



## The Southern Cross St. George Tucker (1861)

*St. George Tucker was a white Virginian who worked as a lawyer and a teacher in addition to writing poetry and fiction. He published this poem in a southern literary journal in March 1861—one month after the formation of the Confederate States of America and one month before the beginning of the Civil War. Tucker wrote his poem so that it could be sung to the tune used for Francis Scott Key’s “The Star-Spangled Banner,” to which Tucker’s text alludes; but at least one reprinting paired Tucker’s text with an original tune.*

*At the time Tucker wrote the poem, the new Confederate government was deciding what design to adopt for the nation’s flag. Tucker’s poem promotes the Southern Cross design: the X-shaped St. Andrew’s cross containing intersecting rows of stars, which is now a readily recognized symbol of the Confederacy. The Confederate government initially adopted instead the Stars and Bars, a design reminiscent of the US flag; but Confederate troops used the Southern Cross as a battle flag, and the symbol was later incorporated into the Confederacy’s national flag as well. As an expression of Confederate civil religion, Tucker’s poem is notable for invoking the Christianized Roman empire and for subverting the role that the Puritans have historically played in US civil religion.*

Oh say, can you see, through the gloom and the storm,  
more bright for the darkness, that pure constellation?  
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 they beacon afar,  
giving promise of peace or assurance in war;  
'tis the Cross of the South, which shall ever remain  
to light us to freedom and glory again.

How peaceful and blest was America’s soil  
'til betrayed by the guile of the Puritan demon,  
which lurks under virtue and springs from its coil  
to fasten its fangs in the lifeblood of freemen.  
Then loudly appeal to each heart that can feel,  
and crush the foul viper 'neath Liberty’s heel;  
and the Cross of the South shall forever remain  
to light us to freedom and glory again.

'Tis the emblem of peace, 'tis the daystar of hope;  
like the sacred labarum, which guided the Roman,  
from the shores of the Gulf to the Delaware’s slope,  
'tis the trust of the free and the terror of foemen.  
Fling its folds to the air while we boldly declare  
the rights we demand or the deeds that we dare;  
and the Cross of the South shall forever 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 his black pinions,  
 then gladly to arms! while we hurl, in our pride,  
 defiance to tyrants and death to their minions,  
 with our front to the field, swearing never to yield  
 or return, like the Spartan, 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.

**Source:** St. George Tucker, "The Southern Cross," *Southern Literary Messenger* 32, no. 3 (March 1861): 189. Digital scan available from Making of America, University of Michigan Library, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/maojrnl/acf2679.0032.003>. The University of Michigan Library provides access to these materials for educational and research purposes. Public domain in the United States.

Edited by John-Charles Duffy. Capital letters at the beginning of lines converted to lowercase for readability. *'Till* corrected to *'til*. Punctuation emended. The capitalizing of *Cross of the South* and of *Liberty*, personified, replicates the source publication, but other nouns capitalized in the source have been converted here to lowercase: *freedom*, *glory*, *virtue*, *labarum*, and *tyrants*.

This edited presentation of Tucker's poem is intended for *teaching* purposes only. For *research* purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.

**See also:** Sheet music that pairs Tucker's text with an original tune (not the tune for "The Star-Spangled Banner") is available as "The Cross of the South," Civil War Sheet Music Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2023782681>.



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