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OUR PATRIOTIC SONGS

We Are Not as Familiar With Them as We Should Be.

FEW OF US KNOW THE WORDS

How Many Americans, For Instance, Can Recite "The Star Spangled Banner" or "My Country, 'Tis of Thee?" "Dixie" and "Maryland, My Maryland."

Proud as they are of their nation, it is a strange fact that Americans are not so familiar with their country's patriotic airs as are the people of the foreign lands.

Even when they are stirred to the point of singing by bands they find it hard to recollect the words. And it is doubtful whether many are aware of the bits of history attached to some of the land's patriotic airs.

Take "The Star Spangled Banner," for instance. How much can you sing of that song? Yet, if any can be called the national anthem, this is the one. Of course it is unfair to ourselves to say that we cannot sing it, but it must be admitted that we don't know it as generally as we should.

Its author, Francis Scott Key, now lies in a cemetery at Frederick, Md., where an American flag is always waving over his grave. Key wrote the song after an experience he had while a prisoner aboard a British war vessel. While he was aboard the boat Fort M'Henry, the sole protection of Baltimore, was bombarded, and the song tells of his satisfaction at finding the flag of his country still waving upon the dawn of the succeeding morning.

It is a hymn which all Americans can join in singing, because it breathes the spirit of the whole land and has not one suggestion of sectionalism in it.

Next as a national song comes "America," sometimes known as "My Country, 'Tis of Thee." Objection is frequently raised against this because the tune was not original. It is the property of the British empire as much as it is of the United States, and when it is heard from afar one cannot tell whether the band wants to feel the inspiration that is in the words of "America" or in "God Save the King."

The words of the song "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," were written by Samuel Francis Smith. The song was first sung at a Sunday school celebration of the Fourth of July at the Park Street church in Boston. It is an interesting fact that one of the little boys who helped to sing "America" for the first time is now the chaplain of the United States senate, the venerable and revered Edward Everett Hale.

Then we have "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean," which has something like an echo of "Britannia, the Pride of the Ocean." The tune of "Yankee Doodle" is a good one, and we all like to whistle or hum it, but the words unfortunately are not very good and, furthermore, it has been said did not mean a great deal at the time they were written. At any rate, it has not the solemn grandeur that "The Star Spangled Banner" holds.

The origin of "Yankee Doodle" is shrouded in the mystery of a score of conflicting tales. It is generally agreed, however, that the tune came from England, and the words were invented by the British soldiers to be sung in derision of the raw American troops who joined them at the camp on the Hudson below Albany in 1755 during the French and Indian war. Twenty years later the rebellious patriots played "Yankee Doodle" at the battle of Lexington, and it became the first national song of the United States.

Philadelphia has considerable interest in "Hail Columbia." It was written by Joseph Hopkinson of this city, although the air was one composed by a German who was conducting an orchestra in New York. Hopkinson wrote the words at the time when war was threatened with France in 1798, and for a long while it was the most popular of our patriotic songs.

As for sectional songs, there are some which have mighty good tunes, a case in point being "Dixie." Although this was the battle hymn of the Confederacy, Lincoln enjoyed it immensely and on the day of his assassination asked a band to play it for him.

"Dixie," however, was written long before the civil war and was not intended for the use of the Confederates. It was written in 1859 by Daniel D. Emmett, who was singing with Bryant's minstrels in New York. Bryant's show was dragging, and as failure seemed imminent he asked Emmett to write a negro "walk around" which would stir up some enthusiasm. "Dixie" was the result.

Its adaptation nearly two years later as the war song of the south was an accident. Mrs. John Wood was appearing at the New Orleans Varieties theater in "Pochontas." On account of the rising tide of war a zouave drill was introduced into the show. The orchestra leader tried over several airs for the march and finally hit upon "Dixie." The war cloud burst the next week, and from New Orleans "Dixie" spread all over the south. At the north Fanny J. Crosby, the hymn writer, wrote a song for "Dixie" which was strongly Union in sentiment, but the other side had pre-empted the air.

Then it was that the north took up "John Brown's Body," which was first put on by a Boston company, and later Mrs. Julia Ward Howe wrote to this tune "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

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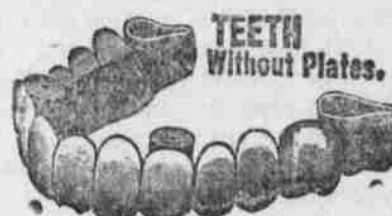
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Another popular southern air is really an old German one. It had been used in America for many years as a vehicle for the old college song "Lauder Horatius," but it is now universally associated with "Maryland, My Maryland."

This song was considered by James Russell Lowell to be the best poem produced by the civil war, and Mr. Lowell could not have been partial to its sentiments. It was written by James Ryder Randall, a Marylander. At the outbreak of hostilities Mr. Randall was teaching in a small college in Louisiana. When he heard the news of the riots in the streets of Baltimore in April, 1861, he was fired by the intelligence and angry because his native state did not forsake the Union. Under these circumstances he wrote the poem. It was first published in the New Orleans Delta and copied in all the southern papers and, of course, became very popular among Maryland secessionists. One of these, Miss Jennie Cary, suggested adapting it to the air of the familiar college song. Miss Cary was in Virginia just after the first battle of Bull Run. She and a party of friends were serenaded at Fairfax Court House by the Washington Light artillery of New Orleans. Miss Cary responded by singing "Maryland, My Maryland."—Philadelphia Press.

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