

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Battle Hymn of the Republic

WORDS BY JULIA WARD HOWE

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“The Battle Hymn of the Republic” was written in 1861 as an abolitionist song by Julia Ward Howe (1819–1910), a prominent American abolitionist and social activist. While witnessing a review of Union troops in Washington, D.C., Howe heard the Union army marching song “John Brown’s Body” set to a tune written by William Steffe (1830–90). The stirring tune inspired her to write new lyrics: this poem came to her in the middle of the night and she scrawled the verses in the dark, using an old stump of a pen. It became a popular Union song during the rest of the Civil War and after.

The song is called a hymn: is there a difference between a hymn and an anthem? What is a battle hymn? The song seems to offer an interpretation of the Civil War: what is its teaching? Other songs collected here also make reference to God and speak of His relation to our national affairs: how does this one differ from the others? The second-to-last line of stanza five originally read, “As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free”: what do you make of the substitution of “live” for “die”? How can what was a partisan Union song become a song of the entire nation? How does singing this song make you feel?

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.

(Chorus)

Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps,
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps:
His day is marching on.

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(Chorus)

Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!
His day is marching on.

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I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel:
“As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal;
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,
Since God is marching on.”

(Chorus)

Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Since God is marching on.

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat:
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.

(Chorus)

Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:
As he died to make men holy, let us die * to make men free,
While God is marching on.

(Chorus)

Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!

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While God is marching on.

He is coming like the glory of the morning on the wave,
He is wisdom to the mighty, He is succour[†] to the brave;
So the world shall be His footstool, and the soul of Time[‡] His slave,
Our God is marching on.

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(Chorus)

Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Our God is marching on.

* *In today's version, "live" is usually substituted for the original "die."*

† *In today's version, "honor" is usually substituted for the original "succour."*

‡ *In today's version, "wrong" is usually substituted for the original "Time."*