

Classic Poetry Series

Julia Ward Howe

- poems -

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Battle Hymn of the Republic

1. Howe's Final version

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 fatal lightning of his terrible swift sword:

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.

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.'

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.

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.

2. Howe's First Manuscript Version

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.
He is trampling out the wine press, where the grapes of wrath are stored,
He hath loosed the fateful lightnings of his terrible swift sword,

His truth is marching on.

I have seen him in the watchfires of an 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.

I have read a burning Gospel writ in fiery 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,

Our God is marching on.

He has sounded out the trumpet that shall never call retreat,
He has waked the earth's dull sorrow with a high ecstatic beat,
Oh! be swift my soul to answer him, be jubilant my feet

Our God is marching on.

In the whiteness of the lilies he was born across the sea
With a glory in his bosom that shines out on you and me,
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,

Our 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.

Julia Ward Howe

Coquette et Froide

What is thy thought of me?
What is thy feeling?
Lov'st thou the veil of sense,
Or its revealing?
Leav'st thou the maiden rose
Drooping and blushing,
Or rend'st its bosom with
Kissing and crushing?
I would be beautiful
That thou should'st woo me,
Gentle, delightful, but
To draw thee to me.
Yet should thy longing eye
Ever caress me,
And quickened Fantasy
Only, possess me,
Thus thy heart's highest need
Long would I cherish,
Lest its more trivial wish
Pall, and then perish.

Would that Love's fond pursuit
Were crown'd never,
Or that his virgin kiss
Lasted for ever!

Julia Ward Howe

Mother Mind

I never made a poem, dear friend--
I never sat me down, and said,
This cunning brain and patient hand
Shall fashion something to be read.
Men often came to me, and prayed
I should indite a fitting verse
For fast, or festival, or in
Some stately pageant to rehearse.
(As if, than Balaam more endowed,
I of myself could bless or curse.)

Reluctantly I bade them go,
Ungladdened by my poet-mite;
My heart is not so churlish but
Its loves to minister delight.

But not a word I breathe is mine
To sing, in praise of man or God;
My Master calls, at noon or night,
I know his whisper and his nod.

Yet all my thoughts to rhythms run,
To rhyme, my wisdom and my wit?
True, I consume my life in verse,
But wouldst thou know how that is writ?

'T is thus--through weary length of days,
I bear a thought within my breast
That greatens from my growth of soul,
And waits, and will not be expressed.

It greatens, till its hour has come,
Not without pain, it sees the light;
'Twixt smiles and tears I view it o'er,
And dare not deem it perfect, quite.

These children of my soul I keep
Where scarce a mortal man may see,
Yet not unconsecrate, dear friend,
Baptismal rites they claim of thee.

Julia Ward Howe

Mother's Day Proclamation

Arise then...women of this day!
Arise, all women who have hearts!
Whether your baptism be of water or of tears!
Say firmly:
"We will not have questions answered by irrelevant agencies,
Our husbands will not come to us, reeking with carnage,
For caresses and applause.
Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn
All that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience.
We, the women of one country,
Will be too tender of those of another country
To allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs."

From the voice of a devastated Earth a voice goes up with
Our own. It says: "Disarm! Disarm!
The sword of murder is not the balance of justice."
Blood does not wipe our dishonor,
Nor violence indicate possession.
As men have often forsaken the plough and the anvil
At the summons of war,
Let women now leave all that may be left of home
For a great and earnest day of counsel.
Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead.
Let them solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means
Whereby the great human family can live in peace...
Each bearing after his own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar,
But of God -
In the name of womanhood and humanity, I earnestly ask
That a general congress of women without limit of nationality,
May be appointed and held at someplace deemed most convenient
And the earliest period consistent with its objects,
To promote the alliance of the different nationalities,
The amicable settlement of international questions,
The great and general interests of peace.

Julia Ward Howe

My Last Dance

The shell of objects inwardly consumed
Will stand, till some convulsive wind awakes;
Such sense hath Fire to waste the heart of things,
Nature, such love to hold the form she makes.
Thus, wasted joys will show their early bloom,
Yet crumble at the breath of a caress;
The golden fruitage hides the scathèd bough,
Snatch it, thou scatterest wide its emptiness.
For pleasure bidden, I went forth last night
To where, thick hung, the festal torches gleamed;
Here were the flowers, the music, as of old,
Almost the very olden time it seemed.
For one with cheek unfaded, (though he brings
My buried brothers to me, in his look,)
Said, `Will you dance?' At the accustomed words
I gave my hand, the old position took.
Sound, gladsome measure! at whose bidding once
I felt the flush of pleasure to my brow,
While my soul shook the burthen of the flesh,
And in its young pride said, `Lie lightly thou!'

Then, like a gallant swimmer, flinging high
My breast against the golden waves of sound,
I rode the madd'ning tumult of the dance,
Mocking fatigue, that never could be found.

Chide not,--it was not vanity, nor sense,
(The brutish scorn such vaporous delight,)
But Nature, cadencing her joy of strength
To the harmonious limits of her right.

She gave her impulse to the dancing Hours,
To winds that sweep, to stars that noiseless turn;
She marked the measure rapid hearts must keep
Devised each pace that glancing feet should learn.

And sure, that prodigal o'erflow of life,
Unvow'd as yet to family or state,
Sweet sounds, white garments, flowery coronals
Make holy, in the pageant of our fate.

Sound, measure! but to stir my heart no more--
For, as I moved to join the dizzy race,
My youth fell from me; all its blooms were gone,
And others showed them, smiling, in my face.

Faintly I met the shock of circling forms
Linked each to other, Fashion's galley-slaves,
Dream-wondering, like an unaccustomed ghost
That starts, surprised, to stumble over graves.

For graves were 'neath my feet, whose placid masks

Smiled out upon my folly mournfully,
While all the host of the departed said,
'Tread lightly--thou art ashes, even as we.'

Julia Ward Howe