

# Famous Georgians

## SIDNEY LANIER

**A**LTHOUGH the poems of Sidney Lanier are mostly sectional in subject matter, there is nothing sectional about his popularity—for the whole world acclaims him.

Lanier was born at Macon, on February 3, 1842, the son of Robert Lanier, a lawyer of Huguenot descent. His mother was Mary Anderson Lanier, of Scotch ancestry.

Graduated from Oglethorpe College (located at Milledgeville) with the class of 1860, he remained there for another year as a tutor. In April, 1861, he enlisted in the Confederate Army. A dauntless soldier, no matter what his duty, he was finally captured as a prisoner of war.

For three years after the war, Lanier worked as a clerk in Montgomery, Alabama, and in 1867 married Mary Day, of Macon.

Like many great men of literature—like Milton and Byron and, particularly, like Stevenson—Lanier triumphed over a dread physical handicap. Many believe his case of tuberculosis was caused by the long months spent in the dank and sordid atmosphere of Federal prisons. Anyway, in 1868, while teaching in a country school at Prattville, Alabama, he had a hemorrhage of the lungs and was forced to return to his home-town, Macon.

Several years later, after a health-seeking trip to the west, Lanier settled in Baltimore,

where he was employed as a flutist with the Peabody Symphony Orchestra. Eminent critics of the time referred to him as "the greatest flutist in the world." Doubtless he practiced to perfection both because of his great love for music and his strong belief that the exercise would strengthen his disease-ridden lungs.

After a trip to Florida in search of sound health, Lanier returned to the Peabody Orchestra in Baltimore. He became a popular lecturer on Elizabethan verse and Shakespeare, which work led to his appointment as a lecturer at Johns Hopkins University. He was forced to resign his position in 1881 due to a complete physical breakdown. He died shortly after in a camp in western North Carolina, where he had again sought to restore his health.

Poet, linguist, mathematician, lawyer, musician, schoolteacher, soldier, clerk—Lanier was truly a man of great versatility, and all was accomplished while he was constantly fighting for his life against tuberculosis. He died on September 7, 1881, not then 40 years of age.

Yes, when the celebrated Lanier's Oak, near Brunswick, under which he is supposed to have penned many lines, is a part of the mold, the marsh and the water, people will remember Lanier's depth-probing "Marshes of Glynn," and readers will still be carried along in the beauty and rhythm of his "Song of the Chattahoochee."

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P. O. Box 1719, Atlanta (1), Georgia