

The Battle Hymn of the Republic A Song for the Season

by Julia Ward Howe and William Steffe
May 25, 2013



This essay is adapted from Mark's book [A Song For The Season](#):

Memorial Day in America – or, if you're a real old-timer, Decoration Day, a day for decorating the graves of the Civil War dead. The songs many of those soldiers marched to are still known today – "The Yellow Rose Of Texas", "When Johnny Comes Marching Home", "Dixie". But this one belongs in a category all its own:

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...

In 1861, the United States had nothing that was recognized as a national anthem, and, given that they were now at war, it was thought they ought to find one – a song "that would inspire Americans to patriotism and military ardor". A 13-member committee was appointed and on

May 17th they invited submissions of appropriate anthems, the eventual winner to receive \$500, or medal of equal value. By the end of July, they had a thousand submissions, including some from Europe, but nothing with what they felt was real feeling. It's hard to write a patriotic song to order.

At the time, Dr Samuel Howe was working with the Sanitary Commission of the Department of War, and one fall day he and Mrs Howe were taken to a camp a few miles from Washington for a review of General McClellan's Army of the Potomac. That day, for the first time in her life, Julia Ward Howe heard soldiers singing:

John Brown's body lies a-mould'ring in the grave
John Brown's body lies a-mould'ring in the grave...

Ah, yes. The famous song about the famous abolitionist hanged in 1859 in Charlestown, Virginia before a crowd including Robert E Lee, Stonewall Jackson and John Wilkes Booth.

Well, no, not exactly. "By a strange quirk of history," wrote Irwin Silber, the great musicologist of Civil War folk songs, "'John Brown's Body' was not composed originally about the fiery Abolitionist at all. The namesake for the song, it turns out, was Sergeant John Brown, a Scotsman, a member of the Second Battalion, Boston Light Infantry Volunteer Militia." This group enlisted with the Twelfth Massachusetts Regiment and formed a glee club at Fort Warren in Boston. Brown was second tenor, and the subject of a lot of good-natured joshing, including a song about him mould'ring in his grave, which at that time had just one verse, plus chorus:

Glory, glory, hallelujah
Glory, glory, hallelujah...

They called it "The John Brown Song". On July 18th 1861, at a regimental march past the Old State House in Boston, the boys sang the song and the crowd assumed, reasonably enough, that it was inspired by the life of John Brown the Kansas abolitionist, not John Brown the Scots tenor. Over the years in the SteynOnline Song of the Week, we've discussed lyrics featuring real people. But, as far as I know, this is the only song about a real person in which posterity has mistaken it for a song about a completely different person: "John Brown's Body" is about some other fellow's body, not John Brown the somebody but John Brown the comparative nobody. Later on, various other verses were written about the famous John Brown and the original John Brown found his comrades' musical tribute to him gradually annexed by the other guy.

Sergeant Brown died during a Union retreat: when the enlistment of Colonel Webster's Twelfth Massachusetts Regiment expired in July 1864, only 85 of more than a thousand men were left to return home to New England. (That statistic alone tells you the difference between the Civil War and Iraq.) Huge crowds in Boston greeted the survivors with cries to sing "John Brown's Body" but, as one report commented, "the brave heroes marched silently to their barracks and the 'Websters' passed into history."

When the lads from the Boston Light Infantry cooked up their John Brown song, they used an old Methodist camp-meeting tune, "Brothers, Will You Meet Us?" So where did that come from?

Well, back in the 1850s, a Sunday school composer, William Steffe of Richmond, Virginia, was asked to go and lead the singing at a Georgia camp meeting. When he got there, he found there were no song books and so improvised some words to one of those tunes that – like most of the others in those pre-copyright days – was just sorta floating in the ether. Steffe's lyric, like the original John Brown song, had one verse – "Say, brothers, will you meet us?" – and one chorus: "Glory, glory, hallelujah..."

And somehow this combination – an improvised camp-meeting chorus with an in-joke verse about a Boston Scotsman – became the most popular marching song of the Union forces, the one bellowed out as Sherman's men marched through Georgia in 1864. According to William Hubbard's *History Of American Music*:

Lieutenant Chandler, in writing of Sherman's March to the Sea, tells that when the troops were halted at Shady Dale, Georgia, the regimental band played 'John Brown's Body', whereupon a number of Negro girls coming from houses supposed to have been deserted, formed a circle around the band, and in a solemn and dignified manner danced to the tune. The Negro girls, with faces grave and demeanor characteristic of having performed a ceremony of religious tenor, retired to their cabins. It was learned from the older Negroes that this air, without any particular words to it, had long been known among them as the 'wedding tune'. They considered it a sort of voodoo air, which held within its strains a mysterious hold upon the young colored women, who had been taught that unless they danced when they heard it played they would be doomed to a life of spinsterhood.

There doesn't seem to be a lot of evidence to support that last fancy. But, whatever the tune's origin, when Julia Ward Howe heard the song for the first time that fall day, "John Brown's Body" was already famous. She loved the martial vigor of the music, but knew the words were "inadequate for a lasting hymn". So her minister, Dr Clark, suggested she write some new ones. And early the following morning at her Washington hotel she rose before dawn and on a piece of Sanitary Commission paper wrote the words we sing today, casting the war as a conflict in which one side has the advantage of God's "terrible swift sword":

I have seen Him in the watchfires 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...

She finished the words and went back to bed. It was published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in February 1862. They didn't credit Mrs Howe and they paid her only four dollars.

Julia Ward Howe came from a distinguished lineage. Her forebear Richard Ward was Royal Governor of the British colony of Rhode Island and his son Samuel Ward was Governor of the American State of Rhode Island. Her husband, like his friend, the poet Lord Byron, had played an important role in helping the Greeks win independence from the Turks. Mrs Howe herself wrote many poems, Broadway plays and newspaper columns. But "The Battle Hymn Of The Republic" is her greatest achievement. Henry Steele Commager called it "the one great song to come out of the Civil War, the one great song ever written in America".

Whether or not that's true, most of us understand it has a depth and a power beyond most formal national songs. When John F Kennedy was assassinated, Judy Garland insisted on singing it on her TV show – the producers weren't happy about it, and one sneered that nobody would give a damn about Kennedy in a month's time. But it's an extraordinary performance. Little more than a year later, it was played at the state funeral of Winston Churchill at St Paul's Cathedral. Among those singing it was the Queen. She sang it again in public, again at St Paul's, for the second time in her life at the service of remembrance in London three days after September 11th, 2001. That day, she also broke with precedent and for the first time sang another country's national anthem – "The Star-Spangled Banner". But it was Julia Ward Howe's words that echoed most powerfully that morning as they have done since she wrote them in her bedroom in Washington 140 years earlier:

As He died to make men holy
Let us die to make men free
While God is marching on.

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The Truth About "Battle Hymn of the Republic"

Kenneth J. Morgan
May 2008

Julia Ward Howe

"Battle Hymn of the Republic" was written by Julia Ward Howe and is included in many hymnals used by Bible-believing churches. Christian congregations sing this song, feeling very patriotic, without knowing what the song means, why it was written, or anything about Julia Howe.

The fact is that this song was not written to praise God or Jesus. It was not even written within the framework of historical Christianity. Julia Ward Howe was a Unitarian and as such did not believe in the Trinity or the deity of Christ. She even preached occasionally in Unitarian pulpits.

Why "Battle Hymn of the Republic" Was Written

Julia Howe was a social activist and an ardent Abolitionist. Together with her husband, Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, they edited the *Boston Commonwealth*, a prominent anti-slavery paper, to which she also contributed articles, essays, and poems.

In November of 1861, Samuel and Julia Howe were invited to Washington by President Lincoln, where they toured a number of Union Army camps along the Potomac. While visiting these camps, they heard the soldiers singing a song well-known in both the

North and the South, "John Brown's Body Lies a'Mouldering in His Grave." The tune, written by a Southerner named John W. Staffe in 1855, had had many different lyrics set to it even before "John Brown's Body," but those were the words heard by Mrs. Howe on the tour. John Brown, of course, was a radical Abolitionist who had been hung for his raid on the Harper's Ferry arsenal in 1859 to secure weapons to arm slaves in Virginia for revolt.

Reverend James Freeman Clarke, a Unitarian minister and fellow Abolitionist, was another member of the tour. Being familiar with Mrs. Howe's poems, he urged her to write a new song fitting that tune for the War effort to replace "John Brown's Body." She did so that very night. Staying at the Willard Hotel in Washington on the night of November 18, 1861, Howe awoke with the words of the song in her mind and in near darkness wrote down the verses. She called the result "Battle Hymn of the Republic." It was first published in February, 1862, in the *Atlantic Monthly*.

Therefore, the purpose of this song was not to praise God or to give testimony to his great works or the blessings he bestows on Christians. It was written to stir the emotions of the Union troops and support the War against the Southern Confederacy. In this regard, the song was quite successful and immediately became popular with the soldiers.

The Meaning of "Battle Hymn of the Republic"

Suppose we examine the verses of the song and determine what Julia Ward Howe was really saying.

Verse 1

*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.*

Mrs. Howe's eyes saw nothing of the Lord's coming because he had not come. As a Unitarian in Boston in 1861, she probably did not believe in the physical, bodily return of Christ to this earth. This was her "interpretation" of the second advent: the Union army pouring out divine grapes of wrath on the Confederacy.

Verse 2

*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.*

The "hundred circling camps" were the Union Army camps that Mrs. Howe toured at President Lincoln's invitation. She actually imagined the watch-fires of the camps to be altars built to God! "By the dim and flaring lamps" in the camps, she was able to read his "righteous sentence" on the South.

Verse 3

*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."*

This is the verse conveniently left out of every hymnal that prints "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

According to Mrs. Howe, the "fiery gospel" is written and spread by "burnished rows of steel"--by rifles and bayonets.

The word "contemner" is not often used today. It means one who commits contempt. The verb "contemn" means to view or regard with disdain, scorn, or contempt; to despise.

The Southern Confederacy is here viewed as having contempt for God. To the extent that the Union Army deals with God's contemners in the South, to that same extent God will shed his grace on the Northern soldiers. What astonishing audacity!

But Mrs. Howe is still not through. Here the Southern Confederacy is cast in the roll of Satan himself. The prediction of Christ crushing Satan in Genesis 3:15 actually finds its fulfillment in the North crushing the South!

Verse 4

*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.*

Here Mrs. Howe depicts the choice made by her contemporaries between the cause of the North and the cause of the South as God "sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat." Of course, God was not then and is not yet sitting on his judgment seat. That again, like the bodily return of Christ to this earth, is an eschatological event. But even apart from that, the fact is that the Southern Army, not the Northern Army, had devout and Godly men such as Lee and Jackson as its leaders. They did not allow their soldiers to curse, they held Sunday services, and they held prayer meetings in their camps. Compare their lives with the likes of Grant and Sherman.

Verse 5

*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.*

Here we see the true purpose of this song: "As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free." "Battle Hymn of the Republic" was written to inspire the Union soldiers who were facing death in their effort to prosecute the War against the Confederacy.

Abolitionism, of course, comes out in the phrase, "make men free." That is the way Mrs. Howe, as an Abolitionist, wanted to portray the goal of the War--to end slavery. However, if anyone thinks the North waged war on the South in order to end slavery and that the South was fighting to preserve slavery, then he knows nothing of the real issues that caused the Southern states to succeed from the Union.

Many modern hymnals change this line to, "Let us live to make men free." Apparently, this was first done by Fred Waring, who used this song on his network radio show during World War II. The song was such a hit for the Pennsylvanians that Waring featured it as the closing number in his live concerts for the next 32 years.

But why have hymn-book editors followed him in this change? Do they think that perhaps the original intent of Mrs. Howe is better captured by the word "live"? After all, so the reasoning might go, men have to be alive to serve as missionaries to the unsaved who need to be "freed" from sin. How utterly foolish! The original intent of Mrs. Howe is quite clear, and she used exactly the right word.

So God is "marching on" with the Union troops? Indeed! I see nothing of God in the despicable march to the sea by General Sherman, destroying crops, farms, burning civilian houses, deliberately executing a scorched-earth policy of destruction across Georgia.

What a travesty that the words of this woman have found such loving acceptance in Bible-believing churches, even to the extent of stirring emotions of patriotic fervor to unparalleled heights of ecstasy in the congregations that sing this "hymn." It should never be sung by any Christian in any church in the North or the South or, in fact, anywhere.

**‘The Battle Hymn of the Republic’
What It Really Means**

By Michael Dan Jones

One of the most enduring traditional American hymns and patriotic songs is Julia Ward Howe's "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." It is a staple with many Christian church choirs and hardly a patriotic holiday passes without this song being sung and played at ceremonies nationwide. But is "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" truly appropriate for religious hymnals and patriotic ceremonies? Who was the author? What motivated and inspired her? What message was she trying to convey? What do the words mean? What meaning do they have for us today?

The author, Julia Ward Howe, was born in 1819 in New York City. She married a prominent physician, Dr. Samuel Howe Gridley (1801-1876) in 1843 and they lived in Boston, Mass. Where they raised five children. She was a much celebrated author, a tireless supporter of the anti-slavery movement, preached in Unitarian churches, and was a zealous worker for the advancement of women, prison reform, world peace and other humanitarian movements. She died 17 October 1910, at her summer home in Oak Glen, Rhode Island.

News reporters of her day delighted in describing this unusual woman. She was diminutive in stature, barely over five feet; invariably wearing a white trimmed, black dress and lace cap and had the habit of peering over her silver-rimmed glasses as she read her lecture in a crisp Boston-Yankee accent.

But her literary works had dark themes, such as murder, suicide and betrayal, perhaps reflecting her own unhappy marriage with her domineering and unfaithful husband. Her church, the Unitarian Church, although it claimed to be Christian, denied the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

And although she was devoted to the anti-slavery movement, like many other Northern radicals of her time, such as Abraham Lincoln, her own words reveal her to be a hypocrite on the subject of race. Julia Ward Howe believed and wrote the "ideal negro" would be one "refined by white culture, elevated by white blood." She also wrote, "the negro among negroes, is coarse, grinning, flat-footed, thick-skulled creature, ugly as Caliban, lazy as the laziest brutes, chiefly ambitious to be of no use to any in the world. . . He must go to school to the white race and his discipline must be long and laborious." Her own disgusting words expose the kind of hypocrisy that was rampant in the abolitionist movement.

Mrs. Howe and her husband, Samuel Gridley Howe, were supporters of the most radical and violent wing of the anti-slavery movement. These "disunion abolitionists" wanted to tear apart the American republic of sovereign, independent states, and reconstruct it along their own radical political, cultural and religious ideals. History records only how too well they succeeded with their treason.

Her husband and her pastor, Unitarian Rev. Theodore Parker, were conspirators in the treasonous group known as "The Secret Six." These wealthy Northeasterners financially supported terrorist and murderer John Brown in his insane Harpers Ferry raid, and advocated slave rebellion that would destroy the original American republic.

Brown's Anti-Southern terror campaign started in Kansas in the mid-1850s. There, on 23 May 1856, Brown and his murderous band descended on a settlement of Southerners at Pottawatomie Creek. They carried with them newly sharpened swords — an image that played a prominent part in Mrs. Howe's song. Her hero and his fellow terrorists literally hacked to death five innocent men. Northern historians try to excuse this crime by saying Brown was exacting revenge for atrocities committed by pro-slavery "Border Ruffians." This is a lie!

The first three of his victims, James P. Doyle and his sons, Drury and William, were Catholics from Tennessee who moved to Kansas to get away from slavery. They never had a thing to do with the institution. But because they spoke with a Southern drawl, and possibly because they were Catholic, Brown marched them to a clearing where their heads were split open with the sharpened swords. Drury's arms were chopped off. Mrs. Doyle was later asked why her husband and sons had been so brutally murdered? She replied, "just we were southern people, I reckon."

The other victims of Brown's murderous rampage were Southern settlers Allen Wilkinson, executed while his wife and children stood by in horror, and William Sherman, whose mutilated body was found floating in the creek with his left hand hanging by a strand of skin and his skull split open with "some of the brains" washed away.

When she got word of the massacre, Julia Ward Howe's own words reveal her to have been perversely thrilled and inspired by this grisly crime. The "terrible swift sword" in her song was terrible indeed, but hardly reflecting Christian values. Mrs. Howe and Brown mutually admired one another, as their own words demonstrate. Mrs. Howe wrote Brown was "a Puritan of Puritans, forceful, concentrated, and self-contained." Brown wrote of Mrs. Howe, in a letter to a friend, that she was "a defiant little woman" and that her personality was "all flash and fire." After the failure of Brown's bloody raid on Harpers Ferry, her husband, who was deeply involved in the treasonous conspiracy, like a coward in the night, fled to Canada until he was assured he was safe from prosecution in Massachusetts.

Mrs. Howe, in a letter to her sister at the time, made it clear she was in complete sympathy with the attempt to start a slave rebellion in the South, and tear the nation apart. She wrote, "I have just been to church and hear [James Freeman] Clarke [another Unitarian minister] preach about John Brown, whom God bless, and will bless! I am much too dull to write anything good about him, but shall say something at the end of my book on Cuba, whereof I am at present correcting the proof-sheets. I went to see his poor wife, who passed through here some days since. We shed tears together and embraced at parting, poor soul. . . . [Brown's] attempt I must judge insane but the spirit heroic. I should be glad to be as sure of heaven as that old man may be, following right in the spirit and footsteps of the old martyrs, girding on his sword for the weak and oppressed. His death will be holy and glorious—the new saint awaiting his martyrdom, and who, if he shall suffer [execution], will make the gallows glorious like the cross."

What "martyrs" could Mrs. Howe have been speaking of in her letter? Surely she could not mean the early Christian martyrs who were slain in many perverse, cruel and cold-blooded ways by the ancient Romans, just as her hero, John Brown, slew the Southern martyrs in Kansas. Her fascination with his sword is also revealed in the letter. This grotesque and warped view of Christian values is reflected in her violent and bloody war song.

Here we have the author of the much revered "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" condoning murder and treason by a ruthless and brutal killer. Her dark fascination with Brown's bloody sword and the killer's unbridled violence seemed to thrill the diminutive author. Clearly, the seeds of inspiration for her "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" had been planted in the poisonous soil of murder, rebellion and treason.

But what was the final inspiration for the famous lyrics? In November 1861, after the start of the tragic war the Howes had for so long worked to instigate, a party which included the Unitarian Rev. James F. Clarke and Mrs. Howe, visited an outpost of the invading Union troops in Northern Virginia. However an unexpected Confederate attack canceled the review. Mrs. Howe and her party were waiting in a buggy while Northern troops came marching by, returning from the skirmish. The camp visitors heard the Yankees merrily singing an obscene version of "John Brown's Body."

When the party returned to Washington D.C., the Rev. Clarke asked Mrs. Howe if she could supply more dignified words for the popular tune. So, inspired by the memory of her late, "martyred hero," John Brown, and the skirmish that so rudely interrupted her review of her beloved invading Northern vandals, she wrote the words for the famous Anti-Southern abolitionist anthem, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," by candlelight in the middle of the night at the Willard Hotel.

James T. Fields, the editor of the Atlantic Monthly, accepted the song and published it as a poem in the February 1862 issue. This bloody, hate-filled, song has been marching on ever since. The "hymn," sung by so many church and school choirs, was inspired not by the Bible or a stirring religious sermon, but by a dastardly killer, John Brown, and by the march of Northern invaders trampling over Southern soil, Southern lives and Southern rights in quest of subjugating or killing the Southern people. And what horrible crime was the South guilty of to warrant its extermination?

The people of the South were guilty of only wanting independence for a government of their own choosing, a pro-Christian, God-based government that safeguarded states' rights, individual liberty and put strict limits on the national government. This was the type of government the founders established in 1776, and the South was trying to preserve it as handed to them.

It was Abraham Lincoln, who is said to have cried the first time he heard the abolitionist war song, and radicals like Mrs. Howe who were the real revolutionaries. It was their forces who, by brute force of arms, destroyed the original voluntary union of sovereign, independent states at the cost of 620,000 dead Americans, and changed the nation into an involuntary union of defeated, militarily occupied, captive states.

In 1863, Mrs. Howe recited "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" at a gathering of fanatical abolitionists. One of those who saw and heard her, commented, she had a "weird, penetrating voice." Considering the bloody, ungodly history of her war song, what a chilling experience that must have been.

In summary, here is a "hymn" celebrating the killing of Southerners on Southern soil, written by someone involved in the most radical causes of her day, who supported the most extreme and violent response to the South, who wrote the song after being inspired by the murderous career of John Brown and her Northern vandal invaders of the South. Whenever "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" is played, five innocent men hacked to death by the "terrible swift sword" of John Brown should be remembered. It is also a dirge for the 620,000 Americans who died in the War for Southern Independence and which war transformed America into a despotic centralized state with practically unlimited powers

What meaning does the song have for the South today?

It is, in effect, a "stealth" heritage attack. It is conditioning Southerners to accept the Yankee myth of history that their ancestor's were wrong, and their Northern "betters" were right and they should be glad 260,000 Southrons were slaughtered in the War for Southern Independence. The message of the song is, "Believe in Mrs. Howe's almighty centralized government to tell you what is right and what is wrong." Don't listen to the founders of 1776 or 1861, is the message of this hymn. Yes, Mrs. Howe's abolitionist hymn is still doing her work, quietly and covertly, of destroying Southern heritage by conditioning Southerners to accept her fanatically leftist cultural and religious philosophy.

How ironic that such a joyous traditional Southern song as "Dixie" is now all but banned throughout the South, while a vicious Anti-Southern war song such as "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" is sung in churches and patriotic ceremonies all over the Confederate states.

What meaning does it have for the Church?

Did Jesus Christ teach that God is a vengeance seeking, sword-wielding maniac that slaughters innocents and tramples people under His wrathful feet, as Mrs. Howe's violent and bloody lyrics would have you believe? No, such lyrics don't fit in with any Christian liturgy I'm familiar with. They do fit in the theology of radical egalitarianism which says everyone must be equal in all aspects of life, or the full force and power of the federal government will destroy you. It also fits in the philosophy of giving to the government god-like powers to declare a whole segments of humanity as non-persons, such as the unborn, who can then be legally slaughtered by the millions at the whim of the mother and abortionist.

If Americans truly care about individual liberty, limited, constitutional government, and the sacred right of self-government of the people in their states assembled, then all such false icons as "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" must be exposed and rejected.

For further reading, I suggest:

- "The Secret Six: The True Tale of the Men Who Conspired with John Brown," by Edward J. Reunion Jr. (New York, 1995)
- "The Secret Six: John Brown and the Abolitionist Movement" by Otto Scott (Murphy, Calif., 1993)

- "The Singing Sixties: The Spirit of the Civil War Days Drawn from the Music of the Times" by Willard A and Porter W. Heaps (Norman, Okla., 1960)
- "Notable American Women 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary" Vol. 11, Article on Julia War Howe, (Cambridge, Mass.)
- "The Encyclopedia of Religion" Vol. 15&16, Article on Unitarians, (New York, 1995).

" I do not believe in battles ending this war. You may plant a fort in every district of the South, you may take possession of her capitals and hold them with your armies, but you have not begun to subdue her people. I know this seems like absolute barbarian conquest, I allow it, but I do not believe there will be any peace until 347,000 men of the South are hanged or exiled. (Cheers)....in a speech by Wendell Phillips in Rad Repub Rev Beecher's church.

While the jaunty southern air, *Dixie*, is frowned upon, we are urged to rejoice in the pumping, tramping sounds of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* ~ the song that accompanied the gruesome work of the Yankee and his *Terrible, Swift, Sword*. I don't know what a "battle hymn" is.

I know what a battle is, and I know what a hymn is, but somehow I never did connect the two. Here, in the South, we sing hymns to God and pray that we can stay out of battles. I guess we just don't share the Yankee appreciation of war; nor understand the allegorical message of hate that Mrs. Howe so cunningly disguised.

Mrs. Howe's lyrics emphasizes the largely believed notion the only way to achieve victory over the South was kill its citizens and their soldiers. She simply applied the lyrics to the music of *John Brown's Body*, a marching tune favored by Northerners, blaming the Lord with issuing the grisly order to go forth and kill. John Brown, a crazed murderer, may have been an inspiration for the North, we Southerners hung him!

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat; I have seen him in the watchfires of a hundred circling camps, etc. It is blasphemous, gory, and profane, and credit must be given to church choirs who remove it from their repertoire upon learning of its irreverent symbolism.

Mrs. Howe *intended* it to spur the Northern soldiers into *trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored*', and this means trample out the South. The bleeding purple of the wine vat was the blood of southerners. What's more she incites Yankee soldiers, aided by God himself, to wreak vengeance on the South with the *fierce lightning of his terrible, swift sword*.

A more bloodthirsty song was never written! First, Mrs. Howe crams Southerners into a wine vat and tramples them to a bloody pulp. Then, we are to be hacked through and through with the terrible swift sword of ~ yes indeed ~ God himself.

The Battle Hymn of the Republic is now sung, North and South, as the ultimate paean of true American soul. *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, as we go marching on.*

Southerners being from the Bible Belt, can't help but know that men cannot be transfigured. The Transfiguration of the Holy Mount happened only to Jesus. Her words, however, imply that crushing Southerners may have the same beatifying results.

No wonder the gray-clad boys wished they were in the land of cotton!

....by David Wright (excerpts from "*The Last Rebel Yell*" by Michael Andrew Grissom