

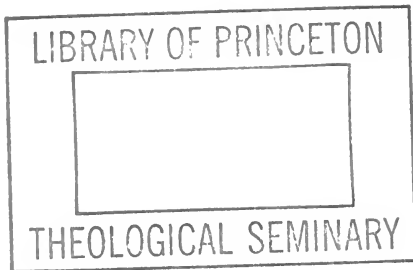


Nearer My  
God to Thee

Firenze

Angelo con canestro di fiori Beato Angelico

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and its romance /

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**NEARER, MY GOD, TO THEE**



Famous Hymns of the World Series

# Nearer My God To Thee

*ITS ORIGIN AND ITS  
ROMANCE*

BY  
ALLAN SUTHERLAND

Illustrated



NEW YORK  
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PUBLISHERS

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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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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 to Thee !

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 to Thee !

There let the way appear,  
Steps unto Heaven ;  
All that Thou send'st to me  
In mercy given :  
Angels to beckon me  
Nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Nearer to Thee !

Then, with my waking thoughts  
Bright with Thy praise,  
Out of my stony griefs  
Bethel I'll raise ;



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So by my woes to be  
Nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Nearer to Thee !

Or if on joyful wing  
Cleaving the sky,  
Sun, moon, and stars forgot,  
Upwards I fly,  
Still all my song shall be,  
Nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Nearer to Thee !







## NEARER, MY GOD, TO THEE



LIZA and Sarah Flower were gifted English sisters, whose early lives began and ended between the opening and the close of the first half of the last century; and yet in that brief period both left their impress on their generation; and the younger, Sarah, achieved undying fame by composing the beautiful hymn, "Nearer, my God, to Thee."

The meeting and courtship of their parents were romantic. Benjamin Flower was a bright young fellow whose business frequently called him to France, and he became early imbued with the spirit of the French Revolution. Afterward he became the Editor of the *Cambridge Intelligencer*, and for defending in its columns the French Revolution, and for real or imaginary reflections on the English constitution,

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he was brought to trial in 1799, and was sentenced to pay a fine and to spend six months in the famous or infamous Newgate Prison.

During his imprisonment Miss Eliza Gould, an enthusiastic young woman of culture, whose soul was fired with indignation at the injustice of his punishment, called upon him to express sympathy. They proved to be congenial spirits; the strangers became friends, the friends lovers, and soon after his release they were married. Two daughters were born to them, and in 1810 the mother, never strong, went to her reward. The training and education of the children devolved upon the father, and right nobly did he meet this added responsibility. Both girls were unusually talented — Eliza as a composer of music, and Sarah as a composer of verse.

In 1834, Sarah married William Bridges Adams, a civil engineer. In

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person she was tall and remarkably beautiful, and her manners were charming. Believing that the stage might be made to perform an important service, in connection with the pulpit, in elevating mankind, she essayed to act, with the approval of her husband, the character of Lady Macbeth. Although she met with considerable success, she soon learned that the demands were far too severe for her physical powers, so she turned her attention to literature. She wrote a number of poems of rare sweetness and power. "Nearer, my God, to Thee," suggested by the story of Jacob's vision at Bethel, as found in Genesis 28:10-22, was first published in 1841; and although it met with some favour, it was not until 1860 that Dr. Lowell Mason's beautiful and sympathetic music "quickened it into glorious life" and gave it a permanent abiding-place in the hearts of the people. In the great Peace Jubilee,

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held in Boston in 1872, this hymn was sung by nearly fifty thousand voices. Dr. Mason, then in his eighty-first year, was present, and was delighted with the matchless melody. He died the following August.

Mrs. Adams died in 1848, at the age of forty-three, two years after the death of her sister Eliza, who died unmarried, at the same age.

Many and interesting are the stories told in connection with the usefulness of this hymn, which has been an inspiration wherever the Christian religion has gone. It is a special favourite of Miss Helen Gould, whose sweet winsomeness and noble charity have made her one of the best loved women of our land.

It was sung at the great Christian Endeavor Convention held in Philadelphia in December, 1900, a choir of fifteen hundred trained voices, under the magnetic direction of H. C. Lin-

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coln, leading the vast multitude. At its close President Eberman said, thoughtfully, "I wonder if we shall ever listen to such singing on earth again!"

"When the officers and men of the North Atlantic Squadron," writes Chaplain Wright, "assembled on the quarter deck of the battleship 'Massachusetts,' at the memorial service for the gun's crew killed in the eight-inch turret, the most touching incident was the singing, softly and reverently, of 'Nearer, my God, to Thee.' It had been the favourite hymn of several of the dead men, and the last one they had sung, for we had closed the service with it two nights before the disaster. During an experience of nearly twenty years in the Navy I have found the songs that last the best with the men are such as 'Just As I Am,' 'Abide With Me,' 'Nearer, my God, to Thee,' and 'Sun of My Soul.'"

"I have heard," writes Dr. Floyd

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Tomkins, “ ‘ Nearer, my God, to Thee ’ sung in camp with a brass band, and I have sung it alone with trembling voice when kneeling by the bedside of the dying, and it has ever the same message of peace.”

The Rev. Millard F. Troxell, D.D., relates this experience: “ The beautiful August day was warm with sunshine along the lower levels, but the three train-loads of tourists found the summit of Pike’s Peak enveloped in mist and cloud too heavy to peer through, so that for an hour or more we gathered about the fire of the block-house and tried to become better acquainted. It was suggested that we sing some popular melody. A voice bravely began one of the many sentimental songs of the day, but few knew enough of it to join in, so the singer was left to finish it alone. Then some one began to sing softly ‘ Nearer, my God, to Thee,’ and before the second





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line was ended it seemed as if all who had been strangers now felt at home; and, for the time being, the place seemed like a very Bethel. It seemed, too, as if the clouds were parted and lifted by the singing, for when a little time had quickly passed, some one exclaimed, 'Oh, there's the sunshine!' and out we rushed to find that the mists were rolled away, and before us stretched the most wonderful of views."

On one occasion three distinguished travellers in Palestine heard in the distance faint snatches of a familiar tune, and were deeply touched, on drawing nearer, to find a group of Syrian students reverently singing, in Arabic, "Nearer, my God, to Thee." One of the hearers, in relating the story, said that the singing of the hymn by these youthful natives moved him to tears and affected him more deeply than anything of the kind to which he had ever listened.

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The Rev. G. B. F. Hallock, D.D., thus writes of his visit to Bethel on March 12, 1902: "As we stood there, where heaven had once come so near to earth, I am sure that there was not one in all our large party who did not share, in some degree, in that ladder vision which Jacob had; and you will not be surprised to know that we fell into the mood of Mrs. Sarah Flower Adams' ever-precious hymn, and, without a word of suggestion, sang together, with deepest feeling, 'Nearer, my God, to Thee!' Who can say that Jacob's vision did not become ours as we softly chanted the trustful, prayerful words!

"Is it not a sweet immortality for this Christian poetess that her song should thus linger about the Holy Land, the stories of which were so dear to her, and continue to interpret the worshipful thoughts of Christian travellers long after she herself ceased to sing on earth? We do not wonder that

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our martyred President [McKinley] and so many before him and since, loved and do love this beautiful hymn. We shall ever count it a rare privilege that so many of us were permitted to sing it together on the sacred site of Bethel itself."

A pathetic story in connection with this hymn is told of an heroic woman whose train was caught in the great Johnstown flood of 1889. Hopelessly imprisoned by the rising waters, and with death surely approaching, she breathed a prayer to her Maker, and then, with a voice of marvellous trustfulness, began singing "Nearer, my God, to Thee," while hundreds, unable to help her, listened breathlessly. Before the last words of the hymn were reached the brave voice was still and the singer had gone to be with "those who had come out of great tribulation and had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

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Dr. William H. Clagett, President of the Board of Trustees of the Texas Presbyterian University, kindly contributes the following: "On a New Year's Day the late Rev. James H. Brookes, D.D., of St. Louis, was earnestly praying for a deeper work of grace in his own heart, and during his prayer quoted the lines:

" 'Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee,  
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me.'

"As he uttered the words, the spirit of God brought the meaning of the last line to his mind as never before; so much so, indeed, that he stopped in his praying and asked, 'Do I so deeply desire a greater consecration that I am willing for God to send a cross, if it be necessary, for me to receive it?'

"After an inner struggle of some minutes he again bowed down, and, with a full sense of the meaning of the words he uttered, made use of the

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same quotation as expressing the innermost desire of his heart.

“That year there came to him one of the greatest sorrows of his life through the death of a daughter, a bright and beautiful girl just about to graduate from college; but he afterwards testified that through this great loss God had answered his prayer and had brought him into closer communion with Him than he had ever been before.”

Chaplain Henry C. McCook, who was with our soldiers in Cuba, says: “It would seem strange that such a hymn as ‘Nearer, my God, to Thee’ should be the most popular and apparently the most widely known among all classes of soldiers. Yet it is so. When conducting services as Chaplain in the camps and hospitals of the Fifth Army Corps, and upon ships of war and transports, as well as in the camps of the States, I found that when this hymn

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was announced all the soldiers took hearty part in the singing. One would hardly think that the high spiritual note touched in this familiar hymn, which breathes longings for a nearer spiritual communion with God, even at the cost of human sacrifice, would truly voice the sentiment of the rough-and-ready, ofttime coarse and profane men who joined with their more religious comrades in singing. Yet such was the case. It was the favourite hymn at funerals, a fact that can be understood more easily. All soldiers are more or less affected by the sense of the near presence of death. The loss of their comrades is indeed 'a cross'; and in the true spirit of camaraderie they feel a touch of woe that the companions of the tent and of the march, who shared with them the toils and perils of battle, have passed away."

He also gives this interesting description of the closing scene on the battle-





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field of Las Guasimas, June, 1898:

“Farther on lay a dead Spaniard with covered face. A buzzard flapped from the tree above him. Beyond was the open-air hospital, where were two more rigid human figures, and where the wounded lay. That night there was a clear sky, a quarter-moon, and an enveloping mist of stars, but little sleep for any, and restless, battle-haunted sleep for all. Next morning followed the burial. Captain Capron was carried back to the coast and buried at Siboney. The other heroes were placed side by side in one broad trench with their feet to the east. In the bottom of the grave was laid a layer of long, thick, green leaves of guinea grass, and over the brave fellows were piled plumes of the royal palm as long as the grave. At the head of the trench stood Chaplain Brown; around it were the comrades of the dead; along the road struggled a band of patient, ragged

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Cubans; and approaching from Santiago a band of starving women and children for whom the soldiers gave their lives. 'Nearer, my God, to Thee,' sang the soldiers; and the tragedy of Las Guasimas was done."

This noble hymn gained additional popularity through the tragic death of President William McKinley. His last intelligible words, spoken just before his soul took its flight, were: "Nearer, my God, to Thee, e'en though it be a cross, has been my constant prayer." His prayer was answered. It was a cross — one of the greatest that could come to him and to the beloved nation which he had served so faithfully — that led him through a martyr's suffering and death to claim a martyr's reward, that of being ever near the blessed Saviour. In a different way, the prayers of his countrymen were also answered, for although his life was not spared, there was infused into the

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hearts of all a profounder reverence for the head of the nation, a greater horror of assassination, a stronger love for our country, a deeper devotion to our political institutions, and a more abiding faith in God.

The day of his burial at Canton, September 19, 1901, witnessed the most singular and unanimous tributes of respect and affection ever paid to the memory of a human being. Seldom, if ever, has a common sorrow found outward expression in so many lands and in so many ways; and never was there so close an approach to church and international unity. Memorial services were held in innumerable churches in our own and other countries; and at half-past three o'clock, through arrangements previously made, all the material activities of the country ceased, so far as possible, for five minutes. Trolley cars were motionless, the hum of machinery died away, horses were stopped, not a

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telegraph instrument clicked, and the great ocean cable no longer pulsed its messages. A Sabbath stillness was over all. Everywhere, as clocks and watches indicated the hour, men stood with uncovered and bowed heads asking God's blessing upon the stricken widow and upon their bereaved country.

Before us as we write is a great metropolitan newspaper of the following day, its pages full of graphic descriptions of the funeral service at Canton, where the vast audience stood at the close, with tear-dimmed eyes, while "Nearer, my God, to Thee," was being sung; and of telegraphic despatches from the leading centres of the world, in almost all of which reference is made to the singing of this hymn in connection with memorial services.

Two of the despatches are of special interest: The first, from New York, dated September 19, is: "The 250 passengers of the American Hamburg-

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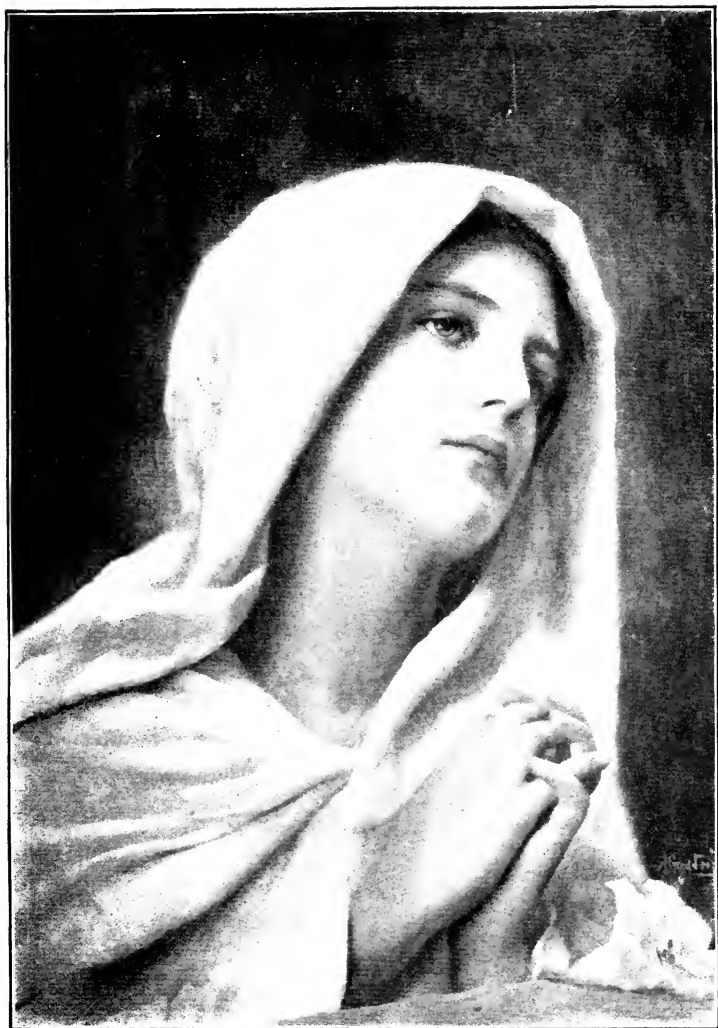
American liner 'Belgravia,' from Hamburg, which arrived this afternoon at Hoboken, as the clock struck 3:30, received the sorrowful intelligence of the President's death and funeral services. Instantly every one stopped and stood for five minutes with uncovered head. While the people waited, the band on the steamer 'Pennsylvania,' lying alongside, played Chopin's funeral march, and a quartet sang 'Nearer, my God, to Thee.' "

The second despatch is from Kansas City, Mo.: "Twenty-five thousand people in the great auditorium this afternoon paid loving tribute to the memory of President McKinley. As many more were turned away. A chorus of seven hundred voices and a band of one hundred pieces furnished the music. The entire audience joined in the singing of 'Lead, Kindly Light' and 'Nearer, my God, to Thee.' "

In Philadelphia, the Academy of

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Music was packed to its utmost capacity, and this hymn was sung with marvellous effect by the standing, weeping audience. At League Island, at Girard College, in Catholic and Protestant churches, in Jewish synagogues and Christian temples, the people were drawn together by a great heart sorrow, and gave expression to it by singing the hymn which so appropriately and fittingly set forth their feelings. On the still autumn air the beautiful notes of "Nearer, my God, to Thee" rang out with singular sweetness and distinctness from the chimes of the belfry of the historic Christ Church — the same bells which had sounded a muffled peal at the reception of the news of the British blockade of Boston; which had joyously echoed the brave full tones of the Liberty Bell when it proclaimed its story of liberty to the world; which had summoned Washington to worship when he was our first President; and





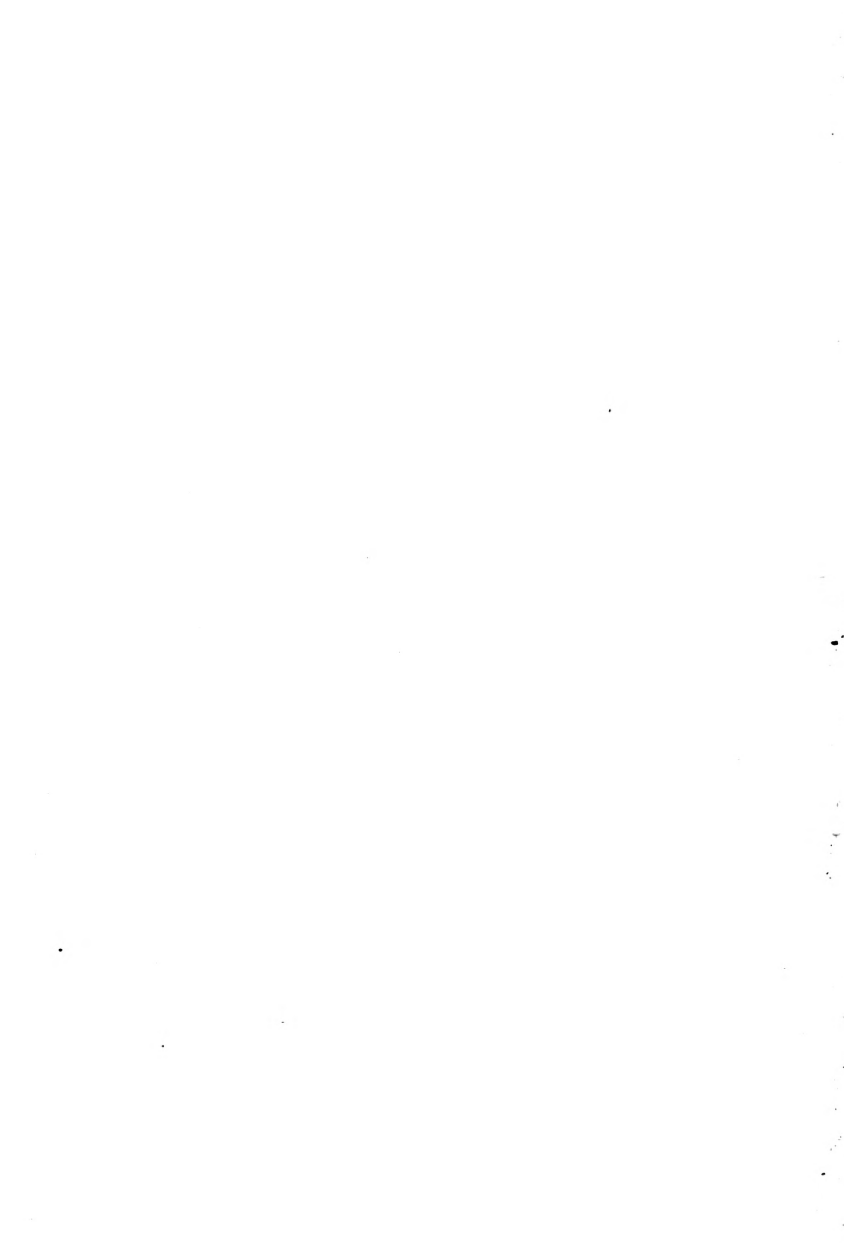
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which had rung out their tribute of love and sorrow when Washington, Lincoln, and Garfield passed on to join the immortals — these chimes now made the air melodious with the tender notes of the deathless hymn; and men, stopping to listen, went on their way with uplifted looks, and with a fuller, deeper understanding of the inner spiritual teachings of the solemn words.

In every civilised country memorial services were held, the most interesting, perhaps, being in Westminster Abbey, by order of the King. The burial service was read with touching simplicity in the presence of royalty, the full diplomatic corps, distinguished men and women, and a vast concourse of sorrowing people. Here, as elsewhere, the greatest interest centred about the singing of the hymn which was in the heart and on the lips of our heroic President as he went to meet his God.









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