Sidney Larriec as a Man of Science

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Outline!

Biography.

Genius:
1. As a Musician.
2. As a Poet.
3. As a Critic.

Character.
Sidney Lanier as a Man of Genius

Critics in estimating the worth of authors are apt to overlook men who do not take part in some great movement of the day, as did Whitman, our great abolitionist poet. This has especially been true of our Southern poet Sidney Lanier. The fact of his having taken arn with the South during the Civil War may have had something to do with his not being recognized as one of the great poets during his life. But where there is true genius it will, sooner or later, be recognized for all it is worth.

People are just commencing to realize Lanier's importance in the literary world.

The man and poet who wished that life and song might each express the other's all were born at Macon, Georgia, in a house yet standing on the front of a hill composing a part of the inland town. A huguenot refuge to England in Queen Elizabeth's time, Jerome Lanier was the earliest known ancestor whose son, Nicolas, was in favor with
James I and Charles I as a musician, and a painter, and also in political service. The earliest American ancestor was Thomas Lanier of Richmond, Virginia, about 1716. Robert S. Lanier, a lawyer, still living in Macon, Georgia, was the father of the poet.

Sidney Lanier attended private school in Macon, and, at the age of fourteen, entered the Agletbok College. The president of the college was the scholarly Talbage, uncle of the now famous public orator. Discontinuing at college, he spent a year as deputy clerk in Macon post-office. There he studied humorous phases of life, which fed that exquisite appreciation of humor, which was to his philosophical tent, quartz, and gold.

As a child the poet exhibited a wonderful passion for music, using first the simplest instruments such as the negro rainstick bones, the drum, and the flutulation banjo. He was given a one-keyed German fluted for a Christmas present, and acquired proficiency upon it in a short time.
He could perform slightly upon every instrument that then became accessible to his boyish ardor, such as the guitar, the piano, and the organ; but the flute had first awed his affections, and for many reasons, it retained his undiminished love. He was well-nigh perfect master of its wonderful effects. While in the army, his flute and a small volume of hermetic poems accompanied him everywhere in his haversack, even if hard tack and soldier's forage were displaced. These were second only to his gun and ammunition.

The violin was also a favorite instrument. It was this above all other instruments that commanded his soul. He had recorded how, after playing on the violin, he would be lifted into an ecstacy which left his whole frame trembling with the exhaustion of too sense delight. In after years, more than one listener marked the strange violin effect which he produced from his flute! It was in his devotion to music that he discovered that he possessed decided genius!
His friends were rather alarmed at his devotion to music, and he for a while shared the early notion of his parents that it was an unworthy pursuit, so that he rather repressed his taste. He did not then know by what inheritance it had come to him, nor how worthy it is the art. In his college note book, he has penciled his displeasure to this musical talent: 'I am more than all perplexed by this fact, that the same inclination, that is, natural bent, of my nature is to music; and for that I have the greatest talent, indeed not boasting, for God gave it me, I have an extraordinary musical talent, and feel it within me plainly, that I could rise as high as any composer. But I cannot bring myself to believe that I was intended for a musician, because it seems so small a business in comparison with other things which it seems to me I might do.' At the outbreak of the Civil War he volunteered as a private. He refused
Promotion several times during the war, declining to be separated from his younger brother. He was assigned as signal officer to the blockade-runner, "Anna," and was taken prisoner of war. Several months of hardship at Back Point Lookout, and the long weary tramp at the close of hostilities from Virginia to Georgia, developed the growth of the poisonous germ of consumption. Peace to him was the beginning of a battle with the relentless disease, a war of about fifteen years of varying fortune, but in which the combatant was always patient and ever heroic.

In December of 1867, he married Mary Davy of Macon, Georgia. At this time Davy was principal of an academy in Alabama. Hemorrhoid of the lungs came to advance the red flag of warning, and he returned to Georgia and undertook to practice law. This did not suit him, so he gave it up, and after traveling over different parts of the South in search of health, he went to Baltimore, under engagement as first pate for the Peabody Symphony Concert.
With his settlement in Baltimore began a story of as brave and sad a struggle as the history of genius records. On the one hand was the opportunity for study and the full consciousness of power and a will never subdued; and on the other a body wasting with consumption that must be forced to tasks beyond its strength to express the thoughts of beauty which strove for utterance.

It is impossible to read his poems without feeling the presence of a clear individuality in song, a mature force, daring, impossible to a great range of influences and melodies. Although the works of other poets may have passed through his mind, may have given some thing of coloring, we find no distinct trace of any save, possibly, Shakespeare's sonnets. In poetic gift, form, and choice of themes, Lane has expressed himself so positively that he cannot be mistaken for any one else.

This poem "Com" was the first new voice of song which the South has blown.
to rise on the ashes of battle. The sun
now in the atmosphere of the first tropical
burst of our American summers. The
whole farm throbs with sunshine, and
is musical with the murmurs of growing
things. It is racy with the fullest life of
the soil and the purest full forth fresh
sprays like an open vine.

In the "Symphony" and "Psalm of the
West" we find the same qualities, to which
a fanciful element has been added. The
lyrics are sometimes so frequent as to
figuratively speaking, entangle the reader in
the melodious sounds and make the repose
of a single couplet graceless. To do this
requires the finest hand, the finest ear,
and the most delicate sense of art.

He wrote "The Centennial Meditation
of Columbia," 1776-1876. This was a cantata
which was set to music by a man in
Baltimore. The form first brought his
name into general notice; but its publication,
in advance of the music, caused an
immense amount of ridicule, more or
less good humored. It was written by a
musician to go with music under the new relations of poetry to music brought about by the great modern development of the orchestra, and was not to be judged without its orchestral accompaniment. The criticism received gained the author, but did not affect his faith in his theory of art.

His were all dealt with nature and the simple things we see around us every day, but to which we pay so little heed. He sings, at the sundown of his own life, the noble hymn "Sunrise." His heart and mind and spirit soft nature grew clearer and clearer as his physical strength waned.

Lamartine did not agree with M. Gola in his belief that science will destroy all poetry, all novel writing, and all imaginative work, generally. By absorbing into itself all imaginative effort as that every novel will be merely the plane unvarnished record of a scientific experiment in passion. He rather believed that science goes hand in hand with poetry and fiction; for he asks the question:
"What would be the worth of Shakespeare’s genius, unless he were a scientific man to the extent of knowing the science of English verse? Or what would be Hildebrand’s genius, unless she knew the science of English prose, or the science of novel writing?"

"The English Novel." Lanier’s most important prose work consists of a series of lectures delivered at Johns Hopkins University. This lacks the intimate continuity which a subject like this requires, but when he wrote these he did not intend to put them into book form. His object was the fundamental idea that the development of the English novel marks the development of man’s conception of his individuality. He often digressed from the main theme; for in the book of three hundred pages on the history of English fiction, at least one hundred pages are devoted to the discussion of the life and genius of a single writer. In this book he seems to have set before himself two conceptions to which
he bents all his powers, illustrations, and arguments. One was the supreme passion for form in literary art, and the other was the firm belief that English literature had reached its loftiest expression in the work of George Eliot. He firmly believed that portraiture and music should go hand in hand, and that science must not do away with poetry.

This book, while containing much that is suggestive and original, gorkewise from its aim, and must be taken, not for a study of the English novel and its development, but as a collection of opinions of a brilliant man of letters upon various topics more or less connected with the general title under which it is published.

Neither sickness nor drudgery could long turn him from the deepest craving of his spirit. Conscions of his bones he had yet what is perhaps the rarest talent in men of his temperament— the talent of waiting. The mission of world, as he conceived it, transcended all others. He knew that the innate
poetic faculty would not suffice for its fulfillment unless it were reinforced by character and knowledge. "Day by day," he wrote his wife, "flow my spirit and my sunshine, a thousand vital elements, self through my soul. Day by day, the secret deep fords gathered, which will pleasantly display themselves in budding leaf and waving petals, and in sweetest fruit and grain." Again he wrote, "All day my soul hastily cutting swiftly into the great spaces of the subtle inconceivable deep, drunk by wind after wind of heavenly melody. The very inner spirit and essence of all wind-song, wind-song, passion-song, folk-song, country-song, soul-song, and body-song hath flown upon me as quick gusts like the breath of passion, and sailed me into a sea of poet dreams, where each wave is as such a vision and a melody."

Conscious of his source, therefore he had, nevertheless, patience to await their ripening. Feeling that the highest mission had been entrusted to him,
he seems to have said to himself, like
Milton, "I was confirmed in this opinion
that he who would not be frustrate of
his hope to write well hereafter in laudable
things, sought himself to be a true poet,
not presuming to sing high praises of
heroic men and of famous cities, unless
he have in himself the experience and
practice of all that which he praises worthy.

To break away from the law of his
father's advice, and to seek support
from his art among strangers, required
resolution which only his loyalty to his
art could justify. In Baltimore, his uncle
bought him a bare maintenance, and
left him leisure for study and for poetry.
He felt that the time had come when
he could open his life. A long form
took shape, and he hoped to find in
New York an editor who would publish
it. But a visit to that city only showed
him the "wooden-headedness" of many
persons who were leaders in literary
matters. Yet he was not discouraged.

"I remember," he wrote, "that it was always
so that the new man has always to
work his way over these Alps of stupidity.

The more I am thrown against these people here, and the more I suffer at
their hands, the more confident am
of beating them finally; that is, to teach
them better things and nobler modes of
living."

I just as he seemed to have conquered
success enough to assure him a little
leisure to write his poems, his feeble,
but resolve hold upon earth was exhausted
and on September 7, 1871 his "unflattering
will rendered its supreme submission to
the adored will of God."

It is still too soon to decide what
Laure's place will be in literature.
Meanwhile we heartily give him welcome,
and congratulate the native South
on a new poet.