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THE flag of a country represents its people as a nation, and however largely they may differ in politics or religion, the protection of the national banner is to them a common interest, and excites feelings of patriotism in which all may share.

The British flag, as we at present know it, has passed through several stages of development. In its present state it embodies a trinity of crosses, containing those of St. George, St. Patrick and St. Andrew, but as it is now it has existed only since the year 1801.

Before the beginning of the 13th century England had no recognized national banner. Each knight claimed the right to bear his own pennon, and the great lords gathered their retainers, each beneath his own private banner. But as national feeling developed, the need of a flag which would represent the whole nation became apparent, and the cross of St. George was selected for a national standard, the design being taken from the shield-device of the Red Cross Knights, heraldically described as "Argent, a cross gules." This is only one of the three flags of which our national banner is composed, and which is still in official use, being now flown at the masthead of an admiral's ship.

Upon the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, James VI. of Scotland, came into undisputed possession of the English throne. Ruler over two nations, his dearest wish was to see them united, but his closest approach to the fulfilment of that wish was the draughting of a design for a national flag, which, however, was destined to remain unused until more than a century had elapsed, and the last of the Stuarts was seated upon the throne of England.

Anne, the second daughter of James II. became sovereign of England and Scotland in 1702, and shortly after her accession the project of union between the two countries was laid before parliament. A commission was appointed to enquire into the matter, but neither side would agree to the terms of the other, and the subject was dropped, only to be taken up again in 1704, when a Treaty of Union was framed which after much determined resistance from the majority of the people, was in 1707 passed through the Scottish Parliament by a majority of 101 votes, and which was, after nearly a year's delay, finally assented to by both houses of the English Parliament, in January, 1708.

Up to this time, then, the flag of England was the red cross of St. George on its white field. It is to it that reference is made by Scott in the first canto of Marmion, as "St. George's banner broad and gay;" of it that Campbell says with more spirit than historical knowledge, that it has "braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze." It floated above the ships in which "Harry the Fifth" went forth to conquer the "vast fields of France." It waved above the decks of "The Little Revenge," when Sir Richard Grenville with one hundred men fought the fifty-three Spanish vessels for a night and a day. Under it John and Sebastian Cabot, Drake, Sir Walter Raleigh and many another valiant and venturesome seaman went forth to seek strange lands, and beneath its folds died Sir Philip Sydney, bravest of knights. The shores of America and the coasts of Spain learned to know it well. Before it fled the great Armada. At Sluys and Cressy, Poitiers and Agincourt, La Hogue, Gibraltar, Blenheim and Ramilies, and at many another victory it floated at the masthead of proud ships, or was borne before victorious hosts, and beneath it have grown up the army and navy of Britain.

Upon the union of England and Scotland was first flown the Union Jack, which was upon that occasion declared to be the National Ensign of the United Kingdom. It is formed by the union of the cross of St. George (red upon a white ground) and the saltire or diagonal cross of St. Andrew (white on a blue ground) or heraldically described as "azure a saltire argent surmounted by a cross gules fimbriated or edged of the second."

Of the origin of the term "Jack" there are two explanations given. The first, and that which seems the more reasonable, is that it was derived from the name of the designer of the first Union flag, James I. who signed himself as Jacques or Jacobus. Hence the Union became known as Jacques or Jacobus Union, and the flag which he had designed, as the Union Jack. A second explanation is that the uniforms upon which the cross of St. George was first worn were called Jacks, and when this emblem was adopted for the national banner this name also came into use.

In this second stage of the development of our flag, many great names were added to the list of its victories.

On land Oudenarde, and Malplaquet, Dettingen and Plassey, Minden and Quebec bore witness to its fame; while at sea, Amherst, Howe and Nelson maintained its supremacy in many a hard fought fight.

At that time Spain, England's old enemy, was slowly dying. At the sending forth of the Armada she had been at the zenith of her power, but the check which she had at that time received had put an end to her efforts against England. France, a yet older enemy, which had for some time retired from the conflict, started forth anew to fill her place. But neither Spain nor France could stay the forward march of that banner in the strong hands that upheld it. Into India and Egypt it was carried, and before it foes fled swiftly.

Poet and novelist made it their theme, and "never was isle so little, never was sea so lone but over the scud and palm-trees" flew the British Banner,

In the year 1801 came the third and last stage in its development, in the union of the red saltire, or cross of St. Patrick, with those of St. George and St. Andrew, of which it had hitherto been composed. After many hundred years of experimental government in Ireland, during which the short period of Strafford's rule had been the most successful, Pitt's great plan for domestic peace was carried into execution, and in January of that year Ireland was united to Great Britain, and was henceforth governed by the British Parliament to which she sent representatives. From that time there has been no change in the design of our national banner.

During this present century many a victory has been won beneath the folds of this ensign. Alexandria, Trafalgar, Vimiera and Corunna, Talavera, Busaco, Albuera and Badajoz, Salamanca, Vittoria and Toulouse, Quatre Bras and Waterloo, brought the power of France to the ground. Under it Denmark was crushed at Copenhagen and Russia in the Crimean peninsula. The rebellion against its power in India was signally defeated. At Delhi and Lucknow, where a small body of men under that flag repelled and finally routed three times their number of rebels. At Alexandria and Tel-el-Kebir the forces of Egypt were forced to fly. The names of Wellington, Nelson, Roberts and Wolseley have been inscribed upon the roll of fame as having gone beneath its folds to victory.

Nor is it on the field of battle alone that its triumphs have been gained. In literature, art, and science the empire which it represents has advanced with mighty strides. "That empire," said one of the greatest of England's statesmen, not many years ago, "was formed by the enterprise and energy of our ancestors; and it

