

**SONGS BY A  
SONG-WRITER,  
FIRST HUNDRED**

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Songs by a Song-Writer, First Hundred by W. C. Bennett

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**W. C. BENNETT**

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© *Russell Lowell Esq.*  
*with friendly greetings*  
**S O N G S**  
*from W. Bennett*  
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**A S O N G - W R I T E R .**

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**FIRST HUNDRED.**  
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**W. C. BENNETT.**

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**1859.**

TO  
JAMES T. FIELDS.

OF BOSTON, U.S.

WITH ALL GOOD WISHES,

FROM ONE OF HIS MANY ENGLISH FRIENDS,

W. C. BENNETT.

2, THE CIRCUS,  
GREENWICH.

EVER since I could read Songs, I have loved them. The dearest shelf of my book-case is that where rank, shoulder to shoulder, in loving brotherhood, Burns and Béranger, Campbell and Herrick. There, too, are those best-loved of all book-companions, the volumes which bring together the quaint fancies and delicate music of the lyrics of our Elizabethan Dramatists and our Cavalier Singers, and treasure for ever, in the Songs of Scotland and of Ireland, the sobs and laughs of bygone generations, for the admiration and the love of all coming centuries. Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton, I reverence with awe. They are the forests, the mountain ranges, the oceans of our literature. But Song-writers are my familiar friends. With what ever-new delight I wander through the grassy valleys, the daisied fields, the summer orchards, by the tinkling rivulets of the land of Song. The Epic speaks to the brain. It demands that I labour up to a fitting comprehension of its grandeur. The Song sings to my heart, and my heart laughs, or answers in tears — what pleasant ones! — to every cry of nature which it utters. “ Blessings be on them, and eternal praise,” who have made the dead past so blossom with strange loveliness for the toiling present. I, too, would add a flower or two to the great garden of Song, best gladdener of the present, best comforter of the

future. For with my love of Songs has grown my love of Song-writing; but with my love of Song-writing has increased my knowledge of all that constitutes a perfect Song, and, alas! of all the difficulty of producing one in any way approaching to perfection, especially in this England of ours, to-day. For why is it we English have no "Auld langsyne" and "John Anderson, my Jo," no "Ae fond kiss" and "Annie Lawrie," or, to cross the Channel, no "*Le Grenier*" or "*Lisette*"? We have feelings true enough, and deep enough. Nay, we have passions to which the noisy sentiment of the Parisian is tame. But we scorn to utter them. We shrink from exposing them to public view, as if it were to public ridicule. We strangle their utterance as we would the cry of physical pain. We hold it weak to waste ourselves in words. No, we are a people whose feelings are as undemonstrative as they are deep. We are not given to the revelations of the confessional or the gesticulations of the boards. We would rather that men's eyes should not centre upon us. Our feelings are for our bosom friends, our homes, and ourselves; we are not talkative Frenchmen, to flourish them in the eyes of acquaintances and strangers. We have had but one Byron, like Goethe, to use up life for art. Nor have we the impulsiveness of our own Celtic or semi-Celtic races, who, French in their vivacity, pour forth every feeling as it stirs them. And this national reserve, this scornful denial of free utterance to passion, weighs down the Song-writer into a servile obedience to the iron opinion that rules around



him. He, too, learns to regard only that which is external to himself as fitting to the use of his art. He, too, shrinks from showing nature undraped. He, too, must thrust aside truth and success, for unreality, falsehood, and failure. There must be Wordsworthism, Carlyleism, Ruskinism, Pre-Raphaelitism, in English Song-writing, to give to us a Song-literature fit to name with that of Scotland. So we have no Songs in the sense in which Scotland and France, and even Ireland, have them. For Song is the music of feeling, the melody of passion, pulsing from the heart as naturally as the blood; and, with us, feeling is unnaturally struck into self-imposed dumbness. We allow only our fancy and our reason to supply us with Songs; so, like our national music, they are artificial. We have madrigals and laboured conceits, not tunes and gushes of fun, of joy, of love, of sorrow. Lately we have taken to setting moral maxims to popular airs, for the evangelization of our streets, our concerts and our drawing-rooms: but it is cold work, this. The fancy speaks but to the fancy, the reason but to the reason: we want the heart to speak to the heart.

"Out of thy own mouth will I condemn thee," will be said by the readers of most of the Songs I here print. Granted. How is this? I have loved all styles of Song-writing. Loving all, I have attempted all; nor will those who read this volume find it difficult to trace the influence of the cold and polished conceits of Beaumont and Fletcher, and Suckling and Carew; the pretinences of Haynes Bayley, of Barry Cornwall, and of

Moore; the fire and nationality of Campbell, of the Jacobite singers, and the Young Ireland of the *Nation*; the nature and passion of Gerald Griffin, of Byron, and of Burns; and the dramatic power, the satire and the sentiment, of Béranger and his compatriots. Thanks to the genius of the great Parisian, that dazzling sun-beam that dances and glances so brightly through his pages, sparkles and gleams fitfully through mine. But let not my readers be startled. That Parisian reality, flesh and blood, in "the Garret" of the Circe of cities, is but a "tricksy spirit" here, "of fancy bred." In the words of him whose highest glory it was to write "*Chansonniers*" after a name eternal in the love and the reverence of Frenchmen—

*Lisette, même, hélas! n'est plus qu'une ombre.*

I have written nearly four hundred Songs. A few in this volume have already been printed and have received no cold welcome from the press and the public. Some ten years since I conceived the idea of writing a lyrical poem composed of Songs, each of which while complete in itself as an independent poem, should form a connecting link carrying on, by the feeling it expressed or the incident from which it sprang, the tale which the whole together loosely completed. The Song, I thought, might thus be a better form in the hand of an English Petrarch than the Sonnet had been in that of the great Italian. This project I have partly carried out. In the past ten years I have collected above one hundred lyrics towards such a tale in Songs. Heinrich Heine's

"Book of Songs," with which I have just formed an acquaintance, is conceived on some such a plan. Scott, in his Ballad Romances, Byron and Moore, in their Eastern extravaganzas, Wordsworth and Coleridge in some of their finest poems, had given to each movement of the tale its fit and varying lyrical expression.

But the publication of "Maud" more nearly approached to the realization of my idea, though I had confined myself strictly to the Song, that is a poem written to be sung, or rather which, by the music it contains in itself, which moulds it to the form it takes, forces you to sing it, the truest proof of a Song being a Song. Some few Songs from this collection I have included in this volume. Should their reception encourage me, the rest may venture from the safe darkness of manuscript into the dangerous daylight of print. "Shall I publish them?" is the question which this volume puts to its critics and to its readers. Its reception will be the answer.