

# "The Southern Cross"

COMMENTARY AND SIDEBAR NOTES BY L. MAREN WOOD

## As you read...

This poem, written by George Tucker, is patterned after "The Star-Spangled Banner" and is an attempt to adapt it to the Confederate cause. First published in *The Southern Literary Messenger* (March, 1861), it was soon printed in broadside form with the note that it was to be sung to the air of "The Star-Spangled Banner." — *Library of Congress* (see <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/lcpoetry/cwvc.html>)

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Whose freedom is the author of "The Southern Cross" referring to? Freedom from what?
2. What imagery did the author use to inspire readers and listeners?
3. Under what circumstances did the author believe southerners would go to war? What did this author believe white southerners were fighting for?
4. What historical people did the author refer to? Why do you think he chose to mention these people?
5. What events in American history did the author reference? Why do you think he chose to refer to these events?
6. Try singing the Southern cross to the tune of "The Star Spangled Banner." How does it compare? How does it make you feel? (You may want to read all four verses of "The Star Spangled Banner" (see <http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/the-lyrics.aspx>) — it's unlikely you've ever heard the last three sung!)

Oh! say can you see, through the gloom and the storm,  
More bright for the darkness, that pure constellation<sup>1</sup>?  
Like the symbol of love, and redemption its form,  
As it points to the haven of hope for the nation.  
How radiant each star, as the beacon afar,  
Giving promise of peace, or assurance in war!  
'Tis the Cross of the South<sup>2</sup>, which shall ever remain,  
To light us to freedom, and glory again!  
    How peaceful and blest was America's soil,  
'Till betrayed by the guile of the Puritan demon<sup>3</sup>,  
Which lurks under virtue, and springs from its coil,  
To fasten its fangs in the life blood of freemen,

Then boldly appeal, to each heart that can feel,  
 And crush the foul viper<sup>4</sup> 'neath liberty's heel!  
 And the Cross of the South shall in triumph remain,  
 To light us to freedom and glory again.

'Tis the emblem of peace, 'tis the day star of hope,  
 Like the sacred Labarum<sup>5</sup> that guided the Roman,  
 From the shore of the Gulf, to the Delaware's slope<sup>6</sup>,  
 'Tis the trust of the free, and the terror of foeman,  
 Fling its folds to the air, while we boldly declare,  
 The rights we demand, or the deeds that we dare!  
 While the Cross of the South shall in triumph remain,  
 To light us to freedom and glory again.

And if peace should be hopeless, and justice denied,  
 And war's bloody vulture should flap its black pinions,  
 Then gladly "to arms," while we hurl in our pride,  
 Defiance to tyrants, and death to their minions!  
 With our front in the field, swearing never to yield,  
 Or return like the Spartan<sup>7</sup>, in death on our shield!  
 And the Cross of the South shall triumphantly wave,  
 As the flag of the free, or the pall of the brave!

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## Notes

1. The southern cross is a constellation of stars visible from the Southern Hemisphere (and cannot be seen from the southern United States.) The author was making a comparison between the southern cross constellation and the stars that were on the Confederate flag. The Confederate flag was also called the Cross of the South.
2. The Cross of the South referred to the Confederate Flag.
3. The "Puritan demon" is abolitionism, which southerners saw as a dangerous, radical New England philosophy.
4. Viper is a type of poisonous snake with large fangs.
5. Labarum was the flag used by the Roman Emperor Constantine, who ruled Rome from 272-337. The flag combined Christian and traditional Roman military symbols.
6. The Gulf of Mexico to the Delaware River. The Delaware river flows through the northern states of Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York. Although the state of Delaware allowed slavery, its state legislature voted overwhelmingly against secession.

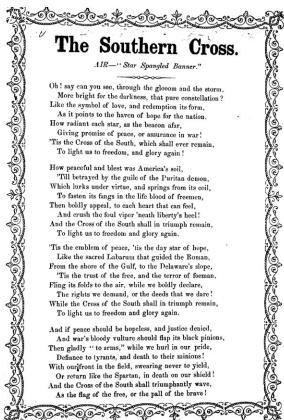


Figure 2. A song sheet published during the Civil War.

7. During the third and fourth centuries BCE, Sparta, a Greek city-state, was one of the dominant military powers in the Mediterranean. Spartan warriors were fierce fighters and feared by others in the region.

## About the author

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### Figure 2 (page 2)

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