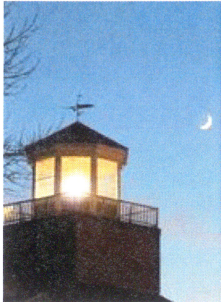


February Hymn of the Month

Just as picturesque scenes can bring peace and calmness to the soul, so does beautiful music

The Hymn



The comparison between mortal life and a sea voyage is used in a number of favorite

hymns. In *"Brightly Beams Our Father's Mercy"* the comparison focuses not on our individual journey, but on our Christian duty to assist others on their journey.

This duty is born of love, and the text of the hymn has basis in the injunctions given by the Savior in the Bible, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you;" "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven."

The poetic symbolism of the hymn becomes more evident as we understand the importance of lighthouses and beacons as aids to navigation in the days before modern electronic positioning systems. The first publication of the hymn is said to have been in 1871, over a decade before the first radio experiments were conducted by Heinrich Hertz in the 1880's. These experiments led to the development of radar.

The hymn was also written thirty years before the Wright brothers made their historic airplane flight in 1903. The people of this time would have been much more familiar with travel by water than we are today. The possibility of shipwreck was a significant danger in this era, and as voyages often took weeks or months to

The Text

"Brightly Beams Our Father's Mercy"

Text as found in the 1985 LDS Hymnal

Brightly beams our Father's mercy
From his lighthouse evermore,
But to us he gives the keeping
Of the lights along the shore.

Dark the night of sin has settled;
Loud the angry billows roar.
Eager eyes are watching, longing,
For the lights along the shore.

Trim your feeble lamp, my brother;
Some poor sailor, tempest tossed,
Trying now to make the harbor,
In the darkness may be lost.

Chorus:

Let the lower lights be burning;
Send a gleam across the wave.
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman
You may rescue, you may save.

Let the Lower Lights be Burning. 35

On a dark, stormy night, when the waves rolled like mountains, and not a star was to be seen, a boat, rocking and plunging, neared the Fortunate Harbor. "Are you sure this is Fortunate?" asked the captain, moving with one light from the lighthouse. "Quite sure, sir," replied the pilot. "Where are the lower lights?" "Down-out, sir." "Can you make the harbor?" "We can't see a light, sir." And with a strong head wind and heavy rain, the boat was driven back. But, when the darkness had turned the captain, and with a crash when the boat was shattered, and under a life and two water grave, the lighthouse, the Master will take care of the great light-house, let us long the lower light burning. F. D. H. Moore.

VERSE.

1. Brightly beams our Father's mercy From his light-house evermore;
2. Dark the night of sin has settled, Loud the angry billows roar;
3. Trim your feeble lamp, my brother, Some poor sailor, tempest-tossed,

CHORUS.

Let the lower lights be burning! Send a gleam across the wave;
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman You may rescue, you may save.

The Author & Composer



Philip Paul Bliss was born to Isaac and Lydia Doolittle Bliss in July of 1838, the third child and the first and only surviving son. His parents lived in a log cabin on a

homestead in a rural Appalachian mountain region of northern Pennsylvania. There is some debate about the actual place of birth, but it is believed to have been in Clearfield County, approximately 100 miles northeast of Pittsburgh.

Philip's father's family is believed to have been of Welsh descent. His father was a devout Christian and a musical man who was always singing gospel songs. Young Philip learned to sing with his father and to whistle and play on reeds or other rude instruments he would make himself. He showed a love of music early in life. The family was poor and during his childhood they moved several times in the sparsely settled region. Thus his opportunities for formal schooling were limited, and his early education was mostly what his family could provide.

At the age of eleven, it is said that Philip left home to work on a farm, carrying all of his clothing done up in a handkerchief. For the next five years he worked on farms and in lumber camps, meanwhile taking every opportunity for schooling that presented itself.

After a Baptist minister conducted a revival at a school he attended, he was baptized at the age of twelve by a

complete, lighthouses and beacons were critical for nighttime safety.

Due to the curvature of the earth, an elevated light can be seen at a further distance. Bonfires on seaside hilltops were used for centuries prior to the construction of the first known lighthouse at the harbor of Alexandria, Egypt, about 280 years BC. Lighthouses eventually replaced the bonfires and continued to be constructed through the ensuing centuries to mark ports and hazards.

Lighthouses are augmented by other aids such as lighted beacons and buoys, which are used to this day to mark navigable channels, and these are of particular interest to the symbolism of the hymn. Ranges, or range lights, are used in harbors and other waterways, and consist of two lights, one higher and set back from the other. When these lights line up vertically, one exactly above the other, the pilot knows that the ship is positioned correctly to navigate the channel. If one of the lights is out, the aid is of little use. In some cases the lighthouse functions as the upper range light. It is evident that the lower lights were very necessary to safe navigation.

The author of the hymn, Philip Paul Bliss, was an associate of the well known American evangelist Dwight L. Moody, who was said to be a dynamic revivalist preacher. It is understood that in one of his sermons, Moody related an anecdote concerning a ship sailing on Lake Erie seeking the Cleveland harbor. "On a dark, stormy night, when the waves rolled like mountains, and not a star was to be seen, a boat, rocking and plunging, neared the Cleveland harbor. 'Are you sure this is Cleveland?' asked the Captain, seeing only one light from the light-house. 'Quite sure, sir,' replied the pilot. 'Where are the lower lights?' 'Gone out, sir.' 'Can you make the harbor?' 'We must, or perish, sir!' And with a strong hand and a brave heart the old pilot turned the wheel. But alas, in the

minister of the nearby Christian Church. He is reported to have said, however, that he never could remember the time when he did not love the Savior.

At the age of seventeen Philip attended, for the winter, a select school at East Troy, Bradford County, Pennsylvania, completing his teaching credentials, and the next winter, 1856, taught school in Allegheny County, NY. The following year his life took a musical turn as he spent the winter in Towanda, Pennsylvania and became acquainted with Mr. Towner. This led to receiving his first systematic instruction in music at Mr. Towner's singing school, and through this association attended his first music convention at Rome, about nine miles northeast of Towanda, where he met composer William B. Bradbury, who is believed to have been an early influence. Philip was said to have had a wonderful bass voice which was instrumental to his success as a musician.

In the winter of 1859 Philip taught at the Rome Academy. Rome, Pennsylvania, is about sixty miles northwest of Scranton. He boarded at the home of a member of the school board, Mr. O. F. Young, whose acquaintance he had made the previous year by means of his singing, and who invited him to make his home there. The Young family was musical and all of the children were among his pupils. Philip was able to have his younger sister come and stay there to attend school, and through her friendship with Lucy, the eldest daughter of the house, Philip became acquainted with his future wife.

Philip P. Bliss and Lucy J. Young were married in June of 1859 in the parlor of the minister's house at Wysocks, a little town about six miles south of Rome on the Susquehanna River. This event Philip noted in his diary as "the very best thing I could have done." Lucy was about eighteen years of age at that time and he was twenty. Neither of them had money, so they continued to live with Lucy's parents, and Philip worked on the farm for his father-in-law for the typical

darkness he missed the channel, and with a crash upon the rocks the boat was shivered, and many a life lost in a watery grave. Brethren, the Master will take care of the great light-house; let us keep the lower lights burning!"

It is believed that after hearing this sermon, Philip Bliss wrote the text for "Brightly Beams Our Father's Mercy" the same day. The anecdote was printed at the top of early editions of the hymn as seen in the photo in the middle column of the author's collection, "Gospel Songs" 1874.

Although the anecdote may be fictional, the principle conveyed is significant. A harbor is a place of safety for ships and the harbor mentioned by the hymn likely represents the safety and peace found in the Kingdom of Heaven. As the Savior said in the New Testament, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you..."

The lighthouse represents the Savior, who John recorded as having said, "... I am the light of the world." Through the Savior the Father sends the mercy of redemption from sin, as recorded in 1 John, "And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins..." The light from the lighthouse represents the Gospel of Christ which shows the way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In John Chapter 14 we read, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

The lower lights represent those who "Let (their) light so shine" in serving the Savior, and show an example of gospel living in their lives. The struggling seamen represent those who do not yet have the aid of the gospel in their lives or who falter in their path of discipleship.

The dark night and angry billows of the second verse represent the consequences of sin, and the eager eyes of the struggling look for aid from the servants of the Savior, who are the

wage of thirteen dollars a month. That winter he also taught music lessons in the evenings, and had a great desire to learn more about music.

In the summer of 1860 a "Normal Academy of Music" was held at Geneseo, New York, about 125 miles northwest of Rome, offering instruction from some of the notable musicians of the area. In this instance it is understood that the word "normal" meant that the academy was for training teachers. Philip despaired of being able to attend, lacking the thirty dollar fee, and was disheartened at his future prospects. However, Lucy's Grandmother Allen, who lived there with the family, hearing his distress and listening to his plight, kindly gave him the silver coins she had been saving for years in an old stocking, which amounted to more than the fee.

This was a pivotal moment, and we are all much indebted to Grandmother Allen for her generosity. Philip attended the "Normal" and was said to have spent six weeks of the hardest study of his life there. Bolstered with this training he became a professional music teacher the following winter. It is said that his father-in-law gave him a twenty dollar melodeon, and with the small, foot pedal powered reed organ, and a horse named Fanny, he traveled about the area giving lessons.

For the next few years he worked on the farm and attended the "Normal Academy" in the summers and taught music in the winter. He was quite successful and saved enough money from his singing schools to purchase a small cottage in Rome, to which he also moved his parents from their humble home in the backwoods. Unfortunately, his father was only able to enjoy his improved circumstances for a short time, and passed away in 1864, when Philip was about twenty-six.

In the summer of 1865 Philip Bliss and Mr. Towner conducted a concert tour as "The Yankee Boys." Philip was then drafted into the Union Army; however,

lights along the shore, to direct their path in the better way of the gospel.

When the light from an oil burning lamp becomes feeble, the end of the wick has usually become charred from the heat of the flame. The char restricts oil flow, and trimming the wick removes this impediment making it burn brighter. In the third verse the author admonishes those who would be the servants of the Lord to trim their feeble lamps. This is, in effect, a call to repentance, to remove whatever is holding us back, and be better disciples in word, thought and deed, that our love may reach those in the circle of our light.

Although the text uses the masculine form in its maritime analogy , consistent with the seafarers of the day, the principles apply to all.

The hymn is said to have first been published in 1871 in "The Charm," the author's first collection of Sunday School songs. The original title was "Let the Lower Lights be Burning," by which it is still known in many hymnals. The hymn tune in 3/4 time was aptly named LOWER LIGHTS. The hymn became quite popular in the early 1900's and is known to have been published in more than 440 hymnals. An arrangement for Men's Chorus appeared in the 1948 edition of "Hymns, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," (LDS Hymnal). The subsequent 1985 LDS Hymnal continued the Men's Chorus arrangement, transposed into a slightly lower, simpler key.

The inclusion of the hymn in current hymnals has not diminished, which is evidence of its quality and timeless appeal.

he was discharged two weeks later, the Civil War drawing to an end.

Around this same time Philip sent a letter to the publisher Root & Cady along with the manuscript of a song and asked, if it was any good, would they give him a flute for it. It is stated that George Root found the letter with its beautiful handwriting and original style as interesting as the music. They accepted the music and sent him the flute, along with some revisions for his first song which was published in 1865. They were on the lookout for bright men, and felt they had found one.

The association between Philip Bliss and George Root developed through correspondence and in November of 1865, "The Yankee Boys" came to Chicago, Illinois to work for Root & Cady, giving concerts. They did not consider themselves to be successful at this and tendered their resignation in December; however, Philip was requested to stay on.

This he did, and spent the next few years holding musical conventions, giving concerts and private music instruction. Philip and Lucy were said to be completely devoted to each other and she was also employed by Root & Cady, working first as a clerk, and then supporting her husband and serving as an accompanist. During this time Philip was also writing and sending in compositions. During the next few years many of these were published in books by Root & Cady. Every summer Philip and Lucy returned to Rome, Pennsylvania, and it is said that many of his sweetest pieces were written there in the rest and peace of the hills.

George F. Root described Philip Bliss as a man with a splendid physique, a handsome face and a striking dignified presence. He said it was delightfully incongruous that a man of such great size and masculine appearance should have such gentleness of manner, perfect amiability and conspicuous lack of self-assertion, such sensitiveness,

considerateness and deference to all. He also had wonderful natural mental gifts. It is said Philip considered all these things as being favored of Heaven and his first impulse on every good thing that happened was to fall on his knees and thank God.

Philip's travels and associations increased, and he visited Boston, New York and Brooklyn. In the summer of 1869 in Chicago, he and Lucy happened upon a gospel meeting of Mr. Dwight L. Moody, a renowned evangelist of the day. Their decision to attend the meeting changed the course of their life. Mr. Moody was without his leader for the singing that night and Philip helped as he could from the audience, which drew Mr. Moody's attention. In shaking hands on the way out, Mr. Moody got him to promise to come and help in the singing as often as he could. This he did, and the association led to other opportunities.

Through connections of Mr. Moody, in July of 1870 Philip became the choir leader and Superintendent of the Sabbath School for the First Congregational Church of Chicago, in addition to his other work. The pastor, Dr. Goodwin, is reported to have said that Mr. Bliss was a gifted, sympathizing, efficient helper, who shared his feeling that to make the song and service of God's house showy and entertaining was an abomination in God's sight; that all music in connection with worship should be consecrated and worshipful.

Philip continued in association with Mr. Moody and in the winter of 1874, received letters from Scotland where Mr. Moody was ministering, urging him to give up his business and sing the gospel. Philip and Lucy wanted to be sure that this was the Lord's will, and received assurance from the urging of their friend Horatio G. Spafford, the author of "It is Well with my Soul," and decided to give it a trial run. The trial run in Waukegan was successful and filled with indications of the Holy Spirit,

so on March 25, 1874, he gave up income and career to take up this self-denying calling, which he is said to have considered as a joy in being a servant of Jesus Christ.

For the next two years he traveled extensively, it is said he visited Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, Kentucky and Missouri, singing and influencing people to come to Christ. He had a desire to work for the children and young people and conducted meetings for them.

In December of 1876, Philip and Lucy spent a very happy Christmas with their two sons, ages four and one, and their extended family at Rome, and then, leaving their sons with the grandparents and aunt, were required to leave for Chicago as they had engagements there. They traveled by rail but shortly before eight o'clock on the cold stormy evening of December 29, 1876, the connecting train in which they traveled around Lake Erie from Buffalo, New York, approaching Ashtabula, Ohio, plunged into a ravine as the bridge gave way. Some of the 160 passengers escaped from the seven cars through broken windows into the icy water and snow, but it is said that within five minutes, the overturned oil stoves and lamps in the varnished wooden cars had set them ablaze, and the remainder of the passengers perished in the intense heat of the ensuing fire. A survivor reported that Philip had escaped through a window, but went back to find Lucy and did not return. They both died in the flames and no trace of their remains was found.

Philip P. Bliss was only thirty-eight years old at the time of his death, yet it is said that he authored hundreds of hymn texts and composed many of their tunes. He was a remarkable combination of poet, composer, singer and preacher. The story of his life shows that he was not only a great example of a man who, through divine providence, raised himself from obscure poverty to national acclaim, but a great example of the

Christian attributes he expressed in his songs.

Philip Bliss was the author and composer of the March 2013 Hymn of the Month, "More Holiness Give Me," and the information above is largely reproduced from the previous article.



Information in this article came from:

'Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,' (Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1985, #335)

'Holy Bible, King James Version,' Matthew 5:14-16, p. 1193; John 9:5, p. 1343, 14:27, p. 1353, 15:12, p. 1354; 1 John 3:5, p. 1558. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1979)

'Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary,' (G & C Merriam Company, Springfield, Massachusetts, 1975)

<http://www.aps.org/publications/apsnews/200604/history.cfm>

<https://airandspace.si.edu/exhibitions/wright-brothers/online/fly/1903/>

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/340721/lighthouse>

<http://www.uscg.mil/d13/dpw/docs/usaidsnavigationssystembooklet23dec03.pdf>

<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,766761,00.html>

http://www.hymnary.org/text/brightly_beams_our_fathers_mercy

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/391240/Dwight-L-Moody>

<http://www.mapquest.com/us/oh/cleveland>

<http://www.lighthousefriends.com/light.asp?ID=282>

http://www.thelampworks.com/lw_wicks.htm

http://www.hymnary.org/text/brightly_beams_our_fathers_mercy

<http://www.ppbmuseum.org/index.htm>

<http://www.ppbmuseum.org/bio/mem01.htm>

<http://www.wholesomewords.org/biography/biobliss.html>

<http://www.mapquest.com/>