimer). The Kern copy in morocco by Zaehnsdorf made \$2,750 in January 1926.