

POEMS AND SONGS OF AMERICA

WITH ALL due respect to "The Star Spangled Banner" and James Whitcomb Riley's "Old Glory," the one banner poem that will continue to hold the attention of all who have read and sensed the stirring message of profound love of country contained in Joseph Rodman Drake's "The American Flag." It is one of the noblest flag poems written. It is so filled with freedom, stars, red and white stripes and eagles that on perusing it the heart swells with pride and glory and the feelings betray a desire to shoot fire crackers and deliver an extemporaneous Fourth of July speech.

Down on Hunt's Point on the Hudson is a little Park that formerly served as a cemetery. In this little park a casual visitor will find the tomb of Joseph Rodman Drake. Drake was born in 1795. As a youth, he developed consumption and died of that malady at the age of 25. Passionately fond of nature, he spent a good deal of his time in the great out-a-doors, yet, he never recovered his health. He studied medicine and in due

time annexed the resultant title to his name, as is indicated by the inscription on his monument.

For a time he collaborated with Halleck in skits for the New York Evening Post over the signature of "The Croakers." The "Flag" did not appear until 1819, one year before Drake's death. It is said that Halleck had a hand in this, writing the last four lines. That one poem made Joseph Rodman Drake immortal. As long as the American flag floats the author of this, its noblest panegyric, will be remembered. There is nothing like this poem in American literature. Only in the earliest school of the English poets is found anything approaching it.

The little cemetery that has been changed into a park now bears the name of the author of this ode to the flag of our country. Since Memorial Day, 1910, the cemetery has been known as Joseph Rodman Drake Park. On that day the park was officially dedicated and named in honor of Mr. Drake.

THE AMERICAN FLAG

By Joseph Rodman Drake

WHEN freedom from her mountain
height

Unfurled her standard to the air
She tore the azure robes of night
And set the stars of glory there!
She mingled with its gorgeous dyes
The milky baldrick of the skies
And striped its pure, celestial white
With streakings of the morning light;
Then from his mansion in the sun
She called her eagle bearer down
And gave into his mighty hand
The symbol of her chosen land.

Majestic monarch of the cloud
Who rear'st aloft thy regal form
To hear the tempest trummings loud
And see the lightning lances driven,
When strive the warriors of the storm
And rolls the thunder drum of heaven.
Child of the sun, to thee 'tis given
To guard the banner of the free,
To hover in the sulphur smoke,
To ward away the battle stroke
And bid its blendings shine afar
Like rainbows on the cloud of war,
The harbingers of victory!

Flag of the brave, thy folds shall fly,
The sign of hope and triumph high!
When speaks the signal trumpet tone
And the long line comes gleaming on,
Ere yet the lifeblood, warm and wet,

Has dimmed the glistening bayonet,
Each soldier eye shall brightly turn
To where thy sky born glories burn
And, as his springing steps advance,
Catch war and vengeance from the glance.
And when the cannon mouthings loud
Heave in wild wreaths the battle shroud
And gory sabres rise and fall
Like shoots of flame on midnight's pall,
Then shall thy meteor glances glow
And cowering foes shall shrink beneath
Each gallant arm that strikes below
That lovely messenger of death.

Flag of the seas, on ocean wave
Thy stars shall glitter o'er the brave;
When death, careering on the gale,
Sweeps darkly round the bellied sail
And frightend waves rush wildly back
Before the broadside's reeling rack,
Each dying wanderer of the sea
Shall look at once to heaven and thee
And smile to see thy splendors fly
In triumph o'er his closing eye.

Flag of the free heart's hope and home,
By angel hands to valor given!
Thy stars have lit the welkin dome
And all thy hues were born in heaven.
Forever float that standard sheet!
Where breathes the foe but falls before us,
With freedom's soil beneath our feet
And freedom's banner streaming o'er us?