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12 Sept 1814

The Maryland Original Research Society of Baltimore.

Bulletin Number Two. Albert Levin Richardson, Editor.

Pages- 8-9-10-11-12.

" Washington, 1856.

" My dear Sir:

I promised some time ago to give you an account of the incidents in the life of Mr. F. S. Key, which led him to write the " Star Spangled Banner, " and of the circumstances under which it was written. The Song has become a National one, and will, I think from its great merit, continue to be so, especially in Maryland; and everything that concerns its Author must be a matter of interest to his children and descendants; and I promised to fulfill my promise with the more pleasure, because, while the song shows his genius, and taste as a Poet, the incidents connected with it and the circumstances under which it was written will show his character and worth as a man. The scene he describes and the warm spirit of patriotism that breathes in the Song, were not the offspring of mere fancy or poetic imagination; he describes what he actually saw; and he tells us what he felt while witnessing the conflict, and what he felt when the battle was over, and the Victory won by his countrymen. Every word came warm from his heart, and for that reason, even more than from its poetical merit, it never fails to find a response in the hearts of those who listen to it.

" You will remember that in 1814 when the Song was written, Mr. Key resided in Georgetown, District of Columbia. You will also recollect that soon after the British troops retired from Washington D. C., a squadron of the enemy's Ships made their way up the Potomac and appeared before Alexandria, which was compelled to capitulate;

and the Squadron remained there some days, plundering the town of Tobacco, and whatever else they wanted. It was rumoured and believed in Frederick that a marching attack of the **same** character would be made on Washington, and Georgetown, before the Ships left the river. Mr. Key's family was still in Georgetown. He would not, indeed could not with honor leave the place while it was threatened by the enemy, for he was a Volunteer in the Light Artillery, Commanded by Maj. Peter, which was composed of citizens of the District of Columbia, who had uniformed themselves and offered their Services to the Government, and who had been employed in active service from <sup>the</sup> time the British feet appeared in the Patuxent, preparatory to the movement upon Washington. Mrs. Key refused to leave home while Mr. Key was thus daily exposed <sup>to</sup> danger. Believing as we did that an attack would probably be made on Georgetown, we **became** very anxious about the situation of his family; for if the attack was made, Mr. Key would be with the troops engaged in the defence; and as it was impossible to foresee what would be the issue of the conflict, his family by remaining in Georgetown might be placed in great and useless peril. When I speak of " we " I mean Mr. Key's father and mother, and Mrs. Taney and myself; but it was agreed among us that I should go to Georgetown and try to persuade Mrs. Key to come away with their children and stay with me, or with Mr. Key's father until the danger was over. When I reached Georgetown I found the English Ships still at Alexandria, and a body of militia camped in Washington, which had been assembled to defend the City; but it was believed from information received that no attack would be made by the enemy upon Washington, or on Georgetown; and

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preparations were making on our part to annoy them by batteries on Shore when they descended the river.

" The knowledge of these preparations probably hastened their departure, and the second or third day after my arrival the ships were seen moving down the Potomac. On the Evening of the day that the enemy disappeared, Mr. Richard West arrived at Mr. Key's house and told him that after the British Army passed through Upper Marlborough, on their return to their Ships, they had encamped some miles below the town, and a detachment was sent back which entered Dr. Beanes' house about Mid-Night, compelled him to rise from his bed, and hurried him off to the British Camp, hardly allowing him time to put his clothes on; that he was treated with great harshness and closely guarded. As soon as his friends were apprized of his situation they hastened to the headquarters of the English Army to secure his release, but it was peremptorily refused, and they were not even permitted to see him; and that he had been carried a prisoner on board the fleet. Finding their own efforts unavailing, and alarmed for his safety, his friends in and about Marlborough thought it advisable that Mr. West should hasten to Georgetown and request Mr. Key to obtain the sanction of the Government to his ( Mr. Key. ) going on board the Admiral's ship, under a Flag-of-Truce and endeavoring to procure the release of Dr. Beanes before the fleet sailed. It was then lying at the Mouth of the Potomac and its destination was not at that time known, with any certainty. Dr. Beanes, as perhaps you know, was the leading physician of Upper Marlborough and an accomplished scholar

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and gentleman. He was highly respected by all who knew him; and was the family physician of Mr. West, and the intimate friend of Mr. Key. Dr. Beanes occupied one of the best houses in Upper Marlborough and lived very handsomely; and his house was selected for the head-quarters of the army/<sup>when</sup> the British troops encamped at Marlborough on their march to Washington. Their officers were of course furnished with every thing that the house could offer; and they in turn treated him with much courtesy, and placed guards around his grounds and out-houses to prevent depredations by their troops. But on the return of the Army to their Ships, after the main body had passed through the town, stragglers who had left the ranks to plunder, or from some other motive made their appearance from time to time singly or in small squads; and Dr. Beanes put himself at the head of a small body of citizens to pursue and make prisoners of them.

Information of this proceeding was by some means or other conveyed to the English Camp; and the detachment of which I have spoken was sent back to relieve prisoners, and to seize Dr. Beanes. They did not seem to regard him, and certainly did not treat him as a prisoner of war.

Mr. Key readily agreed to undertake the mission in his favor, and the President promptly gave his sanction to it. Orders were immediately issued to the Vessel usually employed as a Cartel in the Communications with the fleet in the Chesapeake, to be made ready without delay; and Mr. John T. Skinner, who was agent for the Government for flags of truce and exchange of prisoners, and who was widely known as such to the Officers of the fleet was directed to accompany Mr. Key; and as soon as the arrangements were made, he

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hastened to Baltimore where the vessel was to embark, and Mrs. Key and the children went with me to Frederic and hence to Mr. Key's father's in " Pipe Creek" where they remained until Mr. Key's return. We heard nothing from him until the enemy retreated from Baltimore, which, as well as I now recollect, was a week or ten days after he left us; and we were becoming uneasy about him, when to our great joy, he made his appearance at my house, on his way to join the family.

He told me that he found the British fleet at the mouth of the Potomac, preparing for the expedition against Baltimore. He was courteously received by Admiral Cochrane, and the officers of the Army as well as the Navy; but when he made known his business his application was received so coldly that he feared it would fail. General Ross and Admiral Cockburn who accompanied the expedition to Washington, particularly the latter, spoke of Dr. Beanes in very harsh terms and seemed at first not disposed to release him. It happened, however, fortunately, that Mr. John S. Skinner carried letters from the wounded British officers left at Bladensburg; and in these letters to their friends on board the fleet they all spoke of the humanity and kindness with which they had been treated, after they had fallen into our hands; and after a good deal of conversation, and strong representations from Mr. Key, as to the character and standing of Dr. Beanes and of the deep interest which the community in which he lived took his fate; General Ross said that Dr. Beanes ~~deserved~~ deserved much more punishment than he had received; but that he felt himself bound to make a return for the kindness

which had been shown to his wounded Officers, whom he had been compelled to leave at Bladensburg, and upon that ground, and that only, he would release Dr. Beanes, but at the same time informed Mr. Key that neither he nor any one else would be permitted to leave the fleet for some days; and must be detained until the attack on Baltimore which was then about to be made, was over; but he was assured that they would make him and Mr. Skinner as comfortable as possible while they detained them. Admiral Cochrane with whom they dined on the day of their arrival, apologized for not accommodating them in his own Ship, saying that it was crowded already with Officers of the Army; but that they would be well taken care of in the frigate " Surprise", commanded by his son Sir Thomas Cochrane, and to this frigate they were accordingly transferred. Mr. Key had an interview with Dr. Beanes, before General Ross consented to release him. I do not recollect whether he was on board the Admiral's ship or the " Surprise" but believe it was the former. He found him in the forward part of the ship among the sailors and soldiers; he had not had a change of clothes from the time he was seized; was constantly treated with indignity by those around him and no officer would speak to him; This harsh and humiliating treatment continued until he was placed on board the Cartel.

" Dr. Beanes was a gentleman of untainted character, and a nice sense of honor and incapable of doing anything that could have justified such treatment.

Mr. Key imputed the ill-usage he received to the influence of Admiral Cockburn who it is still remembered, while he

commanded the Chesapeake, carried on hostilities in a vindictive temper assailing and plundering defenceless Villages, or countenancing such proceedings by those under his command.

Mr. Key and Mr. Skinner continued on board the " Surprise" where they were kindly treated by ~~Sir~~ Thomas Cochrane, until the fleet reached the Patapsco and preparations were making ready for the landing of the troops. Admiral Cochrane had shifted his flag to the frigate, in order that he might be able to move farther up the river, and superintend in person the attack by water on the fort.

Mr. Key and Mr. Skinner were then sent on board their own vessel with a guard of sailors, or marines, to prevent them from landing. They were permitted to take Dr. Beanes with them and they thought themselves fortunate in being anchored in a position which enabled them to see distinctly the flag of Fort McHenry from the deck of the Vessel. Mr. Key then proceeded with much animation to describe the scene on the night of the bombardment. He and Mr. Skinner remained on deck during the night, watching every shell from the moment it was fired until it fell, listening with breathless interest to hear if an explosion followed.

While the bombardment continued it was sufficient proof that the fort had not surrendered; but it suddenly ceased, some time before day, and as they had no Communication with any of the enemy's Ships they did not know whether the fort had surrendered or the attack upon it had been abandoned. They paced the deck for the residue of the night in painful suspense, watching with intense anxiety for the return of the day and looking every few minutes at

their watches to see how long they must wait for it; and as soon as it dawned, and before it was light enough to see objects at a distance, their glasses were turned to the fort, uncertain whether they should see there the Stars and Stripes or the flag of the enemy. At length the light came and they saw that " our flag was still there"---and as the day advanced, they discovered from the movements of the boats between the shore and the fleet that the troops had been roughly handled and that many wounded men were carried to the ships.

At length he was informed that the attack on Baltimore had failed, and the British Army was re-embarking and that he and Mr. Skinner and Dr. Beanes would be permitted to leave them, and go where they pleased as soon as the troops were on board and the fleet ready to sail.

Mr. Key then told me, that under the excitement of the time, he had written a song and handed me a printed copy of the " Star Spangled Banner. " When I had read it, and expressed my admiration, I *asked* him how he found time in the scenes he had been passing through to compose such a song?

He said he commenced it on the deck of their vessel, in the fervor of the moment when he saw the enemy hastily retreating to their ships, and looked at the flag he had watched for so anxiously as the morning opened; that he had written some lines, or *brief* notes that would aid him in calling them to mind, upon the back of a letter which he happened to have in his pocket; and for some of the lines as he proceeded he was obliged to rely altogether on his

memory; and that he finished it in the boat on the way to the shore, and wrote it ~~out~~ as it now stands at the hotel on the night he reached Baltimore and immediately after he arrived. He said the next morning he took it to Judge Hopper Nicholson to ask him what he thought of it; he was so much pleased with it, that he immediately sent it to a printer, and directed copies to be struck off in hand-bill form; and that he, Mr. Key, believed it to have been favorably received by the Baltimore public.

Judge Nicholson and Mr Key were brothers-in-law by marriage, Mrs Key and Mrs Nicholson being sisters.

The Judge was a man of cultivated taste, had at one time been distinguished among the leading men in Congress, and was at the period of which I am speaking the Chief Justice of the Baltimore Court. Notwithstanding his judicial character which exempted him from Military [duty] service, he accepted the Command of a Volunteer Company of Artillery, and when the enemy approached, and an attack upon Baltimore, and the Fort was expected, he and his company offered their services to the Government to assist in its defence. They were accepted and formed a part of the garrison, during the bombardment. The Judge had been relieved from duty, and returned to his family only the night before Mr Key showed him his Song, and you may easily imagine the feelings with which at such a moment, he read it, and gave it to the public. It was <sup>no</sup> doubt as Mr Key modestly expressed it, favorably received. In less than an hour after it was placed in the hands of the printer it was all over town and hailed with enthusiasm, and took its place at once as a national song. I have made this account of the " Star Spangled Banner " longer than I intended,

and find that I have introduced incidents and persons outside of the subject I originally contemplated, but I have felt a melancholy pleasure in recalling events connected in any degree with the life of one with whom I was so long and so closely united in friendship and affection; and whom I so much admire **for** his brilliant genius, and loved his many virtues. I am sure, however, that neither you nor any of his children or descendants, will think the account I have given too long."

" With great regard dear Sir

Your friend truly

R. B. Taney.