

MUSIC

The Battle Hymn (Julia Ward Howe)

John Brown was an abolitionist whom some believe inherited traits of insanity from his mother. After years of peacefully opposing slavery he turned to force. On May 25, 1856 he murdered five pro-slavery opponents in what came to be known as the "Pottawatomie Massacre." Before the massacre he said, "I have no choice. It has been decreed by Almighty God, ordained from eternity, that I should make an example of these men."

In 1858 he was involved in another raid to free all slaves. It resulted in another death and he fled to Canada.

His most famous raid, however, occurred on October 16, 1859. With 21 men he captured the U.S. Arsenal at Harper's Ferry and took several hostages. He was captured on October 18 and hanged for treason and murder on December 2.

When the Civil War broke out the federal Troops sang a popular war song:

"John Brown's body lies a mouldering in the grave, but his soul goes marching on. . . ."

Julia Ward Howe heard the troops sing this song around a campfire during those dark and dismal days of civil conflict. Her pastor, the Rev. James Freeman Clarke, said to her that night, "Mrs. Howe, why do you not write some good words for that stirring tune?"

Mrs. Howe wrote:

I went to bed that night as usual and slept, according to my wont, quite soundly. I awoke in the grey of the morning twilight, and as I lay waiting for the dawn, the long lines of the desired poem began to twine themselves in my mind. Having thought out all the stanzas, I said to myself, "I must get up and write these verses down, lest I fall asleep again and forget them." So with a sudden effort I sprang out of bed, and found in the dimness an old stump of a pen which I remembered to have used the day before. I scrawled the verses almost without looking at the paper. Having completed my writing, I returned to bed and fell asleep, saying to myself: "I like this better than most things I have written."

Mrs. Howe's poem was put to the music of John Brown's *Body . . .* and became the most popular war song of the 1860's. It was "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

It was sung with the belief that God's wrath was being poured out by "loosing the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword." It was a "fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel." The Union troops believed that God was operating through them "trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored." As they marched they sang "His truth is marching on. . . ."

Abraham Lincoln heard the song for the first time on the evening of February 2, 1864. Those who were there said that tears came rolling down his cheeks as the booming voice of Chaplain McCabe rang out in the hall of the House of Representatives.

It is a beautiful hymn . . . still not popular in the hearts of many Southerners . . . and seldom sung as it was originally written . . . as a "Battle Hymn!"

Adapted from *The Life of Chaplain McCabe*
Fleming Revell, 1908

“ . . . Bring Me a Minstrel . . . ”

(Elisha – II Kings 3:15)

Elisha was a prophet of God with a double portion of Elijah's spirit (II Kgs. 1:9ff). Some of his miracles include:

Miracle water from barren land (II Kgs. 2:19-22)

Death to those who would dare to mock him (II Kgs. 2:23-25)

Miracle oil to pay a widow's debts (II Kgs. 4:1-7)

A dead boy restored to life (II Kgs. 4:8-37)

The miraculous feeding of a hundred men (II Kgs. 4:42-44)

Healing the leprosy of Naaman the Syrian (II Kgs. 5:1-19)

Blinding the Syrian army (II Kgs. 6:17-23)

Predicting the death of Ben-hadad (II Kgs. 8:7-15)

The miracle working power of Elisha was so great that even after his death a dead man was brought back to life by merely touching his bones (II Kgs. 13:20-21).

The story before us today, however, involves the miracle of music. Three kings amassed an army to fight the Moabites. Their invading army made a large circuit of seven days journey without finding any water. In desperation they sought out Elisha to give them guidance.

It was at this juncture that Elisha said, “. . . bring me a minstrel, and it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him” (II Kgs. 3:15).

God determined to give them a valley full of water without wind or rain . . . and he also determined to give them victory over the Moabites.

Isn't it interesting, however, that the “hand of the Lord” and the revelation of this miracle came in conjunction with the music of a minstrel.

The deeply spiritual Elisha stood in the presence of sinful men. One of the kings who stood before him was Johoram, the

son of the infamous Baal worshipping Ahab of Israel. Another of the kings was from Edom and he also did not worship Jehovah. Had it not been for the presence of Jehoshaphat, Elisha would not have even given these other kings the honor of looking at them (II Kgs. 3:14).

Elisha had been a student and an apprentice to Elijah. His track record of revelations and miracles indicates that he had learned his lessons well. It is therefore profoundly significant that in this difficult circumstance he would call for the ministry of a minstrel. He knew that the right kind of music would create a spiritual atmosphere. He knew that the right kind of music would open his spirit to God's Spirit. He knew that the right kind of music would make him sensitive to the hand of God . . . and sure enough . . . when the minstrel played, the "hand of the Lord came upon him."

Just yesterday I was privileged to make a hospital call with Ron Noel. Not too many years ago Ron was near death with a heart condition. As Ron hovered near death and fought his way back through many weeks of convalescence he came to appreciate the ministry of Christian music. His vast library of Christian records and his willingness to listen to Christian music for hours every day should not be forgotten when you remember that Ron Noel and his faithful wife are deeply spiritual people.

I have been told that the largest group of people ever to assemble in Joplin, Mo. came to hear music. The right kind of melody has the power to minister to us in ways that approach the miraculous. The wrong kind of music can drive away the irenic Spirit of God and prepare a group of savages for war.

The next time you face a crisis and have a desperate need to feel the hand of God . . . why not call for a minstrel?