



But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works. (Psalms 73:28)

Resting in the peace and quiet of the deep and icy waters of the North Atlantic is a massive grave whose occupants are comprised of the poor of Ireland mingled with the prosperous and affluent of London and New York. There is no distinction of persons to the eye of the explorer's camera. The bare human skeletal remains are devoid of any accoutrements of wealth or class. All alike sleep in the repose of death some 12,647 feet beneath the ocean surface. It is not in the power of the living to determine the disposition of the soul of the dead. Many of these dead presently enjoy the bliss of Paradise while others are in an unremitting hell. It is the manner in which those souls passed from the land of the living to their watery graves that is significant to us in the strong testimony that the occasion of the sinking of the RMS Titanic gave to the world of faith and devotion.

The sinking of the Titanic still evokes images of tragedy and heroic faith. It is likely that when you read the name of the hymn for today in the subject line, that you would already know the grave to which I referred was the Titanic, for that great disaster is inextricably joined to the hymn we study today. It is a story of uncommon valor and chivalry. Out of 2,235 recorded passengers, only 712 survived. Of the 1,523 souls who perished, 45% were comprised of the crew who valiantly remained aboard to assist in dispatch of lifeboats. The entire band, who played "Nearer My God to Thee" as the great ship slipped, nose first, into the sea, went to their deaths with the ship. They played, and many of the doomed remaining passengers sang, this Welsh hymn until the waters of the sea overwhelmed the decks of the RMS Titanic as it passed forever from the British registry.

Those passengers who went down on the Titanic were clearly drawing nearer to God moment by moment - either for a shameful judgment, or a blessed welcome. But I will say that the same is true of every man, woman, and child born upon this earth. We

each draw nearer to God by every passing second. One day we shall go before our Maker either as reprobates or the saved of God.

Another story concerns the death of American President William McKinley, assassinated in 1901. Dr. Mann, the attending physician, reported that among McKinley's last words were "Nearer, my God, to Thee, e'en though it be a cross, has been my constant prayer." On the afternoon of September 13, 1901, after five minutes of silence across the nation, bands in Union and Madison Squares in New York City played the hymn in honor of the fallen president. It was also played at a memorial service for him in Westminster Abbey, London.

The hymn was also played as the body of assassinated American President James Garfield was interred at Lakeview Cemetery in Cleveland, Ohio. (NetHymnal).

NEARER MY GOD TO THEE

Text: Sarah F. Adams, 18051848

Music: Lowell Mason, 17921872

Tune: BETHANY, Meter: 64.64.6664

1. *Nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me,
still all my song shall be,
nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!*
2. *Though like the wanderer, the sun gone down,
darkness be over me, my rest a stone;
yet in my dreams I'd be
nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!*
3. *There let the way appear, steps unto heaven;
all that thou sendest me, in mercy given;
angels to beckon me
nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!*
4. *Then, with my waking thoughts bright with thy praise,
out of my stony griefs Bethel I'll raise;
so by my woes to be
nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!*
5. *Or if, on joyful wing cleaving the sky,
sun, moon, and stars forgot, upward I fly,
still all my song shall be,
nearer, my God, to thee;
nearer, my God, to thee, nearer to thee!*

1st Stanza:

Imagine that you, too, were on the deck of the Titanic about to perish in those chilly waters. What would your thoughts be? The words of this hymn express the last thoughts of hundreds of people that wintry night of April 14 15 of 1912. The first stanza expresses the truth that we are, indeed, drawing nearer and nearer to God as we journey through this life whether it is by seconds or by years. The cross is the common ensign of every Christian. If our bodies perish in the icy grave, our souls are raised by

that cross which Christ commanded that we take up daily as His disciples. *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."* (Luke 9:23) If any will come after Jesus in the resurrection to life, he must also come by way of the cross. It is the cross that makes our resurrection to glory possible. If we leave this earth with a hymn and a melody in our hearts, we shall arise with the same on the other side of Jordan Banks.

2nd Stanza:

The Christian is both a pilgrim and a dreamer. The bliss of Heaven is too much to imagine in an earthly vessel, so our dreams bring us closer to the reality of the joys and beauties of Heaven. The 2nd stanza well expresses that sentiment. The pilgrim does not travel with many worldly possessions. He travels lightly with the knowledge that, when he finally arrives at the destination of his dreams, he shall have plenty. *"Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."* (Heb 11:12-16) Our sun of this life will set in the western skies, only to make space for the Sun of Righteousness to cast His brilliant beams over the eastern horizon of our Eternal reward.

3rd Stanza:

The Way has truly appeared, but those of faith will see more clearly than ever at the moment of passing. *"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* (John 14:6) Those steps up to Heaven will lead via the Straight and Narrow Way of which our Lord spoke. *"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."* (Matt 7:13-14) Furthermore, none shall walk that Way in their own righteousness, but by the Mercy of God in Christ. Has your eyesight grown dim with years? We have the brightly beaming angels to beckon us on the Way.

4th Stanza:

I cannot command the words to describe the beauty of the moment presented by this stanza. It will likely be a glorious moment when the graves are opened and the dead in Christ arise with hymns and praises on their lips. It is also by what we may consider the "woes" of this life that we draw nearer to the Holy Ground of Bethel (*Heb*: House of God). We shall arise from the stones and ruins of this life into the beauty and luxuriance of our heavenly homes. The morning will break glorious and sweet to those who have kept the faith and loved the Name of Jesus.

5th Stanza:

There will be a moment after death that the saint is given a heavenly escort like unto that of poor Lazarus: *"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom."* (Luke 16:22) The world has never known such a royal escort as this. But what of those who have rejected the Lord of Life? Their plight will be much like the Rich Man who lived sumptuously and denied Lazarus the crumbs from his table: *".....the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his*

eyes, being in torments." (Luke 16:2223) The former wonders of earth and sky will give way to the grander and greater wonders of the starry canopy through which we are born on wings of angels. But there is one thing that will remain constant our Song of Praise to our God and our Savior!

My dear Reader, I hope you have a beautiful hymn on your lips and melody in your heart today, and always.....