

SONGS OF THE PRESENT

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Songs of the Present by Archer Gurney

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ARCHER GURNEY

**SONGS OF
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"If I were asked what is the great want of English society, I would say that it is the mingling of class with class. I would say, in one word, that that want is the want of sympathy."—*The late Judge Talfourd.*

"Ce n'est que dans les choses extraordinaires et bizarres que se trouve l'excellence de quelque genre que ce soit. On s'élève pour y arriver, et on s'en éloigne. Il faut le plus souvent s'abaisser. Les meilleurs livres sont ceux, que chaque lecteur croit qu'il aurait pu faire; la nature, qui seule est bonne, est toute familière et commune."—*Pensées de Pascal.*

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SONGS

OF

THE PRESENT.

BY THE REV. ARCHER, ¹⁸⁵⁶ GURNEY,

AUTHOR OF "IPHIGENIA AT DELPHI," ETC.

LONDON:

LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS

1856.

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE arrangement of this volume has been scarcely dictated by expediency; for the graver and more mournful colours occupy the foreground of the picture. "A sombre vestibule," writes a friend, "leads to your Muse's airy residence."—"The public, too possibly, may be repelled," warns another, "by the melancholy of your Soho experiences: it were well if your happiest and less work-a-day strains were the first to meet the eye. Men take up a volume of poetry to be made happy, and not miserable." And yet another dwells on that "monotony of care and pain which seems," says he, "in your 'Warning Voices,' to wrap the reader in the fogs of Cockaigne's November."—Doubtless these strictures may be well grounded. But art and nature alike appeared to me to require this sacrifice to justice. I felt constrained to presume thus far (nor do I appear to have presumed vainly) on the sympathy and judgment of the public. This is, indeed, too earnest an age, whatever its defects may be, to quarrel with earnestness in one who courts the Muse. And, again, there is no law to bind the reader to a servile order of advance: if he so will, he may speedily leave the mists behind him, and hear the blithesome harvest echoes resounding o'er the plain.

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+3-31
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DEDICATION

TO

HER MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY,

Victoria,

QUEEN OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

WILL it indeed appear too rash, O Lady,
Who sway'st the empire of the bounding waves,
To dedicate this bold *Essay* to thee?
In which I strove, with oft-times dissonant lyre,
That ill expressed the grandeurs of my theme;
As some wan streamlet midnight's stars might mirror,
Or bleak sea-shell breathe harmonies of ocean,
To trace thy People's virtues and their crimes;
Their heav'nward aspirations, earth-declensions;
And, from the chances of the changeful Present,
Forecast the fortunes of the Age to be.

Wise is thy soul, and keen thy vigilant glances
To pierce the clouds above our valleys low'ring

Where stagnate marsh-like want and rude excess,
And scan the hoped-for glories of the Future.
Though War's great venture needs must fire thy soul,
Who feel'st thy people's honour as thine own,
Yet home's peace-conflict still the heart engages.
And well thou ken'st, to reach the goal desired
Greatest and least must blend in wise endeavour,
Each lend its ray, the glow-worm and the star.
And was't not thine to set example royal,
A planet mild to beam in lower heaven ?
Not only in the home-amenities,
The fireside glories of an English hearth,
But also in the wider sphere of action,
As Wife, as Mother, and as Britain's Queen.

Thou, with thy noble-hearted consort, bravely,
O Royal Lady, dost our steps precede,
And, beckoning on the path of social progress,
Would'st with thy spirit's sunshine light the gloom,
And haply woo life's flowers to blossom freely.

Thence, howsoever dull the hues may be
With which I limned this portrait of the Present,
Its purpose in thy royal eyes may gild it
With some faint straggling gleams. And so, once more

Humbly I rest it at thy sovereign feet ;
Knowing whate'er could cheer the heart of labour
Would earn most generous response from the palace,
As skies will brighten o'er where earth is till'd,
Her dark fens drain'd, her tall woods lopp'd away.

Perpetual blessings wait on Thee and Thine,
Admired Victoria ! May the storm-tost Present,
Now in bold waves its troubled current rearing,
Yet, as we trust, propelled by favouring breezes
Towards the golden haven of the Future,
Beneath thine influence bland be soothed to rest,
And unborn generations live to bless thee !