

Florence Howe Hall



*The Story
of the Battle Hymn
of the Republic*

Florence Howe Hall

The Story of the Battle Hymn of the Republic



Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4066338109989

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I THE ANTI-SLAVERY PRELUDE TO THE GREAT TRAGEDY OF THE CIVIL WAR

II THE CRIME AGAINST KANSAS

III MRS. HOWE VISITS THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC

IV "THE BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC"

V THE ARMY TAKES IT UP

VI NOTABLE OCCASIONS WHERE IT HAS BEEN SUNG

VII HOW AND WHERE THE AUTHOR RECITED IT

VIII TRIBUTES TO "THE BATTLE HYMN"

IX MRS. HOWE'S LESSER POEMS OF THE CIVIL WAR

X MRS. HOWE'S LOVE OF FREEDOM AN INHERITANCE

*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.*

*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.*

THE STORY OF “THE BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC”

I THE ANTI-SLAVERY PRELUDE TO THE GREAT TRAGEDY OF THE CIVIL WAR

Table of Contents

The encroachments of the slave power on Northern soil—Green Peace, the home of Julia Ward Howe, a center of anti-slavery activity—She assists her husband, Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, in editing the *Commonwealth*—He is made chairman of the Vigilance Committee—Slave concealed at Green Peace—Charles Sumner is struck down in the United States Senate.

THE “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” “the crimson flower of battle,” bloomed in a single night. It sprang from the very soil of the conflict, in the midst of the Civil War. Yet the plant which produced it was of slow growth, with roots reaching far back into the past.

In order to understand how this song of our nation sprang into sudden being we must study that stormy past—the prelude of the Civil War. How greatly it affected my mother we shall see from her own record, as well as from the story

of the events that touched her so nearly. My own memory of them dates back to childhood's days. Yet they moved and stirred my soul as few things have done in a long life.

Therefore I have striven to give to the present generation some idea of the fervor and ferment, the exaltation of spirit, that prevailed at that epoch among the soldiers of a great cause, especially as I saw it in our household.

Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his
heel.

So many years have elapsed since the evil monster of slavery was done to death that we sometimes forget its awful power in the middle of the last century. The fathers of the Republic believed that it would soon perish. They forbade its entrance into the Territories and were careful to make no mention of it in the Constitution.

The invention of the cotton-gin changed the whole situation. It was found that slave labor could be used with profit in the cultivation of the cotton crop. But slave labor with its wasteful methods exhausted the soil. Slavery could only be made profitable by constantly increasing its area. Hence, the Southern leaders departed from the policy of the fathers of the Republic. Instead of allowing slavery to die out, they determined to make it perpetual. Instead of keeping it within the limits prescribed by the ancient law of the land, they resolved to extend it.

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 gave the first extension of slavery, opening the great Territory of Missouri to the embrace of the serpent. The fugitive-slave law was

signed in 1850. Before this time the return of runaway negroes had been an uncertain obligation. The new law took away from State magistrates the decision in cases of this sort and gave it to United States Commissioners. It imposed penalties on rescues and denied a jury trial to black men arrested as fugitives, thus greatly endangering the liberties of free negroes. The Dred Scott decision (see page 10), denying that negroes could be citizens, was made in 1854. In 1856 the Missouri Compromise was repealed by the Kansas and Nebraska law.[\[1\]](#) Additional territory was thrown open to the sinister institution which now threatened to become like the great Midgard snake, holding our country in its suffocating embrace, as that creature of fable surrounded the earth. It was necessary to fling off the deadly coils of slavery if we were to endure as a free nation.

The first step was to arouse the sleeping conscience of the people. For the South was not alone in wishing there should be no interference with their "peculiar institution." The North was long supine and dreaded any new movement that might interfere with trade and national prosperity. I can well remember my father's pointing this out to his children, and inveighing against the selfishness of the merchants as a class. Alas! it was a Northern man, Stephen A. Douglas, who was the father of the Kansas and Nebraska bill.

"The trumpet note of Garrison" had sounded, some years before this time, the first note of anti-slavery protest. But the Garrisonian abolitionists did not seek to carry the question into politics. Indeed, they held it to be wrong to vote under the Federal Constitution, "A league with death and a covenant with hell," as they called it. Whittier, the

Quaker poet, took a more practical view than his fellow-abolitionists and advocated the use of the ballot-box.

When the encroachments of the slave power began to threaten seriously free institutions throughout the country, thinking men at the North saw that the time for political action had come. There were several early organizations which preceded the formation of the Republican party—the Liberty party, Conscience Whigs, Free-soilers, as they were called. My father belonged to the two latter, and I can well remember that my elder sister and I were nicknamed at school, “Little Free-Dirters.”

The election of Charles Sumner to the United States Senate was an important victory for the anti-slavery men. Dr. Howe, as his most intimate friend, worked hard to secure it. Yet we see by my father’s letters that he groaned in spirit at the necessity of the political dickering which he hated.

Women in those days neither spoke in public nor took part in political affairs. But it may be guessed that my mother was deeply interested in all that was going on in the world of affairs, and under her own roof, too, for our house at South Boston became one of the centers of activity of the anti-slavery agitation.

My father (who was some seventeen years older than his wife) well understood the power of the press. He had employed it to good effect in his work for the blind, the insane, and others. Hence he became actively interested in the management of the *Commonwealth*, an anti-slavery newspaper, and with my mother’s help edited it for an entire winter. They began work together every morning, he preparing the political articles, and she the literary ones.

Burning words were sent forth from the quiet precincts of "Green Peace." My mother had thus named the homestead, lying in its lovely garden, when she came there early in her married life. Little did she then dream that the repeal of the Missouri Compromise would disturb its serene repose some ten years later.

The agitation had not yet become so strong as greatly to affect the children of the household. We played about the garden as usual and knew little of the *Commonwealth* undertaking, save as it brought some delightful juveniles to the editorial sanctum. The little Howes highly approved of this by-product of journalism!

Our mother's pen had been used before this time to help the cause of the slave. As early as 1848 she contributed a poem to *The Liberty Bell*, an annual edited by Mrs. Maria Norton Chapman and sold at the anti-slavery bazars. "In my first published volume, *Passion Flowers*, appeared some lines 'On the Death of the Slave Lewis,' which were wrung from my indignant heart by a story—alas! too common in those days—of murderous outrage committed by a master against his human chattel" (*Recollections of the Anti-Slavery Struggle*, Julia Ward Howe).

Another method of arousing the conscience of the nation was through the public platform. My father and his friends were anxious to present the great question in a perfectly fair way. So a series of lectures was given in Tremont Temple, where the speakers were alternately the most prominent advocates of slavery at the South and its most strenuous opponents at the North. Senator Toombs, of Georgia, and General Houston, of Texas, were among the former.