

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean

DAVID T. SHAW AND THOMAS Á BECKET

Page | 1

First published in 1843, “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean” was a popular patriotic song in the twentieth century; its British counterpart, played to the same tune, is known as “Britannia, the Pride of the Ocean.” The exact origins and authorship of the song are disputed, but sometime around 1843, David T. Shaw, a singer in Philadelphia, penned some patriotic lines, which he gave to another musician, Thomas á Becket (1808–90), to put to music. Becket composed the tune, but may have also provided new lyrics to the song that Shaw then published, crediting Becket only as arranger. Becket soon published his own version, which itself may have been inspired by a British poem published by Stephen Joseph Meany in 1842. In any case, the song quickly became popular on both sides of the Atlantic, and soon became a patriotic standard.

How does this song differ from the previous celebrations of Columbia? What about it is celebrated here? What does it mean to call Columbia “the ark of freedom’s foundation”? What is the connection between that “ark” and the flag? Between that “ark” and the army and navy?

For a musical rendition of this song, see: <http://youtu.be/evYfXBoN9cU>.

O, Columbia! the gem of the ocean,
The home of the brave and the free,
The shrine of each patriot’s devotion,
A world offers homage to thee.
Thy mandates make heroes assemble
When Liberty’s form stands in view.
Thy banners make tyranny tremble
When borne by the red, white and blue!
When borne by the red, white and blue!
When borne by the red, white and blue!
Thy banners make tyranny tremble
When borne by the red, white and blue!

When war wing’d its wide desolation,
And threatened the land to deform,

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The ark then of freedom's foundation,
Columbia rode safe thro' the storm;
With her garlands of vict'ry around her,
When so proudly she bore her brave crew,
With her flag proudly floating before her,
The boast of the red, white and blue!
The boast of the red, white and blue!
The boast of the red, white and blue!
With her flag proudly floating before her,
The boast of the red, white and blue!

Page | 2

The Star-Spangled Banner bring hither,
O'er Columbia's true sons let it wave;
May the wreaths they have won never wither,
Nor its stars cease to shine on the brave.
May thy service, united, ne'er sever,
But hold to their colors so true.
The Army and Navy forever,
Three cheers for the red, white and blue!
Three cheers for the red, white and blue!
Three cheers for the red, white and blue!
The Army and Navy forever.
Three cheers for the red, white and blue!