

Julia Ward Howe: Beyond the Battle Hymn of the Republic

Mother's Day and Peace



Julia Ward Howe was a famous woman activist in the late 1800's. Among her accomplishments was writing the poem "The Battle Hymn of the Republic". She also started a precursor to today's Mother's Day. The information below was (copied from womenshistory.about.com)

Julia Ward Howe's accomplishments did not end with the writing of her famous poem, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." As Julia became more famous, she was asked to speak publicly more often. Her husband became less adamant that she remain a private person, and while he never actively supported her further efforts, his resistance eased.

She saw some of the worst effects of the war -- not only the death and disease which killed and maimed the soldiers. She worked with the widows and orphans of soldiers on both sides of the war, and realized that the effects of the war go beyond the killing of soldiers in battle. She also saw the economic devastation of the Civil War, the economic crises that followed the war, the restructuring of the economies of both North and South.

In 1870, Julia Ward Howe took on a new issue and a new cause. Distressed by her experience of the realities of war, determined that peace was one of the two most important causes of the world (the other being equality in its many forms) and seeing war arise again in the world in the Franco-Prussian War, she called in 1870 for women to rise up and oppose war in all its forms. She wanted women to come together across national lines, to recognize what we hold in common above what divides us, and commit to finding peaceful resolutions to conflicts. She issued a Declaration, hoping to gather together women in a congress of action.

Here is her powerful Declaration:

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.