

STORIES OF THE HYMNS

RAWSON & TONIOLI

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RAWSON & TONIOLI

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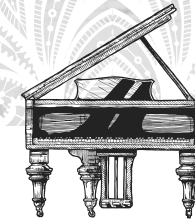
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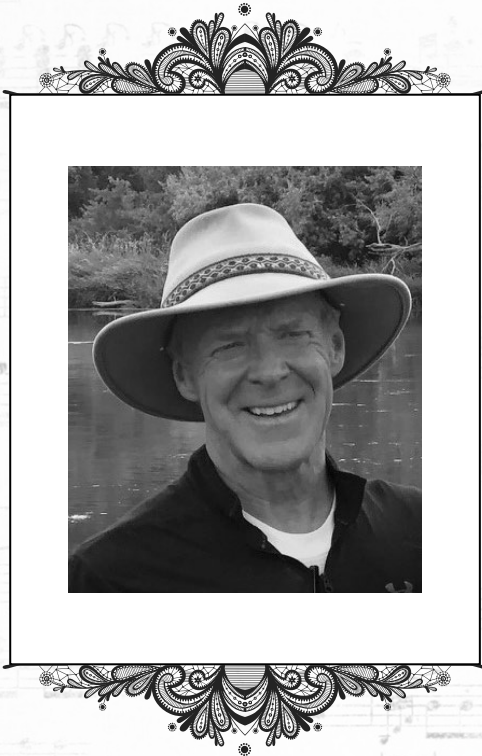


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PROLOGUE

PROLOGUE - GLENN RAWSON

My Friends,

It is my personal belief that hymns are a form of worship, and prayer and are capable of expressing with power what mere words alone cannot. Moreover, sacred music has an almost incalculable power to soften hearts, invite the Spirit, teach truth, and bind us together in unity.

Behind each hymn is an author, a composer, and a story. The Almighty does not generally draw upon a dry well. It is out the depths of our own experiences that He calls us to minister to others, teach, write, and compose. We learned again and again while doing research for this book that the personal experiences of the authors and composers influenced the words and music they wrote. Each hymn and its message became so much more meaningful when we came to know the author and composer.

These stories are true and drawn from as many sources as we could acquire. There is always the challenge of mortal memory, inaccurate interpretations, and faulty documents, but we have done the best we could to cross-reference and check the facts.

It is our hope and prayer that this book will strengthen and affirm your faith, draw you closer to the Almighty, and cause you to sing with greater intent, more power, hope, and joy.

Glenn Rawson



FORWARD

FORWARD - JASON TONIOLI

I can still remember sitting at the piano bench as a boy, with my mother telling me there would come a time when I would appreciate the ability to play the hymns from a hymn book and that others would be blessed by my musical talent. I wish I had the maturity then to value the efforts of my mom and piano teacher encouraging me to practice piano.

It is ironic that for the past 20 years, I have spent thousands of hours at a piano writing, arranging, and recording hundreds of piano solos and other music. More than half of the songs I have created have been hymn arrangements. My younger self on the piano bench would be surprised that my music has been played and listened to by millions of people.

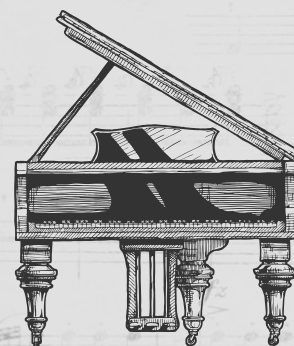
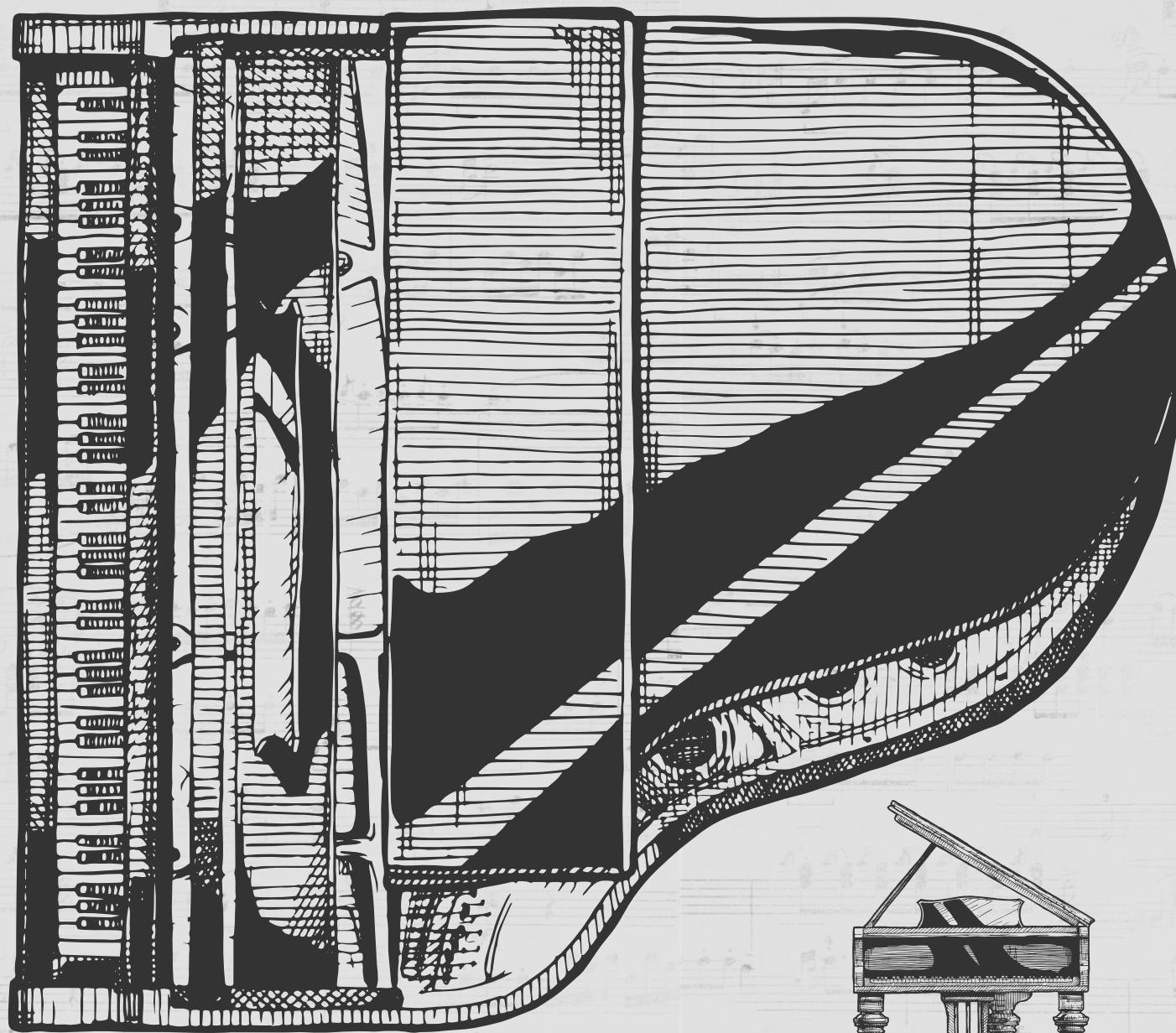
I'm always looking for beautiful melodies and have found that some of the best music and melodies are found in old hymns. I've come to realize great music isn't tied to any specific religion or denomination, and that through the music you can help others to feel the Spirit.

This project started as an idea years ago with my music books, as I would attempt to share a small piece of the story behind how a hymn had been written. There was never enough space to share the full story though.

With the help of my friend, Glenn Rawson and my mother, Jean Tonioli, we have been able to research and write these stories. In some ways, I feel like we are seeing a proper end to what started as a "piano war" with my mom and me at the piano bench with her prediction that one day the time spent practicing the hymns would pay off and bless the lives of others.

Hopefully her predictions are true, and these stories and the music that comes with them will help draw many people closer to the Savior.

- Jason Tonioli



A CHILDREN'S MARCHING SONG



SABINE BARING-GOULD

It began in May 1864, when thirty-year-old Sabine Baring-Gould, newly ordained Anglican minister, set out for the small English community known as Horbury Bridge, where his calling was as curate or caretaker, and his charge was to open a new Church mission for children. He rented a cottage and established his school. Adults as well as children attended the school. Baring-Gould's purpose "was not just to educate and civilize people, but also to help them take on the Christian faith." He was very successful and within a short time a Mission Chapel was erected and opened in November 1865.

In that part of England at that time, the people celebrated Whitsun, which commemorated the Day of Pentecost in the Book of Acts. This holiday was marked with fairs, pageants, parades, and new clothes.

According to historical accounts, "In 1865, the vicar at St. Peter's church decided that the Horbury Bridge Mission scholars should join them. Baring-Gould was asked to conduct them to St. Peter's and the route from Horbury Bridge was then, as it is now, up Quarry Hill and beyond for over a mile. Fearful the little ones would straggle all over the place when climbing Quarry Hill, Baring-Gould decided singing a hymn would help make the children's long journey that much easier."



According to Baring-Gould's own account:

"I had resolved that the [Bridge] children should come up to the parish church on Whitsun Tuesday. Mr. Fred Knowles came to me at the vicarage and asked what they should sing on the day of the long walk. We discussed one thing and then another, then I said, 'I'll write a processional.' Mr. Knowles replied, 'You must be sharp about it, as this is Saturday and there will shortly be no printing done.' So, I sat down and wrote the hymn. It was printed, practiced on the Sunday afternoon, and it was sung to the tune of Haydn on the Tuesday."

According to various accounts, Baring-Gould sat up all night struggling with what to write for the forthcoming march and finally, in a flash of inspiration, he either composed or completed some lines, borrowed a tune, and went to face his students. It was printed and distributed to his young charges. They quickly learned it, and on the appointed day, marched up the hill singing the processional song that Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould never intended to publish. It was meant for that day and only to inspire and impress upon his students that they were soldiers for Christ after the manner spoken of by the Apostle Paul when he said to Timothy, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

The students sang:

*Onward, Christian soldiers,
Marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus
Going on before!
Christ, the royal Master,*



*Leads against the foe;
Forward into battle,
See his banner go!*

Years later, Sabine Baring-Gould would say of that hymn:

"It was written in great haste, and I am afraid some of the rhymes are faulty. Certainly nothing has surprised me more than its popularity. I don't remember how it got printed first, but I know that very soon it found its way into several collections. I have written a few other hymns since then, but only two or three have become at all well known."

In 1871, the great composer, Arthur Sullivan, set the words to a new tune widely sung by Christians today. That song, intended to inspire faith and courage in children, has become one of the most beloved hymns of all time. Who can measure how many hearts have been inspired with courage by the simple gift of a children's processional hymn?

PART II

One such memorable moment in the history of this great hymn occurred in August 1941, when United States President Franklin Delano Roosevelt sailed to a secret location in the north Atlantic to meet with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Roosevelt eluded reporters under cover of darkness and went to rendezvous with Churchill aboard the British battleship *Prince of Wales*.

This was a critical meeting. England was fighting with its back against the wall, determined to stand against Nazi Germany at all costs. The United States had not yet entered the war,

but their help was sorely needed. The two men talked for four days. Then on Sunday, Roosevelt was transported to the *Prince of Wales* for a morning church service. All the fighting men aboard, together with two of the most powerful leaders on earth, met on the quarterdeck for a worship service for which Prime Minister Churchill chose the hymns—his favorites. The effect of that inspiring service, as Roosevelt described it, “cemented us.” Among the hymns sung that morning was “Onward Christian Soldiers.” Churchill would later describe that morning as “A great hour to live.” In a subsequent radio broadcast, Churchill spoke of this meeting and of that hymn.

“We sang “Onward, Christian Soldiers” indeed, and I felt that this was no vain presumption, but that we had the right to feel that we were serving a cause for the sake of which a trumpet has sounded from on high. When I looked upon that densely packed congregation of fighting men of the same language, of the same faith, of the same fundamental laws, of the same ideals ... it swept across me that here was the only hope, but also the sure hope, of saving the world from measureless degradation.”

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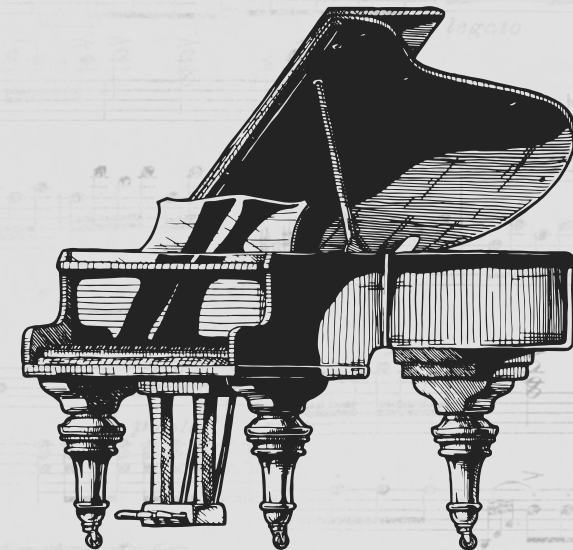
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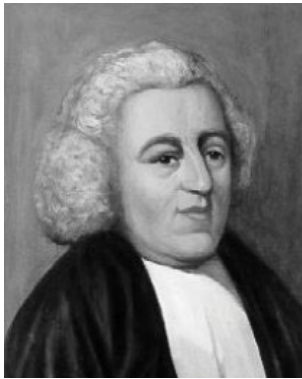
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JOHN NEWTON



JOHN NEWTON

John Newton was born July 24, 1725, in London, England. His father was a sea captain and his mother a pious dissenter from the Church of England. Life may have taken a completely different course for John had his mother lived long enough for her teachings to take root, but she died when he was only six. His father, gone at sea, left his care to an indifferent step-mother. John ran wild.

Then, at age 11, John went to sea with his father, drinking in the ways of the sailor. After six voyages, John's father retired. By the age of 17, John was characterized as headstrong and disobedient, and despite his father's efforts to establish him as a prosperous merchantman, John rebelled and soon found himself kidnapped, or pressed into service, in the Royal Navy.

Not to be cowed, John deserted, but was soon captured, flogged, and enslaved on the ship. As fate would have it, John was traded to a slave ship, and soon found himself bound for Africa and a cargo of slaves. Due to his own insolence, his situation gravely worsened over time and John became a servant of the slaves, starved and abused. The slaves pitied him, smuggling food into him and letters out to his father.

Finally, his father found him and he was freed. It would be assumed that life's experiences and the lingering tug of his childhood faith would have softened John's heart, but it did not. He became once more shockingly profane and debauched. Then on the night of March 21, 1748, the ship he



was on sailed into a violent storm. Men were washed overboard. The ship pitched and rolled and seemed as though it would capsize. John lashed himself to the pumps, commenting to the captain, “If this will not do, then Lord have mercy upon us.”

The flippant remark latched onto John’s soul and would not let go. He reflected on it all night, finally uttering his first weak prayer. He would later declare this was “the hour he first believed.” The ship survived the storm.

John’s faith ebbed and flowed, finally rooting deep and setting him on a course of humility and goodness that would last out his days. It took time, but he gave up the sea and the slave trade, turning instead to the study of languages and theology. He wanted to be a clergyman, but was turned down because he had no university degree. At last though, he was sponsored and ordained a minister.

John Newton became one of the most powerful and persuasive clergymen of his time. Why? It was because he was passionate and personal when he spoke of sin and Christ’s redemptive power. He knew his own weakness and when he spoke of the Lord’s mercy and grace, it was from the depth of a grateful heart.

Not content in the boundaries of his own parish, he traveled and taught all who would listen. Sunday meetings were not enough to meet the need and he began to hold weekly prayer meetings to bolster the faith of the poor around him. Ironically, it was a young man taught and influenced by Newton who would become himself a clergyman, a member of Parliament, and influence Great Britain to outlaw the slave trade—William Wilberforce.

However, it is not for the converts Newton made that he is most remembered. This profane wretch, who once wondered at sea in a deadly storm if he had sinned too much—if heaven



still had a place for him, is most remembered today for a hymn that he wrote for a prayer meeting. It was sung for the first time January 1, 1773. That hymn was “Amazing Grace”—the spiritual autobiography of John Newton, the sailor.

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind but now I see.*

*Was Grace that taught my heart to fear
And Grace, my fears relieved;
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed!*

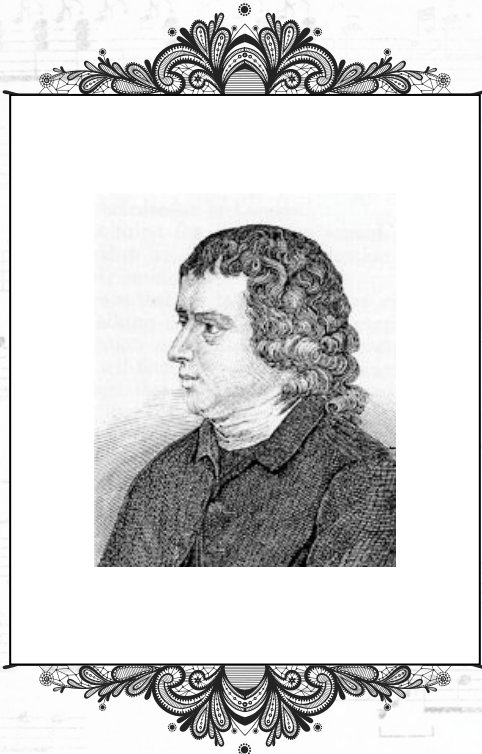
*Through many dangers, toils and snares
We have already come:
Tis grace that brought us safe thus far
And grace will lead us home.*

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COME THOU FOUNT OF EVERY BLESSING



ROBERT ROBINSON

Robert Robinson was born in Norfolk, England in September 1735. When he was just eight years old, his father passed away. Though of tender years, Robert was apprenticed to a barber and labored to support himself and his mother. His grandfather, a man of means, disinherited him because of his mother's low marriage. Robert's opportunities for education were limited, but he sought to learn. He was described as "more given to reading than to his profession."

Robert's mother was said to be a goodly woman and desired that her son become a clergyman. Notwithstanding that lofty ambition, Robert fell into a crowd that was bent on drunken and debauched living. Then in 1752, a series of events brought him up short:

"Out on a frolic one Sunday with like-minded companions, he joined with them in sportively rendering a fortune-telling old woman drunk and incapable, that they might hear and laugh at her predictions concerning them. The poor creature told Robinson that he would live to see his children and grandchildren. This set him a-thinking, and he resolved more than ever to 'give himself to reading.'"

Around this same time he went to hear the famed Methodist preacher, George Whitefield.



Whitefield's text was the Lord's words, "O generation of vipers. Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matthew 3:7). The powerful sermon struck a chord with the young man and haunted him. "For three years he walked in darkness and fear, but in his 20th year found peace by believing."

Robert Robinson had made his peace with God. He continued studying, listening, and learning with an assiduous intent. He first preached as a Methodist, and then in 1759 accepted baptism and as time progressed became a powerful and popular Baptist minister and scholar.

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for a writer to compose and not insert himself—his thoughts, feelings, and desires—into the text. It is for that reason the hymn composed by Robinson when he was only 22 years old is thought to be autobiographical. Consider these words from a young man who only recently found the Savior.

*Come thou fount of every blessing
Tune my heart to sing thy grace
Streams of mercy, never ceasing
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet
Sung by flaming tongues above.
I'll praise the mount, I'm fixed upon it
Mount of thy redeeming love.*

Late in his life, Robinson changed religious persuasions again, aligning himself with a third faith. Could it be that he understood his own impulsive instability, giving added meaning to the most powerful and enduring words he ever wrote?



*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it.
Prone to leave the God I love.
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for thy courts above.*

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HORATIO SPAFFORD



HORATIO SPAFFORD

Horatio Spafford came to Chicago in 1856 to practice law. He was a devoutly religious man and soon formed associations with other evangelical Christians. In those early days in Chicago, Spafford put his Christianity into practice, teaching Sunday School classes, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and ministering where he could.

In 1857, he first met Anna Larsson, a recent immigrant from Norway. He was taken with her beauty and confidence. However, she was only 15 years old. Spafford paid for Anna to attend an elite women's school. After graduation three years later, they were married.

During the Civil War, Horatio and Anna volunteered and served where they could. Horatio continued as a lawyer, senior partner in their firm, and as a professor of law. In 1870, their four-year-old son, Horatio Jr., died of scarlet fever. Then, a year later in October 1871, the great Chicago fire reduced Chicago to ashes, taking with it most of Horatio's considerable real estate investments. Notwithstanding their loss, the Spaffords worked to assist others stricken by the fire.

In 1873, the family decided to take a holiday to England. Horatio was detained because of business in the city and sent his wife and four remaining children ahead. This included Anna and her eleven-year-old daughter, also named Anna, nine-year-old Margaret, five-year-old Elizabeth, and two-year-old Tanetta.



On November 22, 1873, their ship, the *Ville Du Havre*, was rammed midships by another vessel, the *Lochearn*, and sank in 12 minutes. It was one of the worst maritime disasters in the 19th century, as 226 people lost their lives. Among them were the four daughters of Horatio and Anna Spafford. At the collision, Anna gathered her children close, looked for escape, and attempted to comfort and assist other passengers. However, as the ship tipped onto its bow and started under, the babe Tanetta was torn from her arms and swept away, as were the other girls. In the end, the four girls either drowned or succumbed to the icy waters of the North Atlantic. Anna was found floating semi-conscious on a piece of planking. After her rescue, she was overheard to say, "God gave me four daughters. Now they have been taken from me. Someday I will understand why." She would later testify that in anguish and grief, she heard a still small voice speaking to her, "You were saved for a purpose."

When she arrived in Cardiff, South Wales, she sent a telegram to her husband that read simply, "Saved alone. What shall I do?"

Horatio immediately boarded a ship and set out to join Anna. As they sailed, it is reported that one day, the captain called Spafford to the bridge, pointed to his navigation charts, and informed him they were passing over the very spot where the *Ville du Havre* went down. Spafford returned to his cabin and, with emotions we can only imagine, wrote these words:

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

**Refrain:**

*It is well with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

*My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!—
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

*For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.*

*But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul!*

*And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.*