

Sniper Stopped by a Song

Ira D. Sankey, a gospel singer and composer who was associated with evangelist Dwight L. Moody in revival campaigns across America and in Great Britain, became known as *The Sweet Singer of Methodism*. Their crusades drew huge crowds through the late 19th century.

On one occasion, Sankey was traveling on a steamer in the Delaware River when he was recognized by some passengers who had seen his picture in the newspaper and knew he was associated with Moody.

When they asked him to sing one of his own compositions, Sankey said he preferred the hymn by William Bradbury, *Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us*.

He suggested that everyone join in the singing. One of the stanzas begins, "We are thine, do Thou befriend us; be the guardian of our way."

When he finished, a man stepped out of the shadows and asked, "Were you in the Army, Mr. Sankey?"

"Yes, I joined up in 1860," he replied.

"Did you do guard duty at night in Maryland, about 1862?" the stranger continued.

"Yes, I did," Sankey said.

"I was in the Confederate Army," the stranger explained. "I saw you one night at Sharpsburg. I had you in my gun sight as you stood in the light of the full moon. Then just as I was about to pull the trigger, you began to sing. It was the same hymn you sang tonight. I couldn't shoot you."

Had the Confederate soldier fired his weapon, the world would have been robbed of great music that touched the souls of millions to come. Sankey wrote several hymns and songs, and composed and arranged music for many more. He collaborated with Philip Bliss and then later with James McGranahan and George Stebbins on a series of sacred song collections published in the United States and Great Britain. His most enduring production, the popular *Sacred Songs and Solos* (widely known as "Sankey & Moody"), ran to more than 1,200 works and is still in use today.



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Sankey's close call in his Union uniform gives us pause to reflect. Perhaps we have been delivered – unaware – by God from a fateful automobile accident because of the work of angels He sent. Maybe we overcame a dread disease that would have limited our abilities or even brought death because our Lord intervened. No doubt, there are many potentially harmful encounters or circumstances from which we have been saved.

Just as was the case with Sankey, God has a purpose for you. He wants you to fulfill it. When it is time, He will call you home, and not before.

May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble; may the name of the God of Jacob defend you (Psalm 20:1 NKJV).

– Beecher Hunter