

*“For Those in Peril
on the Sea”*

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“For Those in Peril on the Sea”

By FRED LANDON

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Of the hundreds of thousands who watched the passing of the funeral cortege of the late President Kennedy, and the millions who saw it on TV or heard it over radio, there must have been many who were puzzled by one number which the bands played at intervals throughout the long march to Arlington Cemetery. It was a hymn, familiar in Protestant churches, written by an English clergyman and set to a tune written by another English clergyman who lived in the same era. It is to be found today in most Protestant hymnals and is a prayer for Divine protection for men at sea. It is a sailor's hymn and as such what could have been more appropriate for the funeral of John Fitzgerald Kennedy? Its most frequent use in church services was, of course, during the two great World Wars, but in the Great Lakes region it is frequently sung during the stormy autumn months of navigation.

The hymn, imploring protection “for those in peril on the sea,” has four verses. It was written by Reverend William Whiting (1825-1878), for several years Master of the Winchester College Choristers' School. His “Rural Thoughts and Other Poems” was published in 1851 but contained no hymns, and his reputation is confined almost entirely to his “Eternal Father Strong to Save.” He composed the hymn after passing through a violent storm in the Mediterranean in 1860. It was printed in the United States in 1870 and in 1879 a young officer, Charles J. Train, in charge of the midshipman's choir, initiated the singing of the hymn in the chapel of the U.S. Naval Academy. It has become popularly known as “The Navy Hymn,” and the first stanza is always sung at the close of each chapel service.

Whiting was fortunate in having one of the greatest of English hymn tune writers provide the setting for his composition. This was John Bacchus Dykes (1823-1876), musician and theologian, who, when ten years old, was playing the organ in his grandfather's church. At Cambridge University he distinguished himself as an amateur musician. When he graduated in 1847 he entered the Church of England and served in Durham Diocese. His later years were embittered by disputes with his diocesan. Dykes was a high

churchman with pronounced views on doctrinal and theological questions, while his bishop was a low churchman determined to suppress what he regarded as heresy. The bishop went so far as to refuse to license curates nominated by Dykes, leaving him with the care of a great parish on his unaided hands. There was bitterness on both sides and the strain became such that Dykes broke under it in 1874, and died two years later.

Dykes is chiefly remembered for his hymn tunes, most of which appeared first in "Hymns Ancient and Modern," of which they are by far the best and most popular of the modern compositions. Though their style has been criticized as too much that of the part song, they are characterised by remarkable melodic beauty and by the excellent way in which they are written for the words to which they are set. They are undoubtedly the best of their kind.

Of the four verses of Whiting's hymn the first and fourth may appropriately be quoted here:

Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep:
O hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea.

* * * * *

O Trinity of love and power,
Our brethren shield in danger's hour;
From rock and tempest, fire and foe,
Protect them whereso'er they go:
Thus evermore shall rise to Thee
Glad hymns of praise from land and sea.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of "*For Those in Peril on the Sea*" by Fred Landon]