

**POEM OUTLINES.
[NEW YORK-1908]**

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Poem Outlines. [New York-1908] by Sidney Lanier

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SIDNEY LANIER

**POEM OUTLINES.
[NEW YORK-1908]**

POEM OUTLINES

BY

SIDNEY LANIER

*The Artist: he
Who lonesome walks amid a thousand friends.*

**NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
MDCCCXVIII**

NOTE

It requires but little intimacy with the true artist to see that, whether his medium of expression be words or music or the brush, much of his finest achievement can never be given to his fellows bearing the stamp of perfect craftsmanship. As when the painter, with hand momentarily inspired by the fervor of the eye, fixes in a sketch some miracle of color or line, which vanishes with each succeeding stroke of the brush laboring to embody it in a finished picture—so the poet may transcribe one note of his own tense heart strings; may find fluttering words that zigzag aerially beside the elusive new-born thought; may strike out in the rough some heaven-scaling conception—to discover too often that these priceless fragments cannot be fused again, cannot be joined with commoner metals into a conventional quatrain or sonnet.

At such moments, by some subtle necromancy of quivering genius, the poet in his exaltation weaves sinuous words into a magic net with which he snares at one cast the elfin woods fancies, the shy butterfly ideas that flit across secluded glades of the imagination,

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invisible even to him at other times; and there these delicate creatures lie, flashing forth from the meshes glimpses of an unearthly brilliance—for all time, if he be wise enough not to attempt to open the net and spread out their wings for the world to see them better. Or it may be that his mood is interrupted by the necessity for giving to the world that which it will receive in exchange for a living, and his next vision is of a far distant corner of the Enchanted Land. Yet these records are what they are; they bear star dust upon their wings; they give, perhaps, his most intimate revelation, his highest utterance.

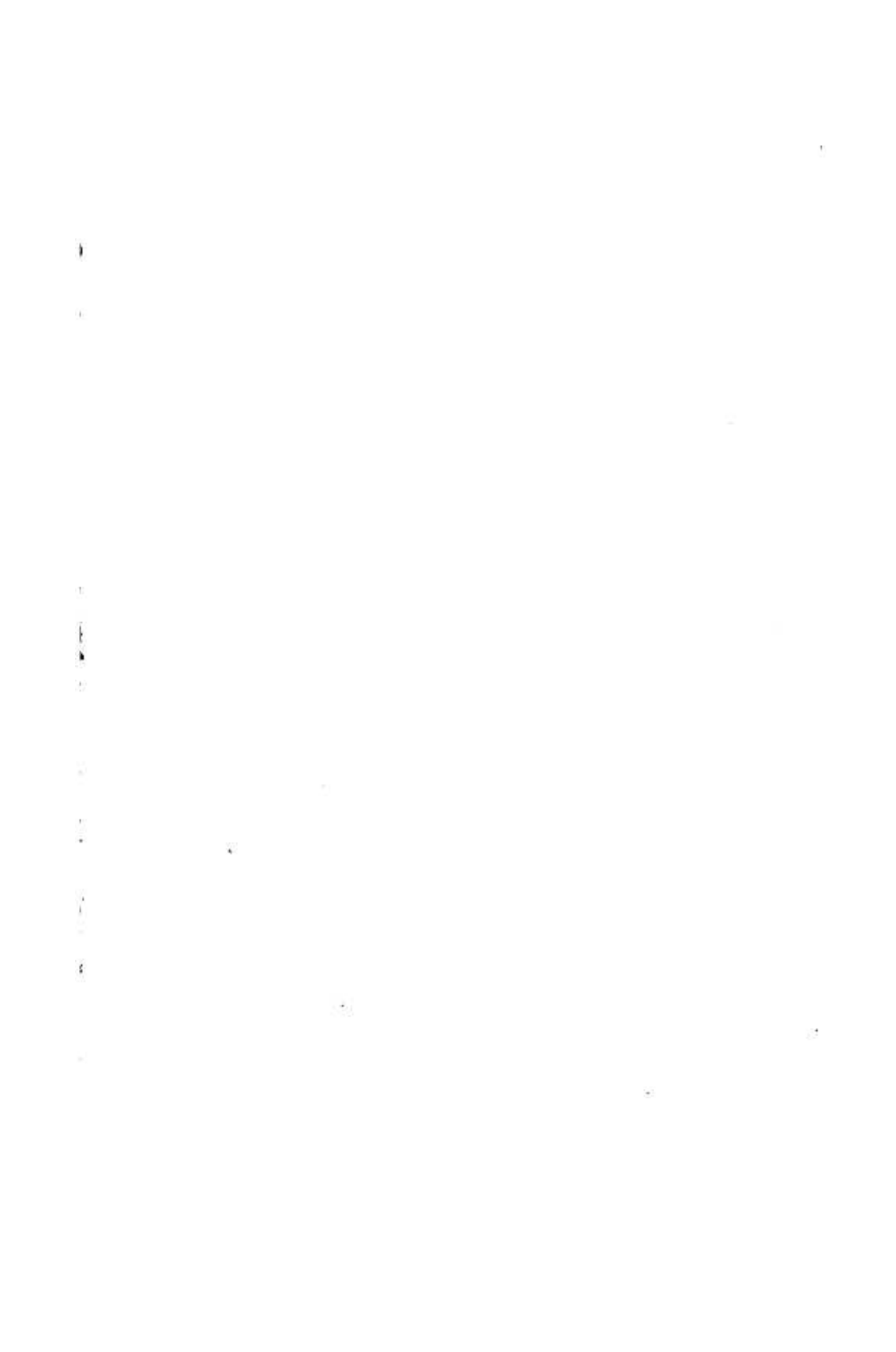
So the following outlines and fragments left by Sidney Lanier are presented, in the belief that they contain the essence of poetry. His mind budded into poems as naturally and inevitably as a tree puts forth green leaves—and it was always spring-time there. These poem-sketches were jotted in pencil on the backs of envelopes, on the margins of musical programmes, on little torn scraps of paper, amid all sorts of surroundings, whenever the dream came to him. Some are mere flashes of simile in unrhymed couplets; others are definite rounded outlines, instinct with the beauty of idea, but not yet hewn to the line of perfect form; one, at least, is the beginning of quite a long narrative in verse. There

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are indications of more than one projected volume of poems, as mentioned in foot-notes. All have been selected from his papers as containing something worthy of preservation; and, while the thought sometimes parallels that in his published work, all are essentially new.

H. W. L.

NEW YORK, *September*, 1908.



POEM OUTLINES

ARE ye so sharp set for the centre of the earth, are
ye so hungry for the centre of things,

O rains and springs and rivers of the mountains?

Towards the centre of the earth, towards the very
Middle of things, ye will fall, ye will run, the Centre
will draw ye, Gravity will drive you and draw you in
one:

But the Centre ye will not reach, ye will come as
near as the plains—watering them in coming so near
—and ye will come as near as the bottom of the Ocean
—seeing and working many marvels as ye come so
near.

But the Centre of Things ye will not reach,

O my rivers and rains and springs of the mountains.

Provision is made that ye shall not: ye would be
merged, ye could not return.

Nor shall my Soul be merged in God, though tend-
ing, though tending.

*[Hymns of the Mountains,
and Other Poems]*

POEM OUTLINES

To believe in God would be much less hard if it were not for the wind. Pray hold one little minute, I cry: O spare this once to bite yonder poor old shivering soul in the bare house, let the rags have but a little chance to warm yon woman round the city corner. Stop, stop, wind: but I might as well talk to the wind: and lo, the proverb paralyzes prayer, and I am ready to say: Good God, is it possible thou canst stop this wind which at this moment is mocking ten thousand babies and thin-clad mothers with the unimaginable anguish of cold—is it possible thou canst stop this, and wilt not? Do you know what cold is? Story of the Prisoner, &c., &c., and the stone.