

**GOD SAVE THE KING; THE
ORIGIN, AND HISTORY
OF THE MUSIC AND WORDS
OF THE NATIONAL ANTHEM**

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God save the king; the origin, and history of the music and words of the national anthem by
William H. Cummings

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DR. JOHN BULL,

From a picture painted in Antwerp. Circa 1625.

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BY

WILLIAM H. CUMMINGS,

Mus. Doc., Dub., F.S.A., Hon. R.A.M.

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PREFACE.

SCARCELY a month passes without some paragraph appearing in the public journals concerning the origin of the music of our National Anthem. Untenable theories, which have often been refuted, are paraded as new discoveries; discussions more or less relevant ensue, are read with avidity, and then, becoming forgotten, are allowed to repose in obscurity for a time, but with a certainty that in due course the whole matter will be re-opened. I propose, therefore, in the following pages, to state and consider various theories which have been advanced, and to publish some documents by Dr. Burney and others which are of great weight and value, and which have never before been made public.

Our National Anthem, from long association, has become a sacred part of our national life. The *Journal des Débats* has pithily remarked: "It is a melancholy fact that France does not possess a song which can be really called national. In a national song the first and most indispensable element is religious sentiment. . . . As for England, we need not mention the air at the sound of which all Englishmen rise and uncover their heads, and which is played at the farthest extremities of the world."

Two striking instances of the sacred use of our National Anthem are worthy of record—the first

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belongs to a peaceful and happy celebration, and the second to a sad and heart-breaking tragedy.

In 1879, Queen Victoria presented a church organ to the inhabitants of Pitcairn Island, who, it will be remembered, were descendants of the old mutineers of "The Bounty." The instrument was conveyed to the island in Her Majesty's ship "Opal," and on arrival at the island the organ was promptly transferred to the shore and placed in position. The inauguration was attended by the whole population, men, women and children, ninety-three in number. "Then, by one of those picturesquely appropriate touches that strike so happily the mind of a community affected by a single impulse of feeling, the scene became at once as pathetic as beautiful, for hardly had the instrument been opened, than it and the people burst into the music of the National Anthem. The effect was touching in the extreme, as, verse by verse, the grand harmony of 'God save the Queen' rolled from the little church-house on the cliff, and was taken up by the ship's crew on the shore. It was no rehearsed scene, but a spontaneous and uncontrollable outburst of loyal gratitude: Her Majesty's gracious kindness, and such an unexpected and substantial proof of it, transported the Islanders with delight, and in the strains of the National Anthem they celebrated the glad renewal of their allegiance which they had feared was despised."

This narration of the joyous occasion of which the National Anthem formed so conspicuous and appropriate a part, may be contrasted with another

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historic but tragic event, when its strains were adopted by a few heroes as their triumphant death-song. During the Matabele war, in 1894, thirty-four Englishmen found themselves, after three hours' fighting, absolutely surrounded and hemmed in by the natives. The little band, commanded by Major Wilson, were all wounded and their ammunition was well-nigh expended; the Major, covered with blood from his many wounds, stood erect and continued to fire at the foe, assisted by a wounded comrade who stood by his side and loaded the rifles for him. The natives crawled along the ground and by degrees drew nearer the few surviving English, till at last the supreme and inevitable moment arrived when, in overwhelming numbers, they rushed in upon the devoted band who, of one accord, stood up, uncovered their heads, and joined in singing "God save the Queen," and whilst so engaged were ruthlessly assegaied.

It is not necessary to refer to the numerous interesting and historic occasions of the past, wherein the performance of our National Anthem has formed an important feature; it can, however, be confidently asserted that its hallowed strains will continue to be fervently echoed and re-echoed by the many millions of peoples, throughout the world, who are proud of their allegiance to our beloved King and Emperor, Edward the Seventh.

W. H. C.

March 1902.

