

THE
Story and Origin
OF THE
UNION JACK



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Past President St. George's Society.

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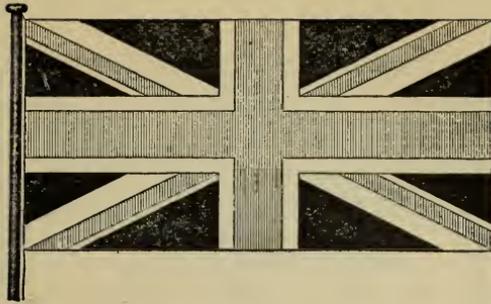
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The Story and Origin of the Union Jack.

BANNERS AND FLAGS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN CARRIED.

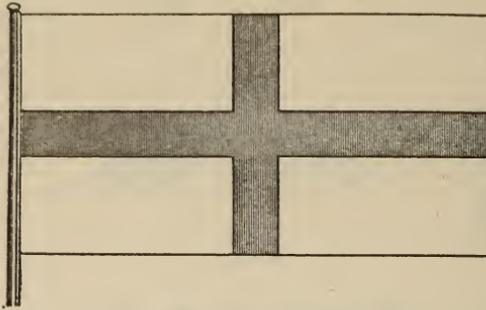
ST. GEORGE'S CROSS, ST. ANDREW'S CROSS, ST. PATRICK'S CROSS.

BY LIEUTENANT-COLONEL E. T. STURDEE.

The following story of the Union Jack, the glorious flag of the British Empire, has been compiled to assist school teachers and others in imparting instruction on the meaning of the flag and the histories of the different patron saints, and also as a guide to those who take an interest in flags and their proper significance, hoping that it may be the means of more attention being given by the public to the national colors. Many of the facts herein recorded have been taken from *The History of the Union Jack*, by Barlow Cumberland, Esq., a most excellent book, and also from *Hulme's Flags of the World*.

From the earliest times banners and standards were used and carried by nearly every nation and tribe, not only as a distinguishing mark, or as a point to indicate where the men of the different parties were to assemble, but as a religious sign, and showing the cause or reason of the conflict; mention is made in the Bible of people carrying ensigns before their armies, and using them as a means to gather the different tribes or companies, each man knowing the particular device which represented his party, thus the Lion was known as the emblem of the tribe of Judah, each other tribe of the Jews having also their own type, while later on the Eagle was adopted by the Romans and emblazoned on their banners, and so every nation had a national emblem, such as the dragon for China, the fleur-de-lys for France, the Crescent for Turkey, the lion for England and Scotland, the harp for Ireland; these flags or standards were not only carried on land by the

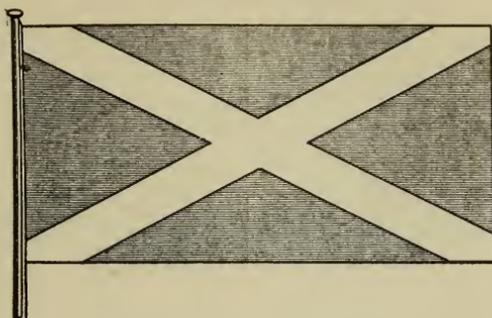
soldiers, but were also used at sea on ships and vessels, while in addition the sails of ships had the particular device thereon, and while the origin of flags may be traced to land usage not only for identifying the different nations, but to show the rank or force of each knight or noble holding command in the army, it was really at sea that the development of flags and banners was thereafter most in evidence, the flag on the mast showing clearly the nation to which the vessel belonged. England was one of the first countries to have a navy and to display the national flag on her ships. Alfred the Great from A.D. 871 to 901 encouraged the building of war ships and ever since has the navy of England and afterwards of Great Britain, been the ruling guide, the chief defence of our country and the envy of all the world; the earliest English flags appear to have borne on them religious emblems and occasionally a lion or a leopard, while there are instances showing only distinctive colors such as red and white, and later on armorial bearings or heraldic devices of a county or a knight were emblazoned thereon, it is unnecessary to trace and describe all the flags used by England during the early centuries, but to relate only the origin of our present flag, the Union Jack, or Great Union, and as the basis of that flag is the red cross of St. George; the history of that will first be told.



ST. GEORGE'S CROSS.

St. George was born about 270 in Lydda, in Palestine, in the vale of Sharon, celebrated for its roses and so the rose is the national flower of England, and always associated with St. George. He was a Christian and when the Emperor Diocletian persecuted the Christians St. George openly declared himself and did all he could to save his fellow countrymen and oppose the Emperor, but was put to death as a martyr April 23rd, 303; this day is known as St. George's day and has been so kept for hundreds of years; it is also related of him that he fought and killed a fierce dragon and thus saved a Princess from death, so St. George is always represented in his combat with the dragon, he being on horseback and carrying a banner with a red cross on a white ground; he was thus early looked upon as a saint and his name and symbol venerated. In 1190, when Richard I. of England joined in the crusades to the Holy Land his ships won in a fierce fight with the Saracens near Beyrout, at a spot called St. George's Bay, so named from the fact that it was near this that St. George's famous fight with the dragon took place. It was reported that King Richard had seen a vision of St. George and his red cross banner the night before the battle; and on his return to England in 1194 he adopted the St. George's cross as the emblem and flag of England and placed his army and the nation under the protection of St. George; from that date this cross became the national flag of England, and was the ground work from

which the present Union Flag has been built up, but not only was the red cross seen on the English flag, for on the invasion of Scotland in 1386 by Richard II. it was ordered that every person should bear the cross of the patron saint on his coat or jacque both before and behind, and in 1513 the sailors of the Cinque ports are said to have worn as their uniform a coat of white cotton with a red cross and the arms of the port underneath; another instance is recorded in 1588 on the fall of Calais, when the city of London raised a thousand men and made them white coats and red crosses, thus the red cross was established as the emblem of England and noble deeds were performed under that banner, the crusaders carried it in the Holy Land, the ships of England won the great naval battle of Sluys and the soldiers were victorious under this flag at Cressy, Poitiers and Agincourt. Cabot, Drake and Frobisher sailed under it and the ships that defeated the great Spanish Armada carried it at their mast heads; it is in compliment to the ancient victories of the English that to-day the St. George's cross is the distinguishing flag of a British admiral and flies on flag ships, those having an admiral on board, as his badge of rank, and is also used on the command pennant, a long flag or whip, flown by every war ship in commission, while the white or St. George's ensign is the flag of the royal navy. The cross is also used as part of the arms of the city of London.

**ST. ANDREW'S CROSS.**

St. Andrew is supposed to have been the first to introduce Christianity into Scotland, and for that reason from very early times he has been known as the patron saint of that country, and his anniversary is kept by the Scotch on the 30th November. Other reasons are also given, one being that some relics of the apostle were being brought to Scotland and the vessel being wrecked the sacred bones were landed safely at the port still called St. Andrew's; another tradition is that in 987 the Scots being attacked by the English under Athelstane there appeared in the sky the night before the battle the cross of St. Andrew formed in the white clouds against the dark blue sky, and animated by this sign the Scots the next day defeated the English, whose king was slain; since then the cross of St. Andrew has been adopted by the Scotch as their national flag; the St. Andrew's cross is a saltire or diagonal cross, white on a dark blue ground, and the origin is said to be from the fact that St. Andrew considered himself unworthy to be crucified on a cross of the same shape as our Saviour, and so chose one of an X shape on which he suffered martyrdom; the St. Andrew's cross was carried by Robert the Bruce, whose descendants, the Earls of Elgin, still bear his banner; this flag was also carried at Bannockburn when the Scots were victorious over the English, and later on in 1385 when the Scots invaded the border counties of England they wore a white St. Andrew's cross on their jacques or coats both before and behind; the Scotch

flag was carried principally on land, as the Scots never made any pretensions to having a navy, although there were some freebooters, or sea rovers, who preyed upon English commerce, but they never ventured very far from land. The St. George's cross for England and the St. Andrew's cross for Scotland were now firmly established as the national flags of these countries and so continued for many years.

UNION JACK OF JAMES I.

The first attempt of combining the two crosses on one flag was made after James VI. of Scotland became James I. of England, who as soon as he came to the throne in 1603 added to the royal standard the personal flag of the sovereign, the red lion of Scotland and the harp of Ireland; this flag under Queen Elizabeth had borne the three lions of England and the fleur-de-lys of France only, but it was not until 1606 that any change was made in the national flag. In that year King James authorized a new flag to be borne in the main top of all ships "The Red Crosse, commonly called St. George's Crosse, and the White Crosse, commonly called St. Andrew's Crosse, joined together according to the forme made by our Heralds" and this flag was known as the "Union Flagge," or Jack, but the separate English and Scotch crosses were still used by the two nations in addition to the new flag to distinguish the nationality of the ships. The origin of the flag being called Jack cannot be clearly accounted for. It has been stated that the above

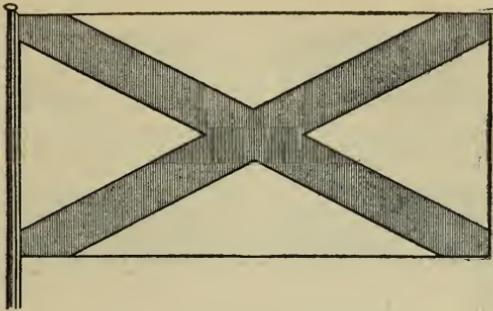
proclamation was the origin on account of the King using the French name of "Jacques," abbreviated as "Jac," and the new flag was called the Jack of James I., but on the other hand it is known that previous to this the English and Scotch flags were generally called Jacks, and from this it seems that the probable origin of the word came from the fact that the respective crosses of each nation were borne on the coats or jacques of the soldiers, the latter word meaning in heraldry the plain surface or outer dress on which an armorial device is borne, and thus the flag came to be called Jack, though the proper name then for the flag was the Union Flag and later on the Great Union. It will be noticed that while the two crosses were ordered to be joined together the flag as then completed showed very much blue for St. Andrew's cross and very little white for the cross of St. George, being only a narrow border for the red; this border was maintained on account of a rule of heraldry which prohibits color being placed on color, or metal on metal, and so there was just enough white left to prevent the red from touching the blue, or in the words of heraldry the white was simply a fimbriation to the red. This almost total disappearance of the white ground of the English flag was the cause of some discontent by that nation. Although the actual union of England and Scotland was not accomplished for over a hundred years after the first Union Jack was adopted; the flag continued to be used, though some different regulations were made, thus in 1634 merchant vessels were prohibited from using the Union Jack, which was reserved for the King's ships or war ships only, but during the Commonwealth merchant vessels used what flags they chose, and war ships by a proclamation made in 1649 reverted to the use of the Red Cross, but in 1660 the use of the Union Flag was restored to the King's ships, and in 1663 this regulation was again published and the flag then called officially for the first time "His Majesty's Jack," commonly called the "Union Jack," was directed to be used on King's ships only, the Jack white, or St. George's cross, and the ensign red were appointed for use on merchant vessels: the ensign red being a red flag with a St. George's cross on a white ground in the upper corner, and

this was used on merchant vessels and probably also on shore in England for many years thereafter.

The next proclamations regarding flags were made in 1707 in the reign of Queen Anne, when the union of England and Scotland and their parliaments became an established fact, so it was found necessary to have one flag to represent the new union; this was set out in the first article of the Treaty of Union, the proclamation, therefore, recited this article, in which the crosses of St. George and St. Andrew should be "conjoined in such a manner as we should think fit" and further appointed and described the red ensign to be used on board all ships or vessels whether employed in the Queen's service or otherwise, but prohibited the use of "our Jack, commonly called the Union Jack," on any but the ships of the royal navy; this proclamation did away with the former ensign with the St. George's cross and thereafter the union was borne in the upper corner of that flag, so from this time also the separate crosses of England and Scotland ceased as national flags, the plain St. George's cross being retained on a white pennant for use in the royal navy as a badge of the ship being in command.

The drawing of the new Union Jack of Queen Anne shows quite a difference from that of King James; the latter, it will be remembered, having only a narrow border or fimbriation of white to the St. George's cross, but the new flag was made with broad white outside the English red cross, which was thus restored to its proper position, as a red cross on a white field. This flag continued to be used for nearly one hundred years until Ireland came into the union in 1801.

St. Patrick from very early times has been the patron saint of Ireland; born in Scotland near the close of the fourth century (authorities differ as to the exact date of his birth), one account states that he went as a young man with his parents to Ireland and devoted himself to teaching the Irish Christianity, and labored incessantly among the people, suffering much and being often persecuted; another account states that he was taken prisoner by pirates when a child and sold into Ireland as a serf, but escaping later he went to the continent, there

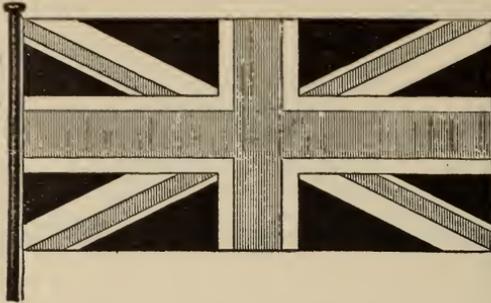


ST. PATRICK'S CROSS.

embracing Christianity, and returned to evangelize the Irish; he founded monasteries, churches and schools, was afterwards made a deacon and priest and finally a bishop; he was called Patricius on account of his ancestors, who were reported to have been nobles, and his labors in Ireland extended over forty years; certain it is that he did a great deal for the Irish and is as much revered as their saint by them as St. George by the English or St. Andrew by the Scotch. St. Patrick's Day, March 17th, is always especially celebrated by the Irish. The origin of St. Patrick's cross or the Irish Jack is very obscure. There is no early record of this flag being carried in battle by the Irish and they were never a nation fond of the sea, but it is quite certain that the Irish cross was in some way connected with St. Patrick; there is a tradition that he suffered martyrdom on a cross of the same shape as St. Andrew, but this is not generally accepted; the most probable origin of the cross is that it was taken from a sacred standard or Labarum set up by Constantine the Great, Emperor of Rome, on which was displayed the first three Greek letters of the name of Christ, X. P. I., or Chiro, and that the cross was taken from the first of these, especially as Constantine had for a time lived in the North of England, which, during the Roman occupation, had been converted by missionaries from Scotland, from which St. Patrick originally came, and so the cross became intimately connected with the labors of St. Patrick in Ireland. St. Patrick's cross is the same shape (sal-

tire) as St. Andrew's, but a red cross on a white field. It was not until very much later, however, that it was at all used, in fact not very much before the close of the seventeenth century, and Ireland had never been represented in the national flag as Scotland was, except for a brief period during the Commonwealth, and then by an ensign on which appeared a golden harp on a blue ground.

When in 1801 Ireland was admitted into the Union, it became necessary that that country should be represented on the national flag, and as this bore already the crosses of England and Scotland, it was decided to add the Irish cross, combining the three crosses on one flag. By a proclamation of King George III. of January 1st, 1801, the details of the new combination were given in heraldic language, it was defined that the white cross of St. Andrew and the red cross of St. Patrick were to be joined together quarterly and counterchanged and that they were to be surmounted by the cross of St. George; therefore it was necessary to join three crosses on one flag, at the same time to do this in such a way that Scotland and Ireland would have equal honor; this was more difficult from the fact that the Scotch and Irish crosses were the same shape and size, and so the proclamation read that they were to be joined together quarterly and counterchanged. It will be noticed that the St. George's cross and its wide border divide the flag into four quarters or cantons, the two upper being numbered



THE PRESENT UNION JACK.

one and two, and the two lower three and four, and that the widths of the two saltire crosses are differently placed in each quarter; the reason is that Scotland being the senior of the two, occupies the higher position in the first and third quarters, which are nearest the flagstaff, and that the positions are reversed in the second and fourth cantons, that is, that in the first and third quarters the broad white of St. Andrew is placed above the red cross and its border, while in the second and fourth the red of St. Patrick and its border are above, so that they are thus counterchanged, while laid over this or surmounting it is the red cross of St. George with its white border, indicating clearly the leading part England has taken in the Union and the leading position the English nation has held, while each cross has been preserved intact and rests upon its own proper ground or field, the white St. Andrew's on a blue field and the red St. George's and St. Patrick's on white grounds, the whole forming a most beautiful combination and one of the handsomest flags that has ever floated to the breeze. Further symbols may be taken from the heraldic meaning of the colors, namely, red for courage, white for purity, and blue for truth; thus each combination was carefully thought out in our flag and explicit instructions given for the different proportions, which have never been changed, the correct measurements being as follows, first bearing in mind that the length of a flag should be double its width:

Red cross of St. George, 1-5 of width of flag.

White border to St. George, 1-3 of red of St. George.

Red cross of St. Patrick, 1-3 of red of St. George.

White border to St. Patrick, 1-6 of red of St. George.

Broad white of St. Andrew, 1-2 of red of St. George.

It will be seen from the above that the crosses of St. Andrew and St. Patrick have an equal share on the flag, because the one-third of the red and one-sixth of the border of St. Patrick together are equal to one-half of the broad white of St. Andrew, although Scotchmen may claim to have a larger share, as the blue ground they can call their own. It will be seen that in the proclamation of January 1st, 1801, the flag was called the Union flag and is the correct name; though still called the Union Jack the latter term is really more applicable to the flag or Jack used on the bow of a ship of war, and flown on what are called Jack staffs; to make a correct Union Jack it is necessary to draw two diagonal lines from the corners, when it will be found that these are the centre and dividing lines of the saltires, but while in a square flag these lines will intersect the corners of St. George's cross in an oblong flag they will not, so in making a flag it is best to draw the saltires first and the St. George's cross over all; a little study will soon enable anyone to become familiar with the proper design and proportions, so there is no excuse for the Union Jack being wrongly made or placed; a correct flag shows the broad white of St. Andrew

in the first and third quarters uppermost, and below the red in the other quarters; if this is not so, then the flag has been either made wrong or placed wrong end to the staff or pole; in fact this is very often seen in the cheap flags used for decoration; this should be discouraged and only the proper flags used; another error often seen is the drawing of a so-called Union Jack of simply two red crosses with a very narrow margin of white, or perhaps none at all, which is not a recognized flag, does not mean anything, and is besides an insult to the national flag.

"AN UNAUTHORIZED CHANGE."

The Union Flag, as ordered by proclamations of 1707 and 1801, and so described according to the drawings made at the time has been herein treated, and there can be no doubt but what the flag as at present used is absolutely correct, but there have been contentions that it is not properly made according to the rules of heraldry. For some years after the proclamation of 1801 the discussion was very warm in the leading papers and magazines, the contention by those opposed to the flag as at present used, being that the St. George's and St. Patrick's crosses should have only a fimbriation or narrow margin and that the broad white of St. Andrew's should be equal to the red of the Irish cross, while on the other side it was clearly shown that the flag was correct from drawings made and approved in 1801; nothing more was heard of this until 1900, when a large order was given an American firm for the supply of flags, this firm having no knowledge of the proper form of the Union Flag asked the Garter King of Arms, London, for instructions, who sent a drawing according to what he contended was the strict heraldic design which shows only the broad white of St. Andrew and a narrow fimbriation to St. George's and St. Patrick's crosses and though no order in council was ever passed or any change authorized by the Admiralty the flags were made of this design and instructions given for the army to have flags made according to this form; in 1901 and since a few British regiments and also some regiments of Canadian militia were furnished with colors of this pattern, but no change was elsewhere made; these flags are not nearly so handsome as the proper Union flag nor do they convey the meaning of the three crosses. It is hoped regulations will be made reverting to the

proper and ancient form of the Union flag for use on colors of infantry in accordance with that used by the Admiralty.

There is another point in connection with the national flag which must be disposed of, and that is the assertion that the ancient white cross of France was introduced in it, or as a ground whereon the St. George's cross was laid, but there is no authority or reason for this; true it is that for years the titles of the sovereigns of England included that of France, and the fleur-de-llys was borne on the national arms, but France was never intended to be represented on the flag, and furthermore as the white cross of France was not of straight sides but shaped something like a Maltese cross it never could have been so used, so the origin and history of the flag is truly British and the meanings and stories of the three crosses have been fully preserved.

The Union Flag is essentially the national flag; it shows the sovereignty of Great Britain wherever it flies; it is used as an army flag, being hoisted over all forts, camps and military stations; it is the King's color of all regiments of the army, and can be flown by any British subject on shore; it is used by Governors General and Lieutenant Governors of colonies with the arms or badge of the colony in the centre, but cannot be used at sea except by ships of war on the Jack staff, as already noted; when flown at the mast head it shows that an Admiral of the Fleet is on board; the Union surrounded by a broad white border is a pilot flag only and should not be otherwise used.

THE THREE ENSIGNS.

An Ensign is generally a flag having in the first or upper canton the great Union, and of these there are three varieties, all having different uses; the first is the white or St. George's ensign, on which is the cross of that name throughout the full length and breadth with the Union as above noted; this is the distinguishing flag of the Royal Navy and cannot be used otherwise at sea under heavy penalty, though an exception has been made in favor of the Royal Yacht Squadron, to which special license has been given; every British ship of war flies this flag at the stern daily, and though it is often used on shore by private individuals, it has there no special meaning. The Red Ensign with the Union in the upper canton only is used as a national flag by all British merchant vessels, and

since 1892 the same flag with the arms of Canada in the fly has been allowed to Canadian merchant vessels; other colonies, such as Australia, etc., also use this ensign with their own particular device, while a crown on the fly denotes a custom house flag; the red ensign, either plain or with the Canadian arms, is used very much on shore, though a maple leaf or some simple emblem easier distinguished than the arms would make a more distinctive Canadian flag.

The Blue Ensign, which also has the Union in the first quarter, is only used by the Royal Naval Reserve, or by merchant vessels commanded by an officer of the Royal Naval Reserve, provided a certain number of the crew are also members thereof; this flag with the arms of Canada in the fly is used by all Canadian government vessels, which also when armed fly a command pennant of blue with St. George's cross at the head on a white ground; the plain Blue Ensign is authorized by special permission for certain yacht clubs that are allowed to call themselves Royal, and by certain government departments in Great Britain, with special devices in the fly.

The three Ensigns were formerly all used by the Navy to distinguish the different grades and ranks, each ship flying a flag of the color of the admiral commanding its squadron, there being Admirals of the White, Red and Blue, but at the battle of Trafalgar, Nelson, who was a vice-admiral of the white, signalled that to prevent confusion, all ships were to fly the white ensign, and this was the origin of the use of this flag for the Royal Navy.

A fact not generally known is that the first flag of the American colonies or United States was composed of thirteen stripes of red and white alternately on the fly, with the Union of Great Britain as then used in the first quarter, but this flag existed for a few months only early in the year 1776.

THE ROYAL STANDARD

is the personal flag of the sovereign, flown only over vessels or buildings when the King, Queen or a member of the Royal Family representing the King is on board or in residence; therefore this flag should not be used by any one either ashore or afloat; the Royal Standard has the three lions of England in the first and fourth quarters, the lion of Scotland in the second, and the harp of Ireland in the third; it is

strange that Wales is not represented in this flag, nor is that part of Great Britain or any representation of its patron, St. David, given a place on any emblem; the first of March is, however, always kept as St. David's Day.

REGIMENTAL COLORS.

Colors or flags carried by infantry regiments are of silk, the first or King's color is the Great Union and the second or regimental is the same color as the facings of the regiment with the Union in the first quarter and the particular device of the corps on the fly; these flags are always consecrated on presentation and are to be treated with every respect; thus when colors are being carried through the streets soldiers salute them, and citizens generally should raise their hats out of respect.

HINTS ON FLAGS.

As a guide to those having charge of flags, a few hints are given as to certain regulations and customs regarding them. The part of a flag next to the flagstaff is called the hoist, the outer part the field or fly; flags are generally hoisted at 8 o'clock in the morning, and by naval and military earlier, but should never be allowed to fly after sunset. Flags are lowered to half mast as a sign of mourning, but should then be only the width of the flag from the top of the flagstaff; when a flag is to be placed at half mast it should always be raised to full height and then lowered. Salutes at sea are made by dipping or lowering the flag and then raising it, and in this connection it may be interesting to note that all nations are the first to salute British ships at sea is a recognition that Great Britain is the Mistress of the Seas. A flag of one nation should never be raised above that of another, as it is a token of disrespect. An ensign hoisted reversed or Union down is a sign of distress or that help is required.

In closing this brief story of the Union Jack it is hoped that some lessons may be learned therefrom, and that our people may become familiar with the honored flag of our country, and bearing in mind its glorious history may ever treat it with the greatest respect, for it is "the flag that has braved a thousand years, the battle and the breeze," and is the flag on which the sun never sets, and

"That flag may sink with a shot torn wreck,
But never float o'er a slave."

