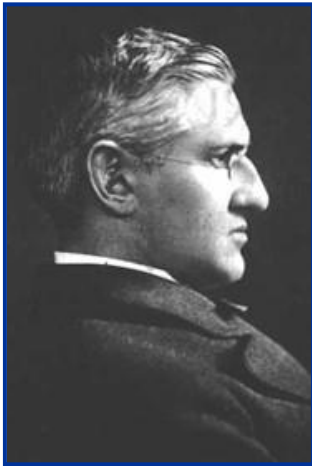


A Song Out of Tragedy

One of my wife's very favorite Christian songs is *It Is Well with My Soul*, and I must agree: It is one of mine as well. Played often at funerals and during worship services at church, the song is familiar to most Christians – but the story behind its origin is not so well known. If you like the lyrics and the tune now, you will appreciate them even more when you understand how and why they were written.



Horatio G. Spafford

Author Tel Asiado tells the story, which appeared on the website Suite101.com. Here it is:

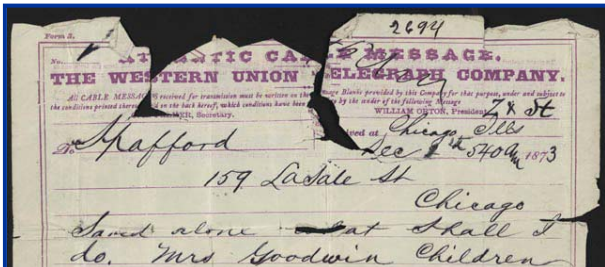
Born in New York State on Oct. 20, 1828, Horatio G. Spafford became a lawyer, practicing law and teaching jurisprudence in Chicago. By the time he was in his early 40s, he was quite successful and invested heavily in downtown Chicago real estate along the shores of Lake Michigan. The infamous Chicago fire of 1871 destroyed all his land holdings. His material losses were exceptional.

A Presbyterian and always in a religious family, Horatio decided to take a holiday in England to assist the famous Dwight L. Moody as he traveled about England on one of his evangelistic crusades. Horatio and Anna, his wife, planned to join Moody in late 1873. The Spaffords traveled to New York in November, from where they were to catch the French steamer *Ville du Havre* across the Atlantic.

Yet just before they set sail, a last-minute business development forced Horatio to delay. Spafford encouraged his family to go as planned, so as not to ruin their holiday. He planned to follow later. Anna and her four daughters sailed east to Europe while Spafford returned west to Chicago. Nine days later, Spafford received a telegram from his wife, who was now in Wales. It read: "Saved alone."



Ann Spafford

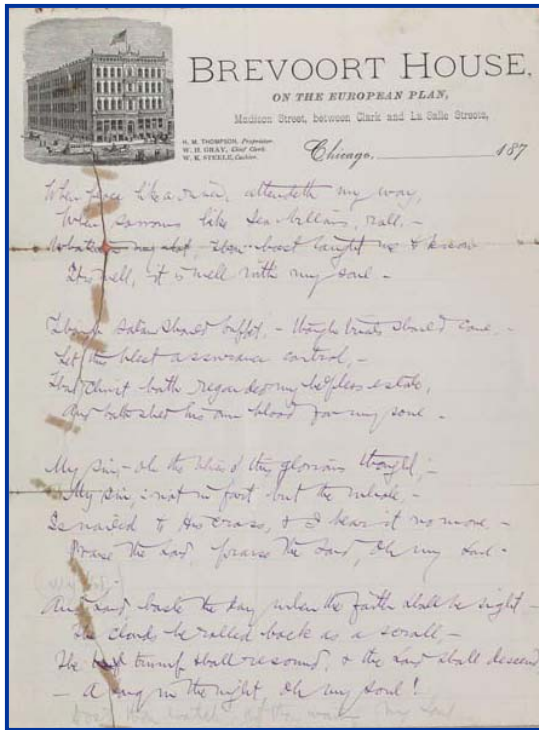


On Nov. 22, 1873, the *Ville du Havre* had collided with *The Loch Earn*, an English vessel.

It sank in only 12 minutes, claiming the lives of 226 people. Anna Spafford had stood bravely on the deck, with her daughters Annie, Maggie, Bessie and Tanetta clinging desperately to her. Her last memory had been of her baby being torn violently from her arms by the force

(more)

of the waters. Anna was only saved from the fate of her daughters by a plank which floated beneath her unconscious body and propped her up. When the survivors of the wreck had been rescued, Mrs. Spafford's first reaction was one of complete despair. Then she heard a voice speak to her, "You were spared for a purpose." A



fellow survivor quoted Anna as saying, "God gave me four daughters. Now they have been taken from me. Someday, I will understand why."

Upon hearing the terrible news, Horatio Spafford boarded the next ship out of New York to join his bereaved wife. Bertha Spafford (the fifth daughter of Horatio and Anna, born later) explained that during her father's voyage, the captain of the ship had called him to the bridge. "A careful reckoning has been made," he said, "and I believe we are now passing the place where the *du Havre* was wrecked. The water is three miles deep." Horatio then returned to his cabin and penned the lyrics of his great hymn:

*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.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has 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!*

*And, Lord, haste the day when my 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.*

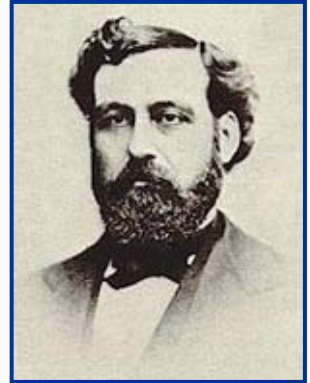
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Philip P. Bliss, the hymn composer, was a prolific writer of gospel songs. He was so impressed with the experience and expression of Spafford's text that he shortly wrote the music for it, first published in one of the praise hymn books, *Sankey-Bliss Hymnals, Gospel Hymns No. 2*. Shortly after writing it, Bliss died in a tragic train accident.

This song brings comfort and peace to those who face adversity – and we all do – but it becomes close to the heart for one undergoing grief.

What about you? Were these words meant for you today?

– Beecher Hunter



Philip P. Bliss