

(From the Academy.)

SONGS OF THE SIERRAS.*

THIS is a truly remarkable book. To glance through its pages is to observe a number of picturesque things picturesquely put, expressed in a vivid flowing form and melodious words, and indicating strange, outlandish, and romantic experiences. The reader requires no great persuasion to leave off mere skimming and set to at regular perusal; and, when he does so, finds the pleasurable impression confirmed and intensified.

Mr. Miller is a Californian, domiciled between the Pacific and the Sierra Nevada, who has lived and written "on the rough edges of the frontier." Last winter he published, or at least printed, in London, a small volume named *Pacific Poems*, consisting of two of the compositions now republished—one of them in a considerably modified form. San Francisco and the city of Mexico were known to him; but it is only in the summer of 1870 that he for the first time saw and detested New York, and soon afterwards reached London. Thus much he gives us to know in a few nervous, modest, and at the same time resolute words of preface—reproduced here, with a postscript, from his former volume. He is prepared to be told and to believe that there are crudities in his book; but he adds significantly, "poetry with me is a passion that defies reason." Mr. Miller's preface would command sympathetic respect even if his verses did not. We feel at once that we have to deal with a man, not with a mere vendor of literary wares. To argue with him would be no use, and to abuse him no satisfaction. Luckily we are not called upon to do either; but, while responding to his invitations to point out without reticence what shows

as faulty, we have emphatically to pronounce him an excellent and fascinating poet, qualified, by these his first works, to take rank among the distinguished poets of the time, and to greet them as peers.

The volume of 300 pages, contains only seven poems. The last of these—a tribute to the glorious memories of Burns and Byron—is comparatively short; all the rest are compositions of some substantial length, and of a narrative character, though *Ina*—considerably the longest of all—assumes a very loose form of dramatic dialogue. Mr. Miller treats of the scenes and personages and the aspects of life that he knows—knows intimately and feels intensely; and very novel scenes, strange personages, and startling aspects these are. This fact alone would lend to his book a singular interest, which is amply sustained by the author's contagious ardour for what he writes about, and his rich and indeed splendid powers of poetic presentment. A poet whose domestic hearth is a hut in an unfathomable canon whose forest has been a quinine wood, permeated by monkeys,

"Like shuttles hurried through and through
The thread a hasty weaver weaves,"

and whose song-bird is a cockatoo, and to whom these things, and not the converse of them, are all the genuine formative experiences and typical realities or images of a life, is sure to tell us something which we shall be both curious and interested to think over. There is an impassible gap between the alien *coulour locale* of even so great a poet as Victor Hugo in such a work as *Les Orientales*, and the native reciprocity of one like our Californian author, whose very blood and bones are related to the things he describes, and from whom a perception and a knowledge so extremely unlike our own are no more separable than

* "Songs of the Sierras." By Joaquin Miller. Longmans & Co.