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THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER



By Dawn's Early Light by Edward Percy Moran

Pictures Francis Scott Key standing on boat, with right arm stretched out toward the United States flag flying over Fort McHenry, Baltimore, Maryland.

Every-body in the United States has heard the song about the star-span-gled banner. Nearly everybody has sung it. It was written by Francis Scott Key.

Key was a young lawyer. In the War of 1812 he fought with the A-mer-i-can army. The British landed sol-diers in Mary-land. At Bla-dens-burg they fought and beat the Americans. Key was in this battle on the American side.

After the battle the British army took Wash-ing-ton, and burned the public buildings. Key had a friend who was taken pris-on-er by the British. He was on one of the British ships.

Key went to the ships with a flag of truce. A flag of truce is a white flag. It is carried in war when one side sends a message to the other.

When Key got to the British ships, they were sailing to Bal-ti-more. They were going to try to take Baltimore. The British com-mand-er would not let Key go back. He was afraid that he would let the Americans know where the ships were going.

Key was kept a kind of pris-on-er while the ships attacked Bal-ti-more. The ships tried to take the city by firing at it from the water. The British army tried to take the city on the land side.

The ships did their worst firing at night. They tried to take the little fort near the city.

Key could see the battle. He watched the little fort. He was afraid that the men in it would give up. He was afraid that the fort would be broken down by the cannon-balls.

The British fired bomb-shells and rockets at the fort. When these burst, they made a light. By this light Key could see that the little fort was still standing. He could see the flag still waving over it. He tells this in his song in these words:

"And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there."

But after many hours of fighting, the British became dis-cour-aged. They found that they could not take the city. The ships almost ceased to fire.

Key did not know whether the fort had been knocked down or not. He could not see whether the flag was still flying or not. He thought that the Americans might have given up. He felt what he wrote in the song:

"Oh! say, does that star-span-gled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave?"

When the break of day came, Key looked toward the fort. It was still standing. There was a flag flying over it. It grew lighter. He could see that it was the American flag. His feelings are told in two lines of the song:

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

Key was full of joy. He took an old letter from his pocket. The back of this letter had no writing on it. Here he wrote the song about the star-spangled banner.

The British com-mand-er now let Key go ashore. When he got to Baltimore, he wrote out his song. He gave it to a friend. This friend took it to a printing office. But the printers had all turned sol-diers. They had all gone to defend the city.

There was one boy left in the office. He knew how to print. He took the verses and printed them on a broad sheet of paper.

The printed song was soon in the hands of the sol-diers around Baltimore. It was sung in the streets. It was sung in the the-a-ters. It trav-eled all over the coun-try. Every-body learned to sing:

"Then con-quer we must, for our cause it is just;
And this be our motto—'In God is our trust'—
And the star-span-gled banner in tri-umph shall wave
O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave."