

THE SINGING CHAPLAIN:
BISHOP CHARLES CARDWELL McCABE AND THE
POPULARIZATION OF THE "BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC"

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"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."

—Julia Ward Howe

While these words may not be as familiar as those of the "Star Spangled Banner," the fact that we know them at all is due to two rather disparate people—one a New York heiress married to a member of Boston society, the other, a young army chaplain from Zanesville, Ohio. The name of the author of these stirring words, Julia Ward Howe, is well-known, but the story of how they grew so rapidly in popularity is as obscure as Charles Cardwell McCabe, the person many credit with making them famous.¹

The poem was written in late 1861, at which time Mrs. Howe accompanied her husband, Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, on a trip to Washington, D.C. Dr. Howe traveled to Washington as a member of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, a privately-funded medical relief agency created to assist in the war effort. Though early in the Civil War, the couple found Washington's streets brimming with both Union troops and the strains of martial music.²

On November 18, 1861, Dr. and Mrs. Howe left the comforts of the Willard Hotel to join a party for a picnic and review of Union troops posted across the Potomac River in Virginia. Rebel skirmishers suddenly interrupted the pageantry, and in a scene somewhat reminiscent of First Manassas, spectators and Union soldiers alike fled pell-mell for the relative safety of the Nation's Capital. In the ensuing traffic jam, the Howes' party fought tedium by singing popular army songs, among them "John Brown's Body." One of the members of the party, Reverend James Freeman Clarke of Boston, suggested that Mrs. Howe write some "good words" to accom-

¹Both Julia Ward Howe in her *Reminiscences* and her daughters, Maud Howe Elliott and Florence Howe Hall, in a 1916 biography, note McCabe's contribution to the "Battle Hymn's" popularity. A more recent biography, Deborah Pickman Clifford's *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* (1979), mentions neither McCabe nor the part he played in transmitting the song both during and after the Civil War.

²Louise Hall Tharp, *Three Saints and a Sinner* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1956), 241-242.

pany the stirring melody. The poet admitted that she had considered the task, but did not openly commit herself to writing new verses.³

The next morning, Mrs. Howe slowly awakened to the cadence of troops marching along the street below her hotel room. As she lay half-awake, a poem—an amalgam of marching rhythms, Old Testament verse, and patriotic fervor—began to take shape. Overtaken by sudden, semi-conscious zeal, she rushed from bed to set the words to paper; using the stub of an old pen and her husband's Sanitary Commission letterhead, she preserved the words that would give her lifelong fame. After minor changes, she submitted the poem to the *Atlantic Monthly* where the editors named it and published it on the front page of the February 1862 issue.⁴

In spite of the *Atlantic's* copyright, the poem found its way to newspapers throughout the country. The *New York Tribune* pulled Mrs. Howe's words from advance sheets for the magazine and printed the poem a full month before its rightful publication. The poem received some acclaim, but Mrs. Howe, every cognizant of "the vicissitudes of the war," was content "that the poem soon found its way to the camps [of soldiers]." Little did she realize how quickly the song would be taken up by citizen and soldier alike.⁵

The link between Charles C. McCabe and the "Battle Hymn" took shape a few months later, when as a twenty-five year old, newly ordained minister, he accepted appointment as chaplain of the 122d Ohio Volunteers. At that time, McCabe read Mrs. Howe's words in the *Atlantic*; the young chaplain was so moved by their power that he committed the poem to memory before leaving his study. Chaplain McCabe, whose rich baritone voice was well-known among the Methodists of central Ohio, realized that the words went to the tune of "John Brown's Body" (the marching song that had so inspired Mrs. Howe) and immediately began to teach it to the men of his regiment. When the 122d marched out of Zanesville, Ohio in September, 1862, McCabe had made certain that the "Battle Hymn" was among his regiment's extensive repertoire.⁶

That winter, the 122d marched into the Shenandoah Valley, near Winchester, Virginia, where it became part of Major General Robert H. Milroy's command. McCabe was devastated by the separation from his new bride, Rebecca, but he felt duty-bound to provide the men of his regiment with spiritual guidance.⁷ To further his mission, McCabe

³Ibid., 243-244; for a similar account see: Laura E. Richards and Maud Howe Elliott, *Julia Ward Howe, 1819-1910* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), 186-187.

⁴Ibid., 244-245 and Boyd B. Stutler, "John Brown's Body," *Civil War History* 4 (December 1958): 259.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Frank Milton Bristol, *The Life of Chaplain McCabe, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Revell, 1908), 78-79, 194-195.

⁷Charles Cardwell McCabe to Rebecca McCabe, November 1, 1862, McCabe Papers, American University Archives Washington, D.C.

personally addressed “a copy of the Testament” to each of the nearly 1,000 men of his regiment. Moreover, McCabe refused lodging with the officers in the warmth and comfort of a local hotel, preferring, as he put it: “to remain with the soldiers—to them I am sent—I must not refuse to suffer with them.” In spite of such hardships, the young Chaplain felt great joy in carrying out the work for which he believed he had been created.⁸

As Milroy guarded the Union’s western flank with between 6,000 and 8,000 men, General Robert E. Lee was preparing to launch a summer offensive that would ultimately reach as far as the small town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. As part of Lee’s plan, the Second Corps, commanded by Lieutenant General Richard S. Ewell, was to sweep northward through Winchester en route to Pennsylvania.⁹ Many confederates, including Ewell, believed anecdotal accounts of Milroy’s mistreatment of those loyal to the southern cause. The peg-legged former cavalryman, whose promotion to corps commander had come only a few days earlier, planned to teach the interlopers a lesson.¹⁰

Many of the Federals, Chaplain McCabe included, had great confidence in Milroy. The previous summer, Milroy had proven himself a feisty, albeit unexceptional Union commander during Major General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson’s famous Shenandoah Valley campaign. Despite this experience, Ewell’s veteran rebel forces overwhelmed the town and its defenders, capturing nearly 4,000 Union troops. As the Confederate Corps pushed through the Valley, remnants of the Union force, including General Milroy, fled to nearby Harper’s Ferry. The Ohio regiments suffered in the confusion and contributed heavily to the numbers of casualties and prisoners. McCabe and the regimental surgeon, Dr. William M. Houston, came through the battle unscathed, but remained behind to care for the scores of wounded soldiers.¹¹

⁸Charles Cardwell McCabe to Rebecca McCabe, November 17, 1862, and February 4, and May 3, 1863, McCabe Papers.

⁹U.S. Department of War. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* ser. 1, vol. 27, pt. 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889), 313. (hereafter cited as *OR*.)

¹⁰McCabe reported that Milroy openly challenged the Confederates to collect the \$10,000 reward offered in Richmond for his head. McCabe continued: “Genl Milroy is a terrible man—He knows not the emotion of fear.” McCabe to Rebecca McCabe, February 4, 1863, McCabe Papers.

¹¹*OR*, ser. 1, vol. 27, pt. 2, 48-49, 68, 462-464; Charles Cardwell McCabe, “The Bright Side of Life in Libby Prison,” *Western Christian Advocate*, February 6, 1907, 10. While a good chaplain, McCabe did not display great military acumen. Months before Ewell routed Milroy’s force, McCabe predicted: “It would be useless for less than three times our number to attack us here. . . . I have great confidence in Milroy—he knows what he is about.” McCabe to Rebecca McCabe, February 4, 1863, McCabe Papers. Milroy’s defense of Winchester countered orders to withdraw to Harper’s Ferry. As a result, he was later relieved of command and brought before a court martial in August, 1863. Despite damning evidence against him, Milroy was exonerated. *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 27, pt. 2, 88-197.

Advancing rebels quickly rounded up the blue-clad samaritans and took them to Brigadier General John B. Gordon, who, when told of their selflessness, dispatched fifty of his men to assist in clearing the Union wounded from the field. The task completed, McCabe went to Ewell's second-in-command, Major General Jubal Early, and requested permission to return to his regiment at Harper's Ferry. Early proved a poor choice for such a request. As a lawyer before the war, he joined many of his fellow Virginians in opposing secession; nevertheless, Early threw in his lot with his native state when it left the Union. Like many southerners, Early identified Northern ministers with the abolitionists commonly blamed for bringing about the war.¹² The guileless young chaplain felt the full force of Early's hostility, as he, Dr. Houston, and the numerous northern prisoners, were marched off to prison in Richmond, via Staunton, Virginia. According to McCabe, the Confederate General told him: "They tell me you [preachers] have been shouting 'On to Richmond' for a long time, and to Richmond you shall go."¹³

McCabe and Houston were taken to Richmond's Libby Prison, which housed Union officers, while neighboring Belle Isle served as a prison for enlisted men. The prison was a converted, three-story warehouse along a canal near the James River. The young preacher survived the 150-mile march with his good spirits, voice, and growing collection of patriotic songs intact. All three would be needed in a place where inmates outnumbered blankets and prisoners contested with vermin for space in a series of drafty, unfurnished rooms.¹⁴ In the face of such odds, McCabe soon set about

¹²In his autobiography, Early wrote of the Civil War: "the struggle made by the people of the South was not for the institution of slavery, but for the inestimable right of self-government, against the domination of a fanatical faction at the North. . . ." Jubal A. Early, *Lieutenant General Jubal A. Early, C.S.A.; Autobiographical Sketch and Narrative of the War Between the States* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1912), x; for additional biographical information, see the "Autobiographical Sketch," vii-xxvi. Although Early generalized in his view of northern ministers, he was correct in McCabe's case. According to Bristol: "The McCabes . . . were the blackest kind of black abolitionists." 71. In addition, the young chaplain was an enthusiastic supporter of John C. Fremont, essentially because of the 1856 Republican nominee's staunch antislavery beliefs. A year later, the chaplain recorded having "preached with the slaves of yore—but now free men. Thank God there is not a slave in District of Columbia now—" See: McCabe to Rebecca McCabe, November 17, 1862, and February 22, 1864, McCabe Papers.

¹³McCabe, "Brighter Side," 10; Ewell did not mention this incident, but he did note sending over 3,300 prisoners to Richmond following the Winchester engagement. Early, *Autobiography*, 251-2.

¹⁴McCabe, "Bright Side," 10; Bristol, *Chaplain McCabe*, p. 96. There are many contemporary descriptions of conditions at Libby Prison, including a number of personal narratives. Both U.S. Sanitary Commission *Bulletins*, and its summary *Narrative of Privations and Sufferings of United States Officers and Soldiers While Prisoners of War* (Philadelphia: King, 1864) contain bitter and obviously weighted testimony, however, they offer detailed descriptions of the interior of Libby and of health care for Union prisoners.

to raise spirits and maintain morale, using both his musical gifts and pulpit-tempered eloquence. Soon after his arrival, he was charged with the musical entertainment for the prisoners' fervent, but necessarily discreet, Fourth of July celebration. In later years, former inmates reported that rebel guards and passersby alike often paused along Cary Street to listen to the strains of music coming from within the prison.¹⁵

Two weeks after his capture, rebel guards told McCabe and the others that the north had suffered a major defeat at Gettysburg. The news hit the inmates hard, as rumors suggested that Lee had taken over 40,000 prisoners. While the prisoners-of-war sat contemplating the magnitude of such a defeat, a slave who was allowed to sell newspapers to the inmates, quietly informed them that the guards' reports were false—Lee had, in fact, met defeat on the fields of Pennsylvania and was in full retreat. As news of Lee's defeat raced through the ranks, the young chaplain came forward to lead the assemblage in the singing of "national airs," among them "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." McCabe's rich baritone rang out through the entire song, as the well-coached inmates joined in for the chorus. A guard tried without success to quell the patriotic outpouring, but as McCabe himself described years later: "the song was out and it still echoes over that city [Richmond]." The scene was repeated a few days later when the federal prisoners received word of Major General Ulysses S. Grant's capture of Vicksburg, Mississippi.¹⁶

Later that summer, many of the prisoners, including McCabe, began to suffer from a number of water-born illnesses, which probably resulted from the disposal of raw sewage into a canal that doubled as the prison's water supply.¹⁷ Fellow chaplain Louis N. Beaudry reported that McCabe began feeling the effects of typhoid fever in September. The young chaplain was allowed the luxury of the only available bunk before being transferred to the prison hospital.¹⁸ He remained there for weeks as another inmate, Colonel William H. Powell, tried to nurse him back to health.¹⁹ During

¹⁵*The Libby Chronicle*, September 25, 1863, 33. The *Chronicle* was a discreet newsletter of humor and information gathered from the inmates of Libby Prison. It was edited by Louis N. Beaudry, chaplain of the 5th New York Volunteer Cavalry. In 1889, Beaudry had all the prison numbers published together in book form.

¹⁶McCabe, "Bright Side," 10-11. Alfred R. Calhoun, who was brought to Libby months later, recalled hearing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" sung during his first night in prison. By that time, McCabe had been transferred to the prison infirmary, but the singing of the "Battle Hymn" was carried on by the other inmates. "The First Night in Libby," *New York Times*, February 15, 1891, 11.

¹⁷"Our Prisoners in the South," *New York Times*, November 6, 1863, 1; a Confederate surgeon at Belle Isle listed diarrhea, dysentery, typhoid fever, and respiratory diseases as primary cause of sickness and death among Union prisoners. In early 1864, he reported like ailments among one-fourth of the inmates at Belle Isle.

¹⁸*Libby Chronicle*, October 2, 1863, note 46.

¹⁹McCabe, "Bright Side," 11.

the first week of October, Beaudry received permission to visit McCabe in the infirmary. He was shocked by the appearance of his young colleague:

On a miserable cot lay my dear friend asleep, burning with fever. I turned down the dirty sheet that covered him. An immense "grayback" [body louse] was crawling up his manly breast. I raised a lock of his heavy hair. The sight staggered me! Myriads of vermin were crawling in every direction. Every hair was beaded white with nits.²⁰

In late October, as part of an exchange of captured chaplains, the weakened, but recovering McCabe sailed down the James River from Richmond to the friendly confines of Fortress Monroe, Virginia. When released to federal authorities, McCabe weighed less than 100 pounds, but his spirit remained undiminished. His condition was not uncommon. Contemporary accounts describe his fellow parolees as underdressed and severely malnourished. Many were too weak to walk and a number died en route to Washington. The chaplain's memory of the voyage, however, revolved around a tin plate of food. In later years he claimed: "I have seen Niagara, I have walked amid the grandeur of Yosemite Valley, but I never saw anything that moved my soul like that beefsteak and baked potato! Then they brought me coffee . . . and in half an hour I was able to walk."²¹

Following his release from Libby prison, Chaplain McCabe became interested in the mission work of the United States Christian Commission, an outgrowth of the Young Men's Christian Association.²² Its mission of ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of Union soldiers appealed to his strong sense of patriotism and was compatible with his religious calling. The Commission had also provided him with much-needed Bibles, tracts, and supplies while he was chaplain of the 122d, and during his furlough home he more than returned this favor.²³

While in Ohio recovering from the effects of his imprisonment, McCabe eagerly participated in fundraising meetings for the commission. His gift of song and oratory not only helped to raise money for the Commission, but also [according to George H. Stuart, Chairman of the Christian Commission] was equal to "twenty recruiting officers" in prompting young men to enlist. For that reason, Stuart argued that McCabe's work for the Commission "would be serving the Union also."²⁴

²⁰Libby Chronicle, October 2, 1863, note 43.

²¹Washington Evening Star, October 22, 1863, 1. and October 30, 1863, 2.; McCabe, "Bright Side," 11. For similar accounts, see testimony given by Union surgeons stationed at Annapolis in U.S. Sanitary Commission. *Narrative of Privations and Sufferings of U.S. Officers and Soldiers while Prisoners of War*, 169-184.

²²For a short history of the Christian Commission, see: James O. Henry, "The United States Christian Commission in the Civil War," *Civil War History*, 6 (September, 1960): 374-388.

²³Bristol, *Chaplain McCabe*, 146-148.

²⁴George H. Stuart, Chairman, to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, January 13, 1864, United States Christian Commission Records, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

In January, 1864, McCabe, with Stuart's assistance, resigned his chaplaincy and assumed full-time duties with the Christian Commission. McCabe began his work immediately, as he made speeches on behalf of the Commission while ostensibly traveling to Washington in order to report for duty. Although McCabe desired a permanent post at the front, members of the Commission recognized his potential as a fundraiser, and in spite of his protests, assigned him to oversee the Commission's financial interests in the midwest. He received a commission as delegate to the U.S. Christian Commission on March 29, 1864.²⁵

During his stay in Washington, Chaplain McCabe began his administrative duties while also ministering to the troops and free Blacks that continued to swell the city's wartime population. It was not unusual for McCabe to officiate at four or five Sunday services at various camps or hospitals around the city.²⁶ On one Sunday, he reported preaching nine times, walking ten miles in the process. He also told of refusing "an invitation to preach to white folks" in order to preach to a congregation of former slaves. At that service, McCabe gave the choir copies of the "Battle Hymn," or "my hymn" as he referred to it in a letter to his wife, Rebecca. The experience so moved the young chaplain that he wrote: "I rather would *be* a nigger and feel as they feel and sing as they sing than be one . . . blaspheming the name of the Lord by . . . unmeaning praise." Nevertheless, McCabe already knew that such work was not his lot in life; instead, he was "doomed to raise money," aided in his task by his growing celebrity.²⁷

On February 2, 1864, while posted in Washington, McCabe went to the chamber of the House of Representatives in order to attend a celebration marking the second anniversary of the Christian Commission. Several notables were in attendance, including President Lincoln, who arrived to loud applause while the meeting was in progress. McCabe's good friend and former "nurse," Colonel William H. Powell, a recent parolee from Libby Prison, was also present.²⁸ Following speeches on behalf of the Commission, Chaplain McCabe was called forward to perform the song that was becoming his trademark, an event which he described in a letter to his wife:

Then after all these great men, your 'little hubby' was called out. . . . I made a brief address and wound up as requested singing the 'Battle Hymn,' Col. Powell singing bass. When we came to the chorus the audience rose. Oh, how they sang . . . Some shouted out loud at the last verse, and above all the uproar Mr. Lincoln's voice was heard: 'Sing it again.'²⁹

²⁵Bristol, *Chaplain McCabe*, 146, 163-166.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 155-156; C. C. McCabe to Rebecca McCabe, February 22, 1864, McCabe Papers.

²⁷McCabe to Rebecca McCabe, March 1, 1864, McCabe Papers; Bristol, *Chaplain McCabe*, 164.

²⁸Bristol, *Chaplain McCabe*, 198-203.

²⁹C. C. McCabe to Rebecca McCabe, February 3, 1864, McCabe Papers.

An account of the meeting in the *Washington Star* reflected the general public's lack of familiarity with the soon-to-be famous song. Its reporter wrote that McCabe "sang a song entitled the 'Battle Hymn of the Republic' which was composed and sung in Libbey[sic] Prison immediately after the Battle of Gettysburg." The reporter also described the tune and well-known chorus, noting that President Lincoln was among one of the first to rise during the singing of the chorus. The young chaplain acceded to the President's request for a reprise following a short talk by Colonel Powell, who recounted the horrors of his incarceration.³⁰

A couple of weeks later, on February 20, 1864, McCabe attended a reception of the White House. At that event, President Lincoln recognized him as the one who had led the singing at the Capitol. The President took the young chaplain aside, complimenting both the song and the singing as the "best I ever heard." McCabe described the encounter to his wife, admitting that the compliment "you know darling, tickled my vanity of which I have a full a share."³¹

Shortly thereafter, McCabe returned to the midwest as a home agent for the Christian Commission. He was responsible for holding public meetings and making collections on behalf of the Commission's Central Office, which paid his salary and directed his efforts. During this period, Chaplain McCabe began honing a lecture relating his short but colorful military career—a talk he would continue to present for the next forty years under the title of "The Bright Side of Life in Libby Prison." His oratory, coupled with his popular singing, served as linchpin for the Commission's fundraising in the Midwest.³²

McCabe's dazzling successes led members of the Commission to consider him "a most efficient home agent." In a history of the Christian Commission, Commission Secretary Lemuel Moss made special mention of the Chaplain's trip to rural Morgan County, Illinois, during the summer of 1864. In the span of a few days, McCabe efforts brought in \$22,700—the equivalent of a dollar for every man, woman and child living in the county.³³

That autumn, perhaps as a reward for his efforts, the Commission temporarily assigned Chaplain McCabe to work with soldiers at the front. Within miles of the Confederate defenses near Richmond, McCabe

³⁰"Second Anniversary of the U.S. Christian Commission," *Washington Star*, February 3, 1864, 3.

³¹McCabe to Rebecca McCabe, February 22, 1864, McCabe Papers; "The Reception This Afternoon," *Washington Star*, February 20, 1864, 1.

³²Bristol, *Chaplain McCabe*, 168; Lemuel Moss, *Annals of the United States Christian Commission* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1868), 171. In 1892, McCabe wrote: "I have lectured on 'The Bright Side of Life in Prison' for twenty years . . . [E]very dollar of which has gone to the Methodist Church for charity." "Chaplain M' McCabe in Libby," *New York Times*, February 2, 1892, 10.

³³Moss, *Christian Commission*, 331, 525.

inspected Commission stations, visited the wounded, and organized religious meetings. His gray overcoat sometimes led to speculation that he was a captured rebel, but such notions undoubtedly receded when the Chaplain rose to talk "in a patriotic strain" or sing the "Battle Hymn." McCabe loved work at the front, but before the year was out, the Commission had ordered him back north for the work to which he had been "doomed."³⁴

On April 14, 1865, while fundraising in Cincinnati, Ohio, McCabe rejoiced at the raising of "the old flag" over Fort Sumter, perhaps the most poignant symbol of the nation's strife. The chaplain's joy dissolved into profound grief, however, as word of Abraham Lincoln's assassination reached him the following day. Days later, McCabe withdrew from the Christian Commission convention being held in Chicago to attend funeral ceremonies in that city and in Springfield, Illinois, the late President's home. On April 30th, following a memorial address by Speaker of the House Schuyler Colfax, McCabe was asked to sing the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." The young chaplain did not think it appropriate, but reluctantly agreed to the request. In his diary, McCabe reported that "as we sang on, it was the natural expression of our gloomy joy." On May 3rd, the night before the President's interment, McCabe once again closed a memorial service with the "Battle Hymn," the "civil and military officers joining in the chorus." According to McCabe, it was sung "because Mr. Lincoln loved it so."³⁵

For the most part, the U.S. Christian Commission ceased to function in the months following Lee's surrender. Like other veterans, McCabe returned home, and in September 1865, he was appointed to Spencer Chapel in Portsmouth, Ohio. Apart from his duties as pastor, McCabe became interested in the newly-formed Freedman's Aid Society and foreign missions, both of which benefited from his ability to raise money. The Spencer Chapel prospered under McCabe's leadership, but his fateful prophecy of "doom" continued to ring true.³⁶

While at Portsmouth, McCabe's alma mater, the Wesleyan University of Ohio, sought to increase its endowment. Within months, the young pastor had amassed over \$87,000 for the University endowment. This feat did not go unnoticed by the Methodist Episcopal Church, for in 1868 he was elected Secretary of the Church Extension Society, charged with the purpose of raising money for the erection of new churches. With his new position McCabe carried both the "Battle Hymn" and his increasingly popular lecture on Libby Prison. Over the next forty years, thousands attended his lectures and listened to his rendition of the song that he

³⁴C. C. McCabe to Rebecca McCabe, October 9, 1864, McCabe Papers; Bristol, *Chaplain McCabe*, 181-187.

³⁵Bristol, *Chaplain McCabe*, 204-213.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 217-220.

occasionally called "my hymn." These crowds contributed both to the popularity of the song and to the financial success of whatever Methodist cause McCabe promoted.³⁷ In response to this seemingly endless fundraising, one friend made a habit of addressing his letters to "The Great American Champoin Beggar."³⁸

In 1891, McCabe became a founding member of the Board of Trustees of The American University, in Washington, D. C., the brainchild of Bishop John Fletcher Hurst. McCabe's fundraising skills and celebrity status within the church quickly elevated him to a position of importance right behind that of Bishop Hurst, who had been elected first chancellor of the fledgling enterprise. Five years later, in 1896, McCabe was elected to the Methodist episcopacy, thus unofficially making him the "Singing Bishop." Thereafter, any Conference over which McCabe presided usually took on the air of a revival or songfest.³⁹

It was appropriate that "Chappie," as Bishop Hurst affectionately called McCabe, should become the University's second chancellor in 1902. At the same time, McCabe remained on the lecture circuit and served as resident Methodist bishop for Philadelphia. The weight of these varied tasks, as well as the financial needs of the still-dormant graduate university, was great, but even as he approached his seventieth year, the Chaplain remained indefatigable. He continued to draw thousands, including many old veterans, to hear his famous lecture and the song so often associated with him. His reputation even preceded him to Latin America, where he lectured on Libby Prison during his travels there in 1900 and 1901.⁴⁰

³⁷Ibid., 231-334. Following sixteen years as Church Extension Secretary, the General Conference of 1884 elected McCabe Corresponding Secretary of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. As such, he immediately embarked on a campaign to raise money for missions using the slogan: "A Million for Missions." By 1887, McCabe was successful in raising at least one million dollars annually for missions; in 1892, the Society raised over one and a half million. McCabe resigned from the Missionary Society in 1896 when he was elected bishop at the General Conference.

³⁸Ibid., 243; McCabe's reputation did not die with him. After his death, a colleague wrote: "As a magician goes up and down the aisles, among the audience taking out of people's pockets and hands and even from their hair things that they did not know were there, so this man could go through an audience and gather out of people's pockets and strong boxes resources that they hardly knew they had at all, and he hypnotized this treasure out of their hands into his." William V. Kelley, "Chaplain McCabe, the Soldier," *Northwestern Christian Advocate*, March 27, 1907, 7-8.

³⁹Bristol, *Chaplain McCabe*, 336-339, 356-362.

⁴⁰Wilbur L. Davidson, "Chancellor McCabe," *The University Courier*, 13 (January, 1907): 1-3.; Bristol, *Chaplain McCabe*, 365-396. Bishop McCabe chaired the Methodist Episcopal Conference held in Mexico City in 1900. Under his leadership, the Conference passed resolutions against the demoralizing "Spanish pastime of bullfighting." McCabe intensified the surrounding controversy when he asked "American tourists not to help perpetuate this infamy by their money and their presence." 371-372. While in Montevideo, Uruguay, a year later, McCabe was invited aboard the U.S.S. *Chicago* where "he had a glorious time singing and telling the grand old story again to the gallant officers and men of the good ship," 380.

In 1904, over forty years after she wrote the "Battle Hymn," Julia Ward Howe sent Bishop McCabe an autographed copy of her famous song. In an accompanying note, she apologized for not sending it earlier, as "promised to you years ago." In wavering script that betrayed her age, Mrs. Howe hoped "that the old adage 'Better late than never'" would serve her at that time.⁴¹ In a letter to Mrs. Howe, McCabe boasted that "I have sung it a thousand times . . . and shall continue to sing it as long as I live. No hymn has ever stirred the nation's heart like 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic.'"⁴²

On December 11, 1906, while returning from a lecture and fundraising tour of western Connecticut and New York City, McCabe suffered a stroke and was taken to a New York City hospital. Doctors had warned him that the pace of his work endangered his health, but he continued to accept any "invitation where the need seemed urgent." The day before his attack, McCabe had worked to raise \$10,000 to pay off the mortgage of a church in Torrington, Connecticut. That night, forty-two years after he began, Chaplain McCabe delivered "The Bright Side of Life in Libby Prison" for the last time. McCabe seemed to sense his vulnerability, for in a letter just days before his stroke, he wrote: "I am still strong and vigorous, but sometimes men break down suddenly."⁴³

Bishop McCabe's wife, traveled from their home in Philadelphia to be at his side, but Bishop McCabe soon lapsed into unconsciousness. McCabe died quietly a few days later, on December 19, 1906. As he had prophesied to a family friend, "I will soon have a long rest, sudden death would be sudden glory."⁴⁴

Although McCabe rose to the office of both Methodist bishop and chancellor of the The American University, most of his friends and admirers continued to call him "Chaplain" McCabe. Many were indeed relieved to see that high office had done nothing to temper his infectious enthusiasm and above all else, his love for singing. The intensity of this affection shone through at his funeral, when the entire audience rose, not unlike the inmates at Libby Prison, to join with the soloist in singing the well-known chorus of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." For the "Singing Chaplain," the man who sang for presidents and Confederate guards alike, nothing could have been more fitting.⁴⁵

⁴¹Julia Ward Howe to C. C. McCabe, April 22, 1904, McCabe Papers.

⁴²Bristol, *Chaplain McCabe*, 195.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 400; C. C. McCabe to Edmund J. James, November 29, 1906, McCabe Papers.

⁴⁴Bristol, *Chaplain McCabe*, 401-402; Rebecca P. McCabe to Wilbur L. Davidson, June 12, 1907, Wilbur L. Davidson Papers, American University Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁵Bristol, *Chaplain McCabe*, 403-416; Philip Burroughs Strong, "If I were a Voice," *The Methodist*, August 18, 1921, 6.; "Choice Tributes to Bishop McCabe," *The University Courier*, 13 (January, 1907): 5-7.