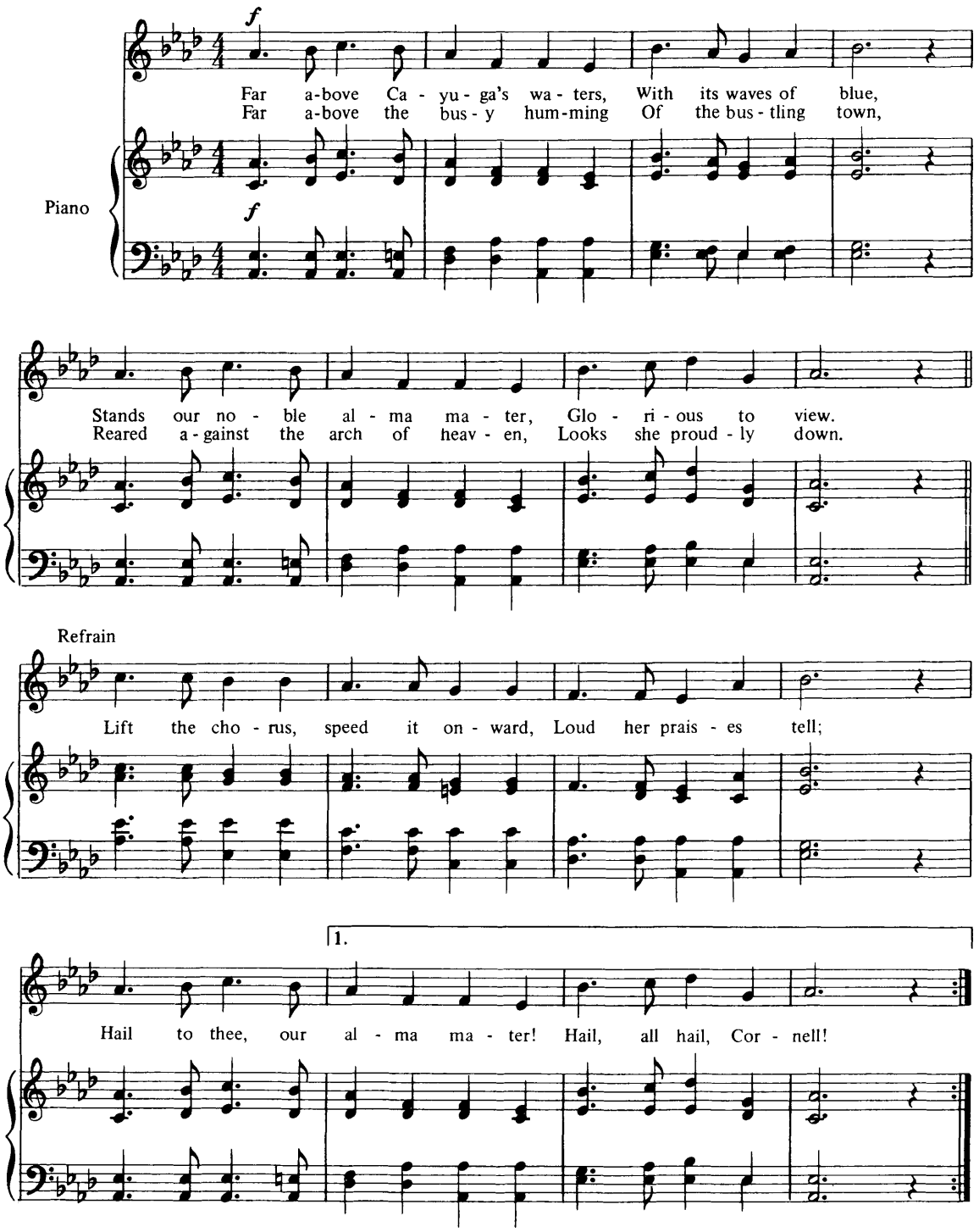
ALMA MATER

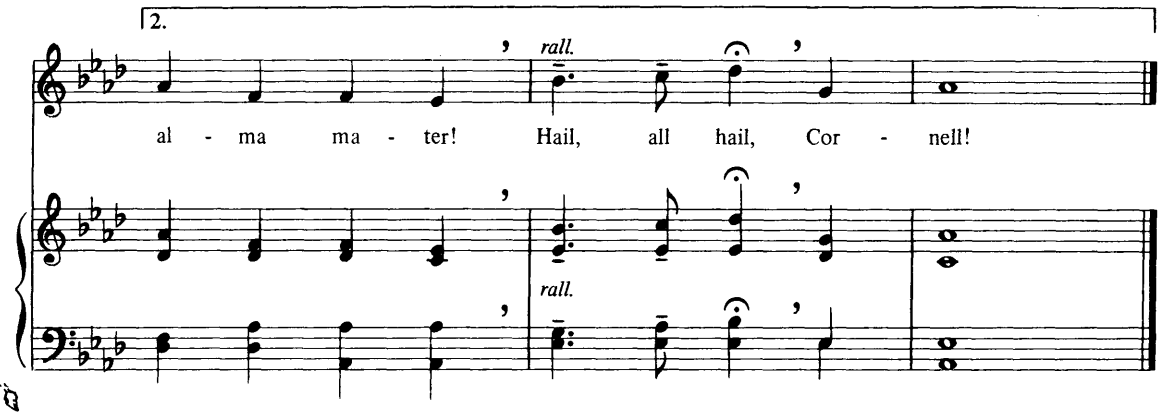
Far Above Cayuga's Waters

Archibald Croswell Weeks 1872
and Wilmot Moses Smith 1874

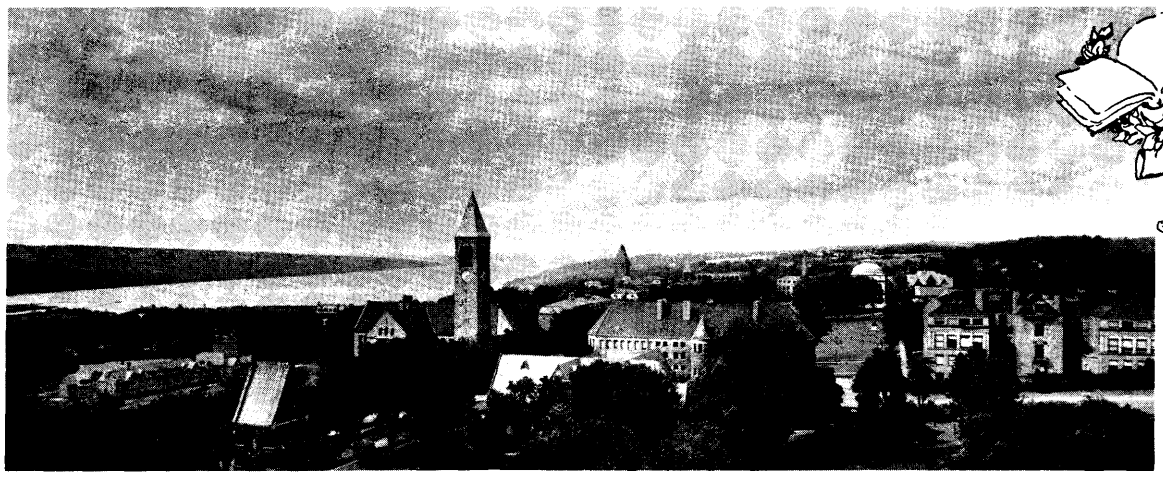
H. S. Thompson

Con spirito





ALMA MATER

The best-known Cornell song and one of the most popular of all American college songs, the ALMA MATER is set to the music of "Annie Lisle," a popular song written in 1857 by H. S. Thompson, a Boston minstrel-musician. "Annie Lisle" is a ballad about a virtuous young lady destined for tragedy—a genre related to Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee" and "Lenore." A newspaper editorial at the time observed that "Annie Lisle" and similar songs "swept the country like a prairie fire." In a letter to the university librarian dated January 18, 1887, Archibald C. Weeks 1872 explains the origin of the text "Far Above Cayuga's Waters":

> It was composed about 1870, under the following circumstances. Mr. W. M. Smith '74 (now district attorney of Suffolk County) and I roomed together in the Woodruff Block on Tioga Street. The blending of our voices, he, tenor, I, bass, pleased us exceedingly in the music of "Annie Lisle." I proposed that we adapt a college song to the music and suggested the first two lines of the first verse; he responded with the third and fourth, I with the fifth and sixth, and he with the seventh and eighth. The chorus was the result of mutual suggestion.