

27th May 2021

Old

***“Es ist eine alte Geschichte,
Doch bleibt sie immer new.”***

“It is so old a story, yet somehow always new.”

Heinrich Heine, Lyrisches Intermezzo no. 39

The hymn *Tell me the old, old story* is based on a poem written in 1866 by Katherine Hankey, an English evangelist, while recovering from a serious illness. Bedridden for a long time in convalescence, Hankey composed her poem of one hundred verses in two parts: *The Story Wanted* and *The Story Told*. As well as being an inspiration for *Tell me the old, old story*, her poem is also the basis of another hymn, *I love to tell the story*.

Hankey was born in 1834, the daughter of a prosperous London banker. From a devout Anglican family, she was stirred by the Methodist revival of John Wesley, and took on the task of organising and teaching in Sunday Schools, so that the children of her day could learn of the Gospel which so inspired her life. She went on to do missionary work as a nurse in South Africa where she worked alongside her brother.

Tell me the old, old story was set to music by William Hoyard Doane, who was impressed by the poem when he first heard it at a YMCA convention in Montreal in 1867. With its repetition of “Tell me the old, old story” in rising cadences as a refrain, Doane’s melody more than suitably captures the power and telling nature of Hankey’s words and faith.

*Tell me the old, old story of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love.
Tell me the story simply, as to a little child,
For I am weak and weary, and helpless and defiled.*

*Tell me the old, old story, tell me the old, old story,
Tell me the old, old story, of Jesus and His love.*

“It is so old a story, yet somehow always new”, wrote Heinrich Heine. Are we to confine the story of faith, the love of our God and the Gospel message to the pages of history? Or are we to find newness in this old story, such that it is heard, and seen and known as if for the very first time?

A prayer for today

*It’s a simple story, yet it is packed with meaning.
It may be an old story, but, thank God, it is always new. Amen*