

Battle Hymn of the Republic

The hymn was born during the American Civil War, when Julia W. Howe visited a Union Army camp on the Potomac River near Washington, D. C. She heard the soldiers singing the song “John Brown’s Body,” and was taken with the strong marching beat. She wrote the words the next day.



Julia W. Howe (1819-1910)

“I awoke in the grey of the morning, and as I lay waiting for dawn, the long lines of the desired poem began to entwine themselves in my mind, and I said to myself, “I must get up and write these verses, lest I fall asleep and forget them!” So I sprang out of bed and in the dimness found an old stump of a pen, which I remembered using the day before. I scrawled the verses almost without looking at the paper.”

The hymn appeared in the Atlantic Monthly in 1862. It has been sung at the funerals of British statesman Winston Churchill, American senator Robert Kennedy, and United States Presidents Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon.

Music: John Brown’s Body, possibly by John William Steffe. John Brown was an American abolitionist who led a short lived insurrection to free the slaves.

Lyrics

Minę 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.

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.

Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! 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.

Glorious! Glorious! Hallelujah! Glorious! Glorious! Hallelujah!
Glorious! Glorious! 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.

Glorious! Glorious! Hallelujah! Glorious! Glorious! Hallelujah!
Glorious! Glorious! 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 live to make men free;
[originally ...let us die to make men free]
While God is marching on.

Glorious! Glorious! Hallelujah! Glorious! Glorious! Hallelujah!
Glorious! Glorious! Hallelujah! 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 honor to the brave;
So the world shall be His footstool, and the soul of wrong His slave,
Our God is marching on.

Glorious! Glorious! Hallelujah! Glorious! Glorious! Hallelujah!
Glorious! Glorious! Hallelujah! Our God is marching on.