

**PROPOSALS FOR AND CONTRIBUTIONS
TO A BALLAD HISTORY OF ENGLAND
AND THE STATES SPRUNG FROM HER.
PREPARING, A BALLAD AND SONG
HISTORY OF ENGLAND**

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Proposals for and Contributions to a Ballad History of England and the States Sprung from Her.
Preparing, a Ballad and Song History of England by W. C. Bennett

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W. C. BENNETT

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AND THE STATES SPRUNG FROM HER.**

EDITED WITH HISTORICAL, BIOGRAPHICAL, AND CRITICAL NOTES,

BY

W. C. BENNETT.

PROPOSALS FOR AND CONTRIBUTIONS
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AND
The States Sprung from Her.

BY
W. C. BENNETT.



"Love thou thy land, with love far-brought
From out the pictured past."

Tennyson.

"A people which takes no pride in the noble achievements of remote ancestors, will never achieve anything worthy to be remembered with pride by remote descendants. It is a sentiment which belongs to the higher and purer part of human nature, and which adds not a little to the strength of States."—*Macaulay's History of England.*

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1868.

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TO THE
RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P., D.C.L., &c.,
STATESMAN, ORATOR, AND POET,

I Dedicate

THIS ATTEMPT TO MAKE THE GLORIES OF OUR HISTORY

"HOUSEHOLD WORDS"

ON THE LIPS OF THE PEOPLE.

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SHALL WE HAVE A NATIONAL BALLAD HISTORY FOR THE PEOPLE?

—♦—
AN APPEAL TO THE POETS OF ENGLAND AND AMERICA.

ENGLISH History is almost unknown to the English people. It lives neither in the memories nor on the tongues of the great race whose deeds it records. Yet in grandeur, in the variety and influence of the principles which its actors have fought into facts—in the multitude and power of the minds that have played out its wondrous dramas—what history, ancient or modern, can compare with it? Prose has told portions of its grand tale more and more fitly. What Hume and Robertson did for our forefathers, Carlyle and Macaulay have done, Froude and Motley are doing, for us with that clearer perception of what constitutes the reality of History, and that freer play of the imagination, which give to their narratives the truth to life and the pictorial power of the poem and the play.

But these are for the cultivated few. The millions of the English race are ignorant alike of historians and of history. Life with them is too leisureless and too overworked for studious reading. In mind they are not far removed from those to whom the gleemen and the minstrels of our Saxon and Norman days chanted the ballad and the lay.

It is due to the literature of fiction, not to that of fact, that any living knowledge of their forefathers reaches nine-tenths of the Englishmen of to-day. "Where did you get your knowledge of history?" was asked of one of our by-gone Statesmen. "From Shakespeare," was his reply. Let the same question be put to all but the exceptional readers of our middle and working classes. What must be their answer? "From Shakespeare and

Scott, Bulwer and Kingsley—the novelists and the poets.” But what memory can hope to retain the actual words of the dramatic chronicle and the novel? The pictures of “Kenilworth” and of “Old Mortality” are fading recollections, while the very lines of the “The Armada,” “The Bonnets of Bonny Dundee,” and “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” are on the tongues of their readers.

Our history must reach the people now as it reached them of old. They are to be moved by the same means which have moved them through all ages—as the universal mind of the Greek races was kindled and ennobled by the thunder-march of the Ballad-epics of Homer; as the imagination of the Teutonic nations was swept along by the gloomy torrent of the Nibelungenlied; as the Spaniard was fired and nationalised by the battle-music of the Cid. And how much our national life needs the delight and the forgetfulness of self which the Ballad and Song can give!

Civilisation has diversified and intensified, but for the many, it has hardly ennobled life. Men should be raised in mind and soul, as well as in comfort and power, by the application to their uses of the discoveries of science, by their more ready access to intellectual enlightenment, and by their nearer approaches to social consideration and political equality with all. Doubtless, slowly but surely, the mass is drawn up into a higher life by potent influences, acting more and more strongly from generation to generation. But our life is through all classes too much a material one. The spirit of work for the bread that perisheth engrosses us overmuch:

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;

the means of living become to us the ends of our struggles and our hopes; the gold fever possesses our traders, and necessity absorbs in endless toil the existence of our labouring classes. We do not “work our souls as nobly as our iron;” nor with all the wondrousness of our “steam horses” can we undoubtingly affirm that “we are greater than the first men who led black ones by the mane.”

But in the BALLAD and the SONG we have a measureless power of weaving through the existence of the many, nobility in the knowledge of the achievements of our noblest; strength and endurance, purity and