

"The Star Spangled Banner"

HOW IT WAS COMPOSED AND SET TO MUSIC

"And you knew Francis Key?"

"Knew him! Why he lived but a few doors above my father's house. There were once two brothers, John Ross and Phillip Barton Key. Phillip was an officer in the British army during the revolutionary war, while John was in that of the United States. John lived on Pipe's Creek, near Taneytown, Frederick county, Md., where Francis and his sister Anna, John's only children, were born. There was an exiled Scotchman, Mr. Bruce—said to have been heir to the throne of Scotland—who had built a mill on Pipe's Creek, and there, in the company of this noble old aristocrat, Frank spent his very early boyhood. The brothers Philip and John, were large, manly-looking fellows, but Frank and Anna were of a much smaller mould. Anna Key was a beautiful little girl, with the cheerfulness and most pleasant smile that I ever saw. When they moved into town, near my father's, Frank was half grown, and ready to enter as a law student with Roger B. Taney, then at the head of the Frederick bar. Roger was a tall, gaunt fellow, as lean, they used to say, as a Potomac herring, and as shrewd as the shrewdest. He married bright little Anna. It was like the union of a hawk with a sky lark; but she lived to be the wife of a Chief Justice of the United States, and I never heard that either repented of their marriage. Mr. Taney was a strict Catholic, and Frank an Episcopalian, not considered very zealous and sharp in his profession, and much given to dreaming. He went to Virginia, and brought home a wife much larger and taller than himself, went to housekeeping on Market street, and had a couple of little children when I left my home in 1809, to seek my fortune in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

"You have heard of Admiral Cockburn, who commanded the British fleet? The atrocious scoundrel! Words can never paint the miserable coward and boaster in his true colors. After his depredations along the eastern shore of Maryland, there followed the sacking of Washington, the battle of North Point, and the attempt of the enemy to take the city of Baltimore by water as they had failed to do it by land. You know all about the bombardment of Fort McHenry, September 13, 1814. I have gone over it again, in fancy hundreds of times, and I'll tell you, Frank Key, patriotic as he was to his heart's core, could not help composing that poem. It was forced out of him. Just think. He was a prisoner on the fleet, which was anchored two miles from Fort McHenry, the city's main defence. He could watch all the enemy's preparations, and he knew the danger they foreboded. Through the terrific cannonading of that midnight fight, while the sky was lit up with the fiery courses of the flying bombs, do you think he could sleep? As the struggle ceased upon the coming morning, and he looked through the dim twilight for the flag of his country, his heart sick with fear and doubt, could he help the grand outburst of that first verse? And then, as through 'the mist of the deep' the banner loomed dimly in the morning sun's first rays, he exclaimed,

"Tis the star-spangled banner! oh, long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!"

it was prayer and praise all in one; and there has never been anything like it since.

"Have you heard Francis Key's poem?" said one of our mess, coming in one evening, as we lay scattered over the green hill near the captain's marquee. It was a rude copy, and written in a scrawl which Horace Greeley might have mistaken for his own. He read it aloud, once, twice, three times, until the entire division seemed electrified by its pathetic eloquence. An idea seized Ferd Durang. Hunting up an old volume of flute music, which was in somebody's tent, he impatiently whistled snatches of tune after tune, just as they caught his quick eye. One called 'Anacreon in Heaven,' (I have played it often, for it was in my book that he found it,) struck his fancy and riveted his attention. Note after note fell from his puckered lips, until, with a leap and shout, he exclaimed, 'Boys, I've hit it!' and fitting the tune to the words, there rang out for the first time the song of the 'Star-Spangled banner.' How the men shouted and clapped, for never was there a wedding of poetry to music made under such inspiring influences! Getting a brief furlough, the

brothers sang it on the stage of the Holiday street theatre soon after. It was caught up in the camps, and sang around our bivouac fires, and whistled in the streets, and, when peace was declared and we scattered to our homes, carried to thousands of fire-sides as the most precious relic of the war of 1812. Ferdinand Durang died—I do not know where—and Frank Key's bones lie in the cemetery at Fredericktown; but I guess that song will live as long as there is an American boy to sing it."—*Nellie Eyster in Harper's for July.*

Anecdotes of Rufus Choate.

Rufus Choate and Chief-Justice Shaw, of Massachusetts, often indulged in wordy combats, and wit was generally freely expended by both sides. Choate was once arguing a cause before the Chief-Justice, (who was one of the homeliest men ever elevated to the Bench,) and, to express his reverence for the conceded ability of the Judge, said, in yielding to an adverse decision:

"In coming into the presence of your Honor, I experience the same feelings as the Hindoo does when he bows before his idol. I know that you are ugly, but I feel that you are great!"

It is said that Choate had a command of language, and his brain teemed with a wealth of diction truly marvelous. When Judge Shaw first heard that there was a fresh edition of Worcester's Dictionary, containing 2,500 new words, he exclaimed, "For heaven's sake don't let Choate get hold of it."

Choate, in an important assault and battery case at sea, had Dick Barton, chief-mate of the clipper-ship *Challenge*, on the stand, and badgered him so for about an hour that Dick got his salt water up, and hauled by the wind to bring the keen Boston lawyer under his batteries.

At the beginning of his testimony, Dick said the night was as "dark as the devil, and raining like seven bells."

Suddenly, Mr. Choate asked him:

"Was there a moon that night?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Ah, yes! a moon—"

"Yes, a full moon."

"Did you see it?"

"Not a mite."

"Then, how do you know there was a moon?"

"The Nautical Almanac said so, and I'll believe that sooner than any lawyer in the world."

"What was the principal luminary that night, Sir?"

"Binnacle lamp aboard the *Challenge*."

"Ah! you are growing sharp, Mr. Barton."

"What in blazes have you been grinding me this hour for—to make me dull?"

"Be civil, Sir. And now tell me what latitude and longitude you crossed the equator in?"

"Sho'—you're joking."

"No, Sir, I am in earnest, and I desire you to answer me."

"I shan't."

"Ah! you refuse, do you?"

"Yes—I can't."

"Indeed! You are the chief-mate of a clipper-ship, and are unable to answer so simple a question?"

"Yes, 'tis the simplest question I ever had asked me. Why, I thought every fool of a lawyer knew that there ain't no latitude at the equator."

That shot floored Rufus.

ZANTIPPE AND SOCRATES.—All our preconceived ideas in regard to historical characters are, one by one being swept away by the new developments of the present age. That much maligned woman, Zantippe, is now crowned with honor. It is now asserted that she was beautiful, thrifty, and a good housewife; that she first won the regard of Socrates by her wonderful conversational powers, and the skill with which she refuted some of his arguments; that in spite of the ugliness of Socrates, and his poverty and obscure origin, she married him, discerning the beauty of his mind and soul; that her relatives disapproved the match, and she herself soon found her husband lacking in every essential quality for comfort in common life. Socrates is found to have given himself little concern about the support of his family; he had no legitimate calling; he was a lounge in public places; he had a habit of inviting persons to dine with him when there was nothing with which to entertain them. Moreover, he was repulsive in appearance, slovenly in dress, and very unsocial at home. What wonder that, if she lost her temper while attempting to keep the house, and rear the children of such a man? The trials of poor Zantippe are only just beginning to be revealed.

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