

FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

(1779–1843)

Defence of Fort M^cHenry (1814)

O! say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous
fight,
O'er the ramparts we watch'd, were so gallantly
streaming?
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still
there—
O! say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave?

On the shore, dimly seen through the mists of the deep,
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,
What is that which the breeze o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,
In full glory reflected now shines on the stream—
'Tis the star-spangled banner, O! long may it wave
O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave.

And where is that band who so vauntingly swore
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion
A home and a country should leave us no more?
Their blood has wash'd out their foul foot-steps'
pollution.
No refuge could save the hireling and slave,
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave;
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave.

O! thus be it ever when freemen shall stand
Between their lov'd home, and the war's desolation,
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the heav'n-rescued land
Praise the power that hath made and preserv'd us a
nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto—"In God is our trust!"
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave.

FRANCIS SCOTT KEY (August 1, 1779–January 11, 1843) b. on family estate in Frederick (now Carroll) County, Maryland. Son of Ann Phoebe Charlton and John Ross Key (an officer in American Revolutionary Army). Graduated St. John's College, Annapolis in 1796; studied law, opening practice at Fredericktown in 1801. Married Mary Taylor Lloyd in 1802; they had six sons and five daughters. The family moved to Georgetown in the District of Columbia, where Key practiced law for a time with his uncle, future congressman Philip Barton Key. In 1814, during British withdrawal from Washington, was asked to intervene in plight of an American physician held prisoner aboard a British ship; after arranging his release, witnessed British bombardment of Baltimore. In response to the sight, on the dawn of September 14, of the American flag still flying over Fort McHenry, wrote "The Star-Spangled Banner." Poem published (as "Defence of Fort McHenry") in *Baltimore American* on September 21, it achieved immediate nationwide popularity. As lawyer, practiced extensively in federal courts; served as U.S. attorney for District of Columbia (1833–41). Died of pleurisy in Baltimore. Poetry collected posthumously in *Poems of the Late Francis S. Key, Esq.* (1857).