

Surely Goodness And Mercy

By
Bill Dagle

One of my fond memories of Dr. Al Smith, Mr. Singspiration, is seeing him in a church in Rome, Pennsylvania. The time was July, and the occasion was another Phillip P. Bliss remembrance birthday celebration. Bliss was born on July 9, 1838 in Clearfield County Pennsylvania and would eventually call Rome his home. Each year, the Phillip Bliss Historical Society would celebrate Bliss's birthday with Dr. Al Smith sharing his "Hymn Stories." It would be the combination of a story about Bliss, the help of John W. Peterson, and the 23rd Psalm that would inspire Dr. Al to write his own hymn just as Bliss had done for so many years.

It all began when Dr. Al received a letter from a descendant of Mr. Bliss. In the letter, the story was told about the time when young Bliss attended his first day of school. Six years of age, a one room school house and a very pretty teacher, Miss Murphy, would impact the boy. Little Bliss never had seen someone so beautiful and was instantly love struck. As was the custom back then, the Bible was used in the classroom. Before the day was over, Miss Murphy chose to read the 23rd Psalm. When she came to the part, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," little Bliss heard it just a little bit differently. Unable to read, young Philip thought for sure it said, "Surely good Miss Murphy shall follow me all the days of my life." Our young student was heartbroken when, days later, he discovered that Miss Murphy wouldn't be making that journey after all.

Inspired by the story, Dr. Al, with John Peterson, would write the song, *Surely Goodness and Mercy* in a matter of hours. Added to the hundreds of songs already written by Dr. Al Smith, this one has gone down in the books as a classic. For years now, it has been sung to encourage those trusting in Christ that a better home is waiting in Heaven for them someday:

A pilgrim was I, awand'ring, In the cold night of sin I did roam, When Jesus the kind Shepherd found me, and now I am on my way home.

When I walk thru the darksome valley, My Savior will walk with me there; And safely His great hand will lead me. To the mansions He's gone to prepare.

Chorus

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days, all the days of my life; Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life.

Jesus said "In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you." He also said "That He is the way, the truth and the life." John 14:2-6