

## ***Let the Lower Lights Be Burning (Part 1)***

***By Arne Kohl***

The Scottish author/ historian Thomas Carlyle said, "Let me make the nation's songs, and I care not who makes their laws."

None of you have probably ever heard of Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle lived from 1795 to 1881 and his works were highly influential in the Victorian Era. Even though you or I may have never heard of Carlyle he did make a strong statement about the power of music.

The song "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning" is a song that fulfills what Carlyle was talking about. One of those songs that grips you. If you are a believer it gives you a special feeling. I can't really describe it, but the feeling is almost like being at peace with God.

Let's examine the words and background of this song, and what these words should mean to us as Christians. This song, as were several others in our song book was written by Philip Bliss. You might find it interesting that Bliss was a colleague of H.G. Spafford. Spafford wrote the words to the song, "It is Well With My Soul" after his four daughters drowned, when an ocean liner they were on sank in the

Mid-Atlantic. Bliss wrote the music for that song.

Bliss and Spafford were both co-workers with the well known preacher Dwight L. Moody and Bliss often directed the singing for Moody's services.

At the close of one of his sermons Moody told the story of a captain who was attempting to bring his boat into the Cleveland harbor, one very dark and stormy night.

I don't know if any of you have ever seen any of the Great Lakes during a storm. Living in Milwaukee for many years I can tell you that these storms can get very bad with fierce winds and high waves.

The waves rolled like mountains Moody said, and not a star was to be seen in the clouded sky. Moody verbally pictured the boat rocking on the violent waves as the captain peered through the darkness for the sight of a signal light by means of which to guide his ship to safety. When he finally spotted a single light from the light house, the captain turned to the pilot and asked: "Are you sure this is Cleveland

Harbor?"

"Quite sure, sir," the pilot replied.

"Then where are the lower lights?" The captain continued.

"Gone out sir," the pilot replied.

"Can we make the harbor?" the captain anxiously asked.

"We must or perish, sir" the pilot replied.

With a strong hand and brave heart, the old pilot turned the wheel. But in the darkness he missed the channel. With a resounding crash the ship piled up on the rocks and then..... Settled slowly to a watery grave where many lost their life.

Then Moody made his appeal to the audience: "Brethren, the Master will take care of the great light-house: let us keep the lower lights burning!"

Philip Bliss was inspired by Moody's words that night and wrote the words to *Let the Lower Lights Be Burning*. I'm not sure if this is the exact wording of Dwight Moody's sermon that night.

I have seen several texts of it with slight variances in the description of the shipwreck, but the concluding words always are the same.

"Brethren, the Master will take care of the great light-house: let us keep the lower lights burning!"

*Let's look at this song.*

The first verse says, "Brightly beams our Father's mercy, from the lighthouse evermore; but to us he gives the keeping of the lights along the shore."

Let's think about what was just said in those words. God, Our Father beams mercy down from heaven to us. And what are we to do? We, as Christians are to continue what God has begun. We are supposed to keep that light burning here on earth. God is merciful to us, we are to be merciful to others.

Psalms 100:5 – “For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations.” Luke 6:36-  
“Therefore be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Let’s read that whole section of Luke 6 beginning with verse 27 Luke 6:27-36. But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the *one* cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not *to take thy* coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask *them* not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend *to them* of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and *to* the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

God is called “the Father of mercies” in II Corinthians 1:3. Eph. 2:4- tells us that God “is rich in mercy”

Ephesians 2:1-10 And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

These people, which in the present day include YOU and Me were saved by the grace of God. But most of us would have been shipwrecked and drowned in the sea of our sins; if there hadn’t been some lower light burning that helped us make it to the shore.