

# THE HYMN THAT SAVED FOUR LIVES

(As told by Earl Marlatt)

It was the summer of 1916. I was in Rushville, Indiana [in the U.S.], where the Royal Welsh Male Chorus was giving a concert for the local Chautauqua Association. They concluded their program with a hymn, "Abide with Me," sung by a quartet to a low, intermittently surging accompaniment by the chorus. Such a finale seemed strange at a Wednesday evening musicale, which featured rollicking choruses rather than sacred music. I was puzzled and interested. Looking up the director, I asked him why he had closed the program with a hymn.

"We always end it that way," he said. "It's almost a rite with us."

With a newspaperman's persistence, I carried on until I got the story.

"We were on the *Lusitania*," he said, "when it was torpedoed in the Irish Sea. We saw a crosswise ripple on the waves and heard a muffled explosion below. A few minutes later the boat began to list. We understood and decided to act at once. Having been reared on the Welsh coast, we were excellent swimmers. So we put on our life belts and planned to dive from the deck rail before the liner sank. We mapped out our course in detail. We would swim underwater as far as possible and meet out of range of the suction we knew would follow the sinking of the ship.

"We were just in time. As we came up within a few yards of each other and looked back, we saw the *Lusitania* stand upright for a second and then drop terribly, shriekingly, into the sea. We swam furiously on and on together. A damaged life raft floated out to us. It was useless except as something to cling to when we were tired of floating or treading water. All the rescue boats missed us. The sun set over the spot where the *Lusitania* had been. It was suddenly dark and very cold.

"Our fingers, and eventually our bodies, grew numb. We clung to the life raft with increasing difficulty. Without a light or a sound on the sea, we gave up hope of rescue and grudgingly admitted as much to each other. Being Christians, we wanted a sacrament at a time like that. None of us felt good enough to pray. But we had always sung—sometimes sacred songs. We agreed to sing one stanza of a hymn and then slip quietly, together, into the sea. We chose 'Abide with Me.'

*Abide with me: fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.  
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!*

"As we finished the stanza a claxon sounded. Our voices, carrying out over the sea, had reached a destroyer cruising over the spot where the *Lusitania* had sunk. We took heart and sang the remaining stanzas. Guided by the music of the hymn, the crew of the destroyer steered directly to us, picked us up, and carried us safely to shore.

"After that we feel that the least we can do is to use that hymn as a benediction for our concerts."



The RMS Lusitania was a British steamship which was torpedoed off the coast of Ireland on May 7, 1915, during WWI. 1,198 people died.

**T h o s e  
w h o p l a c e  
t h e m s e l v e s  
i n t h e c a r e  
o f G o d e x -  
p e r i e n c e  
t h e p e a c e  
o f G o d.**

**W**hen everything else has passed away, you'll still have Jesus! When everything else is gone, there will still be Jesus! When all others forsake you, there will still be Jesus! When you haven't got anything left, there will still be Jesus! When everything else has gone to pot and lies in ruins, Jesus will still be with you. When the world has nothing left, you will still have Jesus!—And when you have Jesus, the two of you together can handle anything!

—David Brandt Berg