

JULIA WARD HOWE

(1819—1910)

My Last Dance

The shell of objects inwardly consumed
Will stand till some convulsive wind awakes;
Such sense hath Fire to waste the heart of things,
Nature such love to hold the form she makes.

Thus wasted joys will show their early bloom,
Yet crumble at the breath of a caress;
The golden fruitage hides the scathed bough;
Snatch it, thou scatterest wide its emptiness.

For pleasure hidden, I went forth last night
To where, thick hung, the festal torches gleamed;
Here were the flowers, the music, as of old;
Almost the very olden time it seemed.

For one with cheek unfaded (though he brings
My buried brothers to me in his look)
Said, 'Will you dance?' At the accustomed words
I gave my hand, the old position took.

Sound, gladsome measure! at whose bidding once
I felt the flush of pleasure to my brow,
While my soul shook the burthen of the flesh,
And in its young pride said, 'Lie lightly, thou!'

Then, like a gallant swimmer, flinging high
My breast against the golden waves of sound,
I rode the madd'ning tumult of the dance,
Mocking fatigue, that never could be found.

Chide not—it was not vanity, nor sense
(The brutish scorn such vaporous delight)
But Nature, cadencing her joy of strength
To the harmonious limits of her right.

She gave her impulse to the dancing Hours,
To winds that weep, to stars that noiseless turn;
She marked the measure rapid hearts must keep,
Devised each pace that glancing feet should learn.

And sure, that prodigal o'erflow of life,
Unvowed as yet to family or state,
Sweet sounds, white garments, flowery coronals
Make holy in the pageant of our fate.

Sound, measure! but to stir my heart no more—
For, as I moved to join the dizzy race,
My youth fell from me; all its blooms were gone,
And others showed them, smiling, in my face.

Faintly I met the shock of circling forms
Linked each to other, Fashion's galley-slaves,
Dream-wondering, like an unaccustomed ghost
That starts, surprised, to stumble over graves.

For graves were 'neath my feet, whose placid masks
Smiled out upon my folly mournfully,
While all the host of the departed said,
'Tread lightly—thou art ashes, even as we.

Battle-Hymn of the Republic (1862)

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.

JULIA WARD HOWE (May 27, 1819—October 17, 1910) b. New York City. Daughter of Julia Rush-Cutler Ward (an occasional writer of poems) and Samuel Ward (a wealthy banker); sister-in-law of sculptor Thomas Crawford and aunt of popular novelist F. Marion Crawford. In 1843 married reformer Samuel Gridley Howe (18 years her senior) and moved to Boston; they had six children, four of whom survived their mother (children included writers Laura Richards and Maud Howe Elliott). With her husband, published abolitionist newspaper *The Commonwealth* beginning in 1851; their Boston home was frequented by Theodore Parker, Charles Sumner, and other anti-slavery activists. First collection of poetry, *Passion Flowers*, appeared in 1854, followed by *Words for the Hour* (1857) and *A Trip to Cuba* (1860). *Atlantic Monthly* published "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" in April 1862; song became unofficial anthem of Union Army. After the war, Howe campaigned for woman suffrage; was a founder in 1868 of New England Woman Suffrage Association and served as its first president; active from 1869 on in American Woman Suffrage Association; president of Association for the Advancement of Women, 1878–88. Campaigned for world peace; in "Appeal to Womanhood Throughout the World" (1870) called for international women's peace conference; became president (1871) of Woman's International Peace Association. Active in support of prison reform and Greek independence. Was first woman elected to National Academy of Arts and Letters. Marriage strained by husband's objection to many of her public activities (she later wrote, "I have never known my husband to approve of any act of mine which I myself valued"); he died in 1876. Poetry collected in *Later Lyrics* (1866) and *From Sunset Ridge: Poems Old and New* (1899); other writings included *Sex and Education* (1874), *Modern Society* (1881), *Margaret Fuller* (1883), *Is Polite Society Polite?* (1895), and memoirs *Reminiscences* (1899) and *At Sunset* (1910). Died in Newport, Rhode Island.