

## TELL ME THE OLD, OLD STORY

Arabella Catherine Hankey

William Gladstone was Britain's longest serving politician, with a career lasting over sixty years. He served as Prime Minister four times, Chancellor of the Exchequer four times, and he was Britain's oldest Prime Minister, retiring at 84 years old. He was an evangelical, who sometimes attended Spurgeon's church, and also supported by his attendance the London Gospel campaign led by Moody and Sankey. He was not ashamed to be known as a Bible-believing Christian.

On one occasion, he was lecturing on the subject of 'Science, Industry, and Art', and he commented, "I do not mention any of these things as the great remedy for relieving the sorrow of human life and combating the evils which defile the world. If I am asked what is the remedy for these things, I must point to something, which, in a well-known hymn, is called 'The Old, Old Story', told of in an old, old Book, and taught with an old, old teaching, which is the greatest gift ever given to mankind". ... A tremendous tribute to the hymn penned by this lady.

Arabella Catherine Hankey was born in London, 12<sup>th</sup> January 1834, the daughter of a wealthy banker. At an early age she became a Christian, - her family belonged to the evangelical group within the Church of England known as the 'Clapham Sect'. It was founded by John Newton, and included many influential people of its day, such as William Wilberforce and the eminent evangelical preacher Charles Simeon.

In her early thirties Catherine became seriously ill, ... so weak and weary she felt like a child, needing 'simple thoughts in simple words'. In her loneliness, she longed for someone to come and remind her of the old, old story, but eventually, she did it herself by writing a poem consisting of one hundred verses! The first fifty verses, - known as "The Story Wanted", - were completed by 29<sup>th</sup> January 1866, and the remaining fifty verses, - known as "The Story Told", - by 18<sup>th</sup> November, the same year. From this poem came the two great hymns, "Tell me the old, old story" and "I love to tell the story Of unseen things above, Of Jesus and His glory, Of Jesus and His love" Written especially for children, but sung by people of all ages, "Tell me the old, old story" is one of the most translated hymns ever! (<https://www.wholesomewords.org/poetry/oldstory.html>).

Catherine health later improved. She became a missionary and a nurse, and died 9<sup>th</sup> May 1911, at the age of seventy-seven. These two hymns, though, are her

greatest legacy, and speaking of the purpose behind why she wrote them she said, “God’s remedy for sin is something I want to understand, and I want to hear it often, lest I forget it. As weak as I am, I cannot think too well or too fast. I need to have the story explained to me as a little child”. ... Let’s also look at it simply, as we too consider the Gospel.

She described herself as “weak and weary, and helpless and defiled” ... As far as the state of her health was concerned, she *was* ... but she particularly wanted to relate to something much deeper. She described herself as “weak and weary, and helpless and defiled” *before God*. ... She knew that was her sinful state before Him, - a **reprobate**, a sinner.

She became a Christian as a young girl from a wealthy family, - she knew nothing about the poverty in the streets of London. She had no idea of the prostitutes and the drinking dens. Gambling and other such pursuits were alien to her ... She had never been involved with anything like that. Yes, she had helped to feed the poor in the back-streets, and she had supplied them clothing ... but she knew nothing about the sinful depravity which lurked in many a corner ... *AND YET*, she knew she was a sinner, “helpless and defiled”.

You don’t need to be a prostitute to be a sinner ... or a murderer, to be a sinner ... or a gambler. In fact, you don’t have to be a bad person at all. But simply by virtue of being born into this world, you are already a sinner for God’s Word explains, **Rom. 3:23** *all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God ...* **10** ... *There is none righteous, no, not one:* **11** *There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.* **12** ... *there is none that doeth good, no, not one.* ... Out of all the people who have ever lived in this world, there is none of us to whom these words do not comply, for as the psalmist describes, **Ps. 51:5** *I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

Ah, but that does not apply to me! ... Yes, it does, for it is all-inclusive, - it leaves no one out, and there are no exceptions. No one has to teach a child to tell lies or be selfish, - in fact, we have to teach them to tell the truth and put others first. Sinful behaviour comes naturally, again the psalmist wrote, **Ps. 58:3** *The wicked are estranged [Darby, “go astray”] from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.* Sin is in every fibre of our being, - it is in our flesh, our DNA, says Paul (Rom. 8:3) ... he says in Rom. 6:6 our bodies are ruled by sin, - *total depravity*. We are shaped by our sinful nature.

We try to make excuses for it, but we know how much easier it is to do what we know we ought not to be doing ... and it goes back to the sins of our first parents who disobeyed God, **Rom. 5:12**, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. And because of sin, there is hostility towards God, **Rom. 8:7** Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. <sup>8</sup> So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. ... And sin is also the reason the sinner resents and rejects God, **I Cor. 2:14** the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him, - the things of God make no sense to him!

That is what *reprobate* means, - sinful rebellion against God ... and that is the state into which we were all born, and it is also the condition in which sin would try to keep us.

Look, though, at another word Arabella Catherine Hankey uses in the second verse of her hymn,

Tell me the story slowly,  
That I may take it in,  
That wonderful *redemption*,

From *reprobation* to *redemption* ... There is only one Person in the entire history of the world Who did not have a sinful nature, and that Person was Jesus Christ. He never sinned, neither was He born sinful, nor born into sin, - when He was born as a little baby boy, He was perfect and sinless. The miraculous means by which He was conceived permitted Him to enter our world while avoiding the curse passed down from Adam. Jesus was conceived without sin, and born without sin, and He never sinned at any time in His life ... the sinless Son of God His Father sent into this world, **Jn. 3:16** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

The whole world, and everything and everyone in it, had turned away from God ... and yet, God sent His Son to bring them back by becoming the Saviour of those who by nature instinctively reject Him. ... The hymnwriter calls it, "that wonderful redemption", and apart from that 'wonderful redemption', there would be no salvation.

... There is none righteous, and there is none who would seek after God ... and yet, God sent His Son to seek after them, - the Shepherd came searching for His sheep.

So, what is ‘redemption’? ... The word ‘redeem’ is a simple word which means ‘to purchase, to buy, to pay the price for, to pay the cost of.’ It was the currency paid for a slave ... and it describes the ransom Jesus paid for sinners at Calvary. He did not purchase us with money, - no shekels or silver or gold, - but the price He paid to purchase His own people was the shedding of His blood, - the precious sacrifice of the Lamb of God. He gave His life to obtain our salvation ... and that is how He redeemed us.

And when He paid the ultimate sacrifice, no more needed to be done for the redemption price He paid on Calvary paid in full the complete cost to free us from sin eternally, as Paul explains, **Rom. 3:24** Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ... **Rom. 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. ... And because I have been redeemed, I now belong to the One Who redeemed me for I am no longer my own since He has purchased me. And because of all that He has done for me on Calvary ...

- my sins are forgiven (**Eph. 1:7** In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace),
- I have been made righteous before God (**17** For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ),
- I am free from the curse of the law (**Gal. 3:13** Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us),
- I have been adopted into God’s family (**Gal. 4:5** To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons), - ‘born again’ (**1 Jn. 3:9** ... born of God.),
- I have been delivered from sin’s bondage (**Titus 2:14** Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity),
- I have peace with God (**Col. 1:18** And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. **19** For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; **20** And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven),
- the Holy Spirit lives within me (**1 Cor. 6:19** know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? **20** For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.)

- ... and I have eternal life ([Rom. 6:23](#) the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord)!

I have been redeemed, - **redemption**, - ... and that is the only “**remedy** for sin”. The streets of Glory will be filled with former captives who, through no merits of their own, are redeemed, forgiven, and free. They will be with Christ for ever, - not because of anything *they* have done, but because of everything *He* has done for them. Slaves become saints because Christ, - our **redemption** on the cross, - is our only **remedy** for sin!

Through His finished work at Calvary, Jesus satisfied God’s wrath against our sin and He granted victory for His people over their sinful nature, [1 Peter 2:24](#) *Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness ...* [Rom. 5:6](#) *For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly ...* <sup>8</sup> *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ...* Had it not been for the cost Jesus paid in full, Hell would be waiting for us! ... That is the seriousness of this matter ... Without Christ, there is no **remedy**. Without believing in Jesus as your Saviour and Lord, there is no means of escape. ... **Redemption** ... **Remedy** ... and then the hymnwriter tells us, “**Remember**, I’m the sinner whom Jesus came to save”.

That is the only reason God sent His Son into this world! There was no other purpose for Jesus to come to this earth and die, except to become our Saviour! ... No other reason! That is the only purpose for which the Father sent His Son” If Jesus had not entered this world, there would be no escape from our trespasses and sins ... and no escape from the eternal fires of Hell!

But Jesus came, and Jesus died, and, therefore, *Jesus saves!!* ...

Yes, and when that world’s glory  
Is dawning on my soul,  
Tell me the old, old story:  
“Christ Jesus makes thee whole.”

[Acts 4:12](#) *there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. ...* Religion does not save. A church does not save. Ignorance does not exonerate you. Even the fact of Jesus coming into this world, - on its own, - does not save you for to be saved and freed from bondage to sin, the wages of sin had to be paid for ... and if we were to pay for it, the wages of sin is eternal death, everlasting separation from God in a fearful lost eternity, with no hope of ever being released ... [Rom. 6:23](#) ... *but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus*

Christ our Lord. ... He paid the full amount the wages of sin required for your salvation when He died for you on the cross ... when His precious blood was shed as your ransom to redeem you, to 'cover' your sins forever ... the same Jesus Christ Who is alive today and coming back soon! That's the Gospel of the Good News of Saving Grace, **Titus 2:13** Looking for that ... glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; **14** Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Arabella Catherine Hankey has it all in her hymn ...

Tell me the old, old story ...

Of Jesus and His glory,

Of Jesus and His love.

Tell me the story simply,

As to a little child

Tell me the story slowly,

That I may take it in,

That wonderful **redemption**,

God's **remedy** for sin ...

**Remember** I'm the sinner

Whom Jesus came to save.