NEAR TO THE HEART OF GOD

Cleland Boyd McAfee, 1903

"*Near To the Heart of God*" was written and composed by American theologian, Presbyterian minister, and hymn writer, Cleland McAfee following the tragic concurrent deaths of his two nieces to diphtheria in 1903. They died within twenty-four hours of each other. His daughter described the account in her book, "*Near to the Heart of God*". Hymnologist, William J. Reynolds, quotes the account:

> "The family and town were stricken with grief. My father often told us how he sat long and late thinking about the communion hymn he wanted to write for the following Sunday morning. Soon he was saying to himself, "*We can find peace and comfort if we stay near to the heart of God*". And then the words began flowing from his facile pen, and he found himself writing, "*There is a place of quiet rest, Near to the heart of God; A place where sin cannot molest, Near to the heart of God*". The choir learned it at the regular Saturday night rehearsal, and afterward they went to my Uncle Howard's home and sang it as they stood under the sky outside the darkened, quarantined house. It was sung again on Sunday morning at the communion service...".

McAfee composed the tune: McAfee to pair with the hymn lyrics. It was first published in "*The Choir Leader*" (1903)". McAfee also penned other hymns of lesser note, including "*Christian Soldiers, on to Conflict*", a temperance song (1897), and "*Let Us Watch and Pray in our Master's Name*" (1917), a song about the second coming.

Cleland Boyd McAfee (1866-1944) was a native of Missouri, graduating in 1884 from Park College, which was founded by his father, John A. McAfee. Following study at Union Theological Seminary, New York, he returned to Park College to serve for almost twenty years on the faculty as a professor of philosophy, choir director, pastor, and dean of Park College until 1901. He went on to serve congregations in Chicago, Brooklyn, (1901-1912) & McCormick Theological Seminary (1912-1930) as well as moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (1930-1936).

~Tull