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THE BALLAD OF NEW ORLEANS.

BY GEORGE H. BOKER.

Just as the hour was darkest,
Just between night and day,
From the flag-ship shone the signal,
"Get the squadrons under way."

Not a sound but the tramp of sailors,
And the wheeling capstan's creak,
Arose from the busy vessels
As the anchors came apeak.

The men worked on in silence,
With never a shout or cheer,
Till it was whispered from bow to quarter,
"Start forward! All is clear."

Then groan'd the ponderous engines,
Then flounder'd the whirling screw;
And, as ship join'd ship, the comrades
Their lines of battle drew.

The moon through the fog was casting
A blur of lurid light,
As the captain's latest order
Was flash'd into the night:—

"Steam on! and, whatever fortune
May follow the attack,
Sink with your bows all northward:
No vessel must turn back."

It was hard, when we heard that order,
To smother a rising shout;
For it waken'd the life within us,
And we burn'd to give it out.

All wrapp'd in the foggy darkness,
Brave Bailey moved ahead;
And stem after stern his gunboats
To the starboard station led.

Next Farragut's stately flag-ship
To port her head inclined;
And midmost, and most in danger,
Bell's squadron closed behind.

Ah! many a prayer was murmur'd
For the homes we ne'er might see;
And the silence and night grew dreadful
With the thought of what must be.

For many a tall, stout fellow
Who stood at his quarters then,
In the damp and dismal moonlight,
Never saw the sun again.

Close down by the yellow river,
In their oozy graves they rot;
Strange vines and strange flowers grow o'er them
And their far homes know them not.

But short was our time of musing;
For the rebel forts discern'd
That the whole great fleet was moving,
And their batteries on us turn'd.

Then Porter burst out from his mortars,
In jets of fiery spray,
As if a volcano had open'd
Where his leaf-clad vessels lay.

Howling, and screeching, and whizzing,
The bomb-shells arch'd on high,
And then, like gigantic meteors,
Dropp'd swiftly from the sky—

Dropp'd down on the low, doom'd fortress
A plague of iron death,
Shattering earth and granite to atoms
With their puffs of sulphurous breath.

The whole air quaked and shudder'd
As the great globes rose and fell,
And the blazing shores look'd awful
As the open gates of hell.

Fort Jackson and Fort St. Philip,
And the battery on the right,
By this time were flashing and thundering
Out into the murky night.

Through the hulks and the cables, sunder'd
By the bold Itasca's crew,
Went Bailey in silence, though round him
The shells and the grape-shot flew.

No answer he made to their welcome,
Till abeam St. Philip bore;
Then, oh! but he sent them a greeting
In his broadsides' steady roar!

Meanwhile, the old man in the Hartford
Had ranged to Fort Jackson's side:
What a sight! he slow'd his engines
Till he barely stemmed the tide.

Yes, paused in that deadly tornado
Of case-shot and shell and ball,
Not a cable's length from the fortress,
And he lay there, wood to wall!

Have you any notion, you landsmen,
Who have seen a field-fight won,
Of canister, grape-shot, and shrapnell
Hurl'd out from a ten-inch gun?

I tell you, the air is nigh solid
With the howling iron flight;
And 'twas such a tempest blew o'er us
Where the Hartford lay that night.

Perch'd aloft in the forward rigging,
With his restless eyes aglow,
Sat Farragut, shouting his orders
To the men who fought below.

And the fort's huge faces of granite
Were splinter'd and rent in twain,
And the masses seemed slowly melting,
Like snow in a torrid rain.

"Full between us and the foe
A torrent of blazing vapor
Was leaping to aid fro;
While the fort, like a mighty cauldron,
Was boiling with flame and smoke,
And the stone flew aloft in fragments,
And the brick into powder broke,
So thick fell the clouds o'er the river
You could hardly see your hand,
When we heard from the foremast rigging
Old Farragut's sharp command:
"Full head! Steam across to St. Philip!
Starboard battery, mind your aim!
Forecastle, there, shift your pivots! Now
Give them a taste of the same!"
St. Philip grew faint in replying,
It's voice of thunder was drown'd.
"But, ha! what is this? Back the engines!
Back, back! The ship is aground!"
And down the swift current came sweeping
A raft spouting sparks and flame;
Push'd on by an iron-clad rebel,
Under our port side it came.
At once the good Hartford was blazing,
Below, aloft, fore and aft,
"We are lost!" "No, no; we are moving!"
Away whirled the crackling raft.
The fire was soon quench'd. One last broadside
We gave to the surly fort;
For above us the rebel gunboats
Were wheeling like devils at sport.
And into our vacant station
Had glided a bulky form:
'Twas Craven's stout Brooklyn, demanding
Her share of the furious storm.
We could hear the shot of St. Philip
Ring on her armor of chain,
And the crash of her answering broadsides
Taking and giving again.
We could hear the low growl of Craven,
And Lowry's voice, clear and calm,
While they swept off the rebel ramparts
As clean as your open palm.
Then ranging close under our quarter,
Out burst from the smoky fogs
The queen of the waves, the Varuna—
The ship of the bold Charley Boggs.
He waved his blue cap as he passed us;
The blood of his glorious race,
Of Lawrence the hero, was burning
Once more in a living face.
Right and left flash'd his heavy broadsides;
Rams, gunboats—it matter'd not;
Wherever a rebel flag floated
Was a target for his shot.
All burning and sinking around him
Lay five of the foe; but he
The victor, seem'd doom'd with the vanquish'd,
When along dash'd the gallant Lee.
And he took up the bloody conflict,
And, so well his part he bore,
That the river ran fire behind him,
And glimmer'd from shore to shore.
But while powder would burn in a cannon,
Till the water drown'd his deck,
Boggs pounded away with his pivots
From his slowly-settling wreck.
I think our old captains in heaven,
As they look'd upon those deeds,
Were proud of the flower of that navy
Of which they planted the seeds.
Paul Jones, the knight-errant of ocean,
Decatur, the lord of the seas,
Hull, Lawrence, and Bainbridge, and Biddle,
And Perry, the peer of all these.
If Porter beheld his descendant
With some human pride on his lip,
I trust, through the mercy of Heaven,
His soul was forgiven that slip.
And thou, living veteran, "Old Ironsides,"
The last of the splendid line,
Thou link 'twixt the old and new glory,
I know what feelings were thine.
When the sun look'd over the tree tops,
We found ourselves—Heaven knows how—
Above the grim forts; and that instant
A smoke broke from Farragut's bow;
And over the river came floating
The sound of the morning gun,
And the Stars and Stripes danced up the halliards,
And glitter'd against the sun.
Oh! then what a shout from the squadrons,
As flag follow'd flag, till the day
Was bright with the beautiful standard,
And wild with the victors' huzza!
But three ships were missing; the others
Had passed through that current of flame;
And each scar on their shattered bulwarks
Was touch'd by the finger of Fame.
Below us the forts of the rebels
Lay in the trance of despair;