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## **JUST AS I AM**

**By Duane V. Maxey**

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## **PICTURES INCLUDED WITH THIS PUBLICATION**

There are two pictures included with this publication: 1 of Charlotte Elliott as hdm1514a.jpg, and one of William B. Bradbury as hdm1514b.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This article is about Charlotte Elliott and her Hymn, "Just As I Am," -- a hymn that according to one writer "has touched more hearts and influenced more people for Christ than any other song ever written." Whether this be an accurate assessment or not, there is no doubt that this well-known hymn has had a long and mighty impact in bringing souls to Christ.

Different sources do not agree on all the dates and details related to Charlotte Elliott and her hymn, "Just As I Am, and I suspect that in at least one sketch I read there was a good deal of embellishment not based on the facts. I do not say that anyone intentionally wrote fiction into the story, but for whatever reason or reasons, some appear not to have gotten their facts straight. Thus, it has been a bit of a chore to sort fact from fiction and still relate the story without a lot of awkwardness. I have endeavored to present the material with as much accuracy as I can, taking note of some variations in the dates and details given by different writers. In piecing together the story of Charlotte Elliott and her hymn, "Just As I Am," I have favored the information that came from sources in England, her homeland, as likely to be more accurate than those originating in America. Regardless of the precise accuracy of all of the dates and details, I hope that my readers will find the basic truths of the story to be useful and a personal blessing.

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## Part 1

### CHARLOTTE ELLIOTT AND HER CONVERSION

Charlotte Elliott was born March 18, 1789 in Clapham, England. She was the daughter, granddaughter, and sister of ministers, and according to one writer she was therefore "reared in a cultured and deeply spiritual atmosphere." During most of her first 30 years, her life was happy and cheerful, so much so that she acquired the nickname, "Carefree Charlotte," and she became a popular artist and writer of humorous verse. However, God had different plans in mind for the blithe young woman, and no doubt in order to bring about her conversion, she was cast into the crucible of affliction.

At about 30 years of age, in 1819, she was stricken with a grave illness that rendered her an invalid and she was compelled to spend much of the time bedfast. She once described the symptoms of her ailment as "bodily feelings of overpowering weakness, languor and exhaustion... day after day ...hour after hour" with times of "great physical suffering." After being thus smitten, she who had been known as "Carefree Charlotte," became despondent, depressed, and defiant toward God for not healing her. Much of the time in bed, unable to leave her home, listless, and suffering, she felt useless and became sour and embittered.

At this point, I will go on and relate: -- that Charlotte Elliott spent the remaining 52 years of her life as an invalid, living in Westfield Lodge Brighton, England -- that she never married -- and that she died at the age 82 on September 22, 1871. But, happily, this is NOT "the rest of the story," for out of the midst of her suffering God ordained to take those poetic talents that He had given her and put them to a better use. Those gifts were not to be employed in writing that which was filled with gaiety, but rather that which was filled with piety -- not to write of the jocular, but to write of Jesus, and of His unmerited salvation provided all who come to Him, "without one plea" but that His blood was shed for them.

How Charlotte Elliott was saved in her crucible of affliction, and how she thus used those God-given talents for Jesus -- THAT is the rest of the story.

All sources seem to agree that the events which brought about Charlotte Elliott's conversion occurred in 1822 -- from one to three years following the onset of her debilitating affliction, depending upon whether it began in 1819 or 1821. One source states that the occasion leading to her conversion occurred in the month of May, 1822.

In May of 1822, Dr. Caesar Malan, a friend of Charlotte's father and a well-known evangelist from Geneva, Switzerland, was being entertained in the Elliott home at Brighton, England. He had been invited there by Charlotte's father in the hope that he could help her break through her wall of despondence and regain her faith in Christ.

When Dr. Malan and Charlotte were conversing, he asked her, "Are you a Christian? Have you experienced Christ?" -- and she was immediately offended by the queries. According to one source, in a sharp retort she let Dr. Malan know quite clearly that she did not care to have that subject discussed that evening, and the same writer relates that the rebuffed Dr. Malan reacted

sweetly, saying : "Well, I will not persist in speaking of it, but I shall pray that you may give your heart to Christ and become a useful worker for Him."

Following this rude rebuff of their guest, Charlotte was smitten with conviction, probably even quicker than she had been smitten with illness, and during a later conversation with Dr. Malan, her spirit was changed. (Some writers have her second encounter with Dr. Malan as two or three weeks later and under different circumstances at a different location, but I think it may have been simply a second conversation with him during several days that he was a house-guest in the Elliott home.)

Whatever the exact circumstances of the second conversation, Charlotte was evidently chastened by Divine conviction at the time. She apologized to Dr. Malan for her previous rudeness, saying, "Actually, I would like to come to Christ, but I do not know how to find Him." -- to which the evangelist replied: "Come just as you are. Cut the cable; it will take too long to unloose it. It is a small loss anyway."

Charlotte asked: "But, will He receive me just as I am, and now?"

Dr. Malan replied: "Oh, yes, gladly will He do so."

"They then knelt together and prayed, and she soon experienced the holy joy of a full forgiveness through the blood of Christ."

"Instantly Charlotte was a changed person, placing complete trust in Christ's redemptive sacrifice and expressing the peace and joy she desired. For the rest of her life, Charlotte Elliott celebrated that day every year as her "spiritual birthday" when she had gone from despair to faith."

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## Part 2

### HOW "JUST AS I AM" CAME TO BE WRITTEN

Twelve years went by before Charlotte Elliott wrote the lines of her famous hymn, "Just As I Am," in 1834. Her brother, Rev. Henry V. Elliott, was endeavoring to raise money to build a school at St. Mary's Hall in Brighton for the children of poor clergymen. While the rest of the family went to attend an event in connection with this charitable effort, Charlotte was left alone.

Feeling depressed at first because she felt useless to help her brother's efforts, it became a sleepless night. Finally, she thought, "God's grace is sufficient for all things, and surely my thoughts of uselessness can be conquered by His grace." She thought of Dr. Malan's advice years before when she was saved: "Come, just as you are," and the lines of "Just As I Am," began to form in her mind. Somewhere, in the wee hours, at 2 a.m. according to one writer, Charlotte arose. And, according to another, it was for her own spiritual comfort and benefit that she took a pad and pencil, and set down the formulas of her faith in six stanzas -- lines that were to be first read as poetry and then sung to music for years to come, and around the globe. When Charlotte's sister-in-law returned home, she found the poem on a table.

Whatever it was that first prompted her to write the lines, Charlotte sent the poem to a publisher hoping that printed copies of the poem could be sold for a few shillings to put toward her brother's charitable school-building project -- to be, if possible, her little donation. Leaflets were printed and sold containing the poem. At the top was the statement: "Sold for the benefit of St. Margaret's Hall, Brighton." Under that, was the verse: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out," and beneath the verse was Charlotte's poem, "Just As I Am."

Ecclesiastes 11:1 says: "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days." It may have seemed like a tiny crust of bread that she was casting upon the waters, but in time God fulfilled that truth to Charlotte. A wealthy woman who was touched by the poem bought and distributed copies freely. Others were touched. Copies of the leaflet poem, "Just As I Am," sold and spread far and wide, and as many were moved by its poetic message, funds for the school-project came in from those sales.

Some time after printed leaflet copies of the poem began to be distributed, a doctor who knew not that she had written the poem visited Charlotte. He had no medicine that could help her physical ailment, but he had purchased some of the poem leaflets to distribute to his shut-in patients, and he wanted to cheer her by leaving her one.

Unaware that she was the author, the good doctor informed Charlotte that the leaflets were selling all over England and that they were even being translated into foreign languages! -- and that this was being done for a good cause -- to help raise funds for the construction of a school for the children of poor clergymen.

Tears began to flow from Charlottes eyes as she remembered how so many others had contributed to the project while she felt useless and unable to give anything. But before it was all over, the funds coming in for that project from the distribution and sale of her poem far exceeded all other contributions!

What a blessing that must have been to her, but far beyond the good done by turning her "mite into a million" (so to speak) for that earthly project, has been the spiritual good done through the publication of that poem. One writer said that Charlotte Elliott "received 1,000 letters from around the world telling her how this hymn had affected people's lives." Another wrote: "Only eternity will reveal the vast number of individuals whose lives have been dramatically changed through the use of this one hymn from the pen of an invalid woman." Her brother, Rev. Henry V. Elliott said years later: "In the course of a long ministry, I hope to have been permitted to see some fruit of my labors; but I feel more has been done by a single hymn of my sister's."

The success of first publishing "Just As I Am" also aroused Charlotte Elliott to put her God-given talents to work as a writer and publisher of hymns. Shut in by her blindness, Fanny Crosby shared with the wide world the beauties opened in Christ to her spiritual eyes! And, shut in by her crippling malady, Charlotte Elliott began to share with the world, in published verse, the spiritual truths that she could not bring them in person.

Spiritual paradoxes are often striking! -- but as with the imprisoned apostle Paul who thereby left the world most of the New Testament, sometimes God shuts up one of his saints, or song-birds, into a small and painful confinement to give him or her a broader, a more beautiful, a world-wide, a centuries-spanning, influence for Him. One need not reflect long to recognize this truth -- The great apostle Paul, Madame Guyon, John Bunyan, and who knows how many more? -- all shut up, but all made a boundless blessing to the world through their imprisonment. So it was with the two songsters, Charlotte Elliott and later Fanny Crosby.

In about 1835, "Just As I Am" was published in "The Christian Remembrancer," and not long after its initial publication successes, Elliott published "Just As I Am" as part of her "Invalid's Hymn Book" containing 115 of her original works. During her lifetime she wrote a total of 150 hymns and came to be considered as one of England's finest hymn-writers.

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### Part 3

#### THE WORDS OF "JUST AS I AM"

According to one source, the hymn originally had 6 six verses and a 7th verse was added later. That writer also states that the "original verse two is now omitted." I present below the 6 verses and chorus with which holiness congregations today are probably the most familiar.

1

Just as I am, without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

2

Just as I am, and waiting not  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

3

Just as I am, though tossed about  
With many a conflict, many a doubt,  
Fightings and fears within, without,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

4

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
Yea, all I need in Thee to find,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

5

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;  
Because Thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

6

Just as I am, Thy love unknown  
Hath broken every barrier down;  
Now, to be Thine, yea, Thine alone,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Chorus:

Just as I am, without one plea  
Just as I am, without one plea  
But that thy blood was shed for me,  
And that thou bid'st me come to thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come.

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#### Part 4

#### THE POEM SET TO MUSIC

Although across the many years of its publication the words of "Just As I Am" have been sung to several different tunes, the most widely used tune with the poem has been that which was composed by William Bachelder Bradbury (1816-1868) -- a tune that he composed in 1849 that he named "Woodworth."

Boston music teacher, composer and hymnbook publisher, Lowell Mason began gathering religious poems and setting them to music, and he encouraged his pupils to do the same. William Bachelder Bradbury, an impoverished young man from York, Maine, was one of Mason's pupils. He had seen neither piano nor organ until the age of 14, but with such rapidity did he progress musically that before many years passed he was the directory of music at a large tabernacle in New York City.

Bradbury's achievements in the realm of gospel music were considerable: He took further musical studies in Europe, and went on to become a composer and the publisher of 60 hymnbooks. Among the hymns composed by Bradbury are: "He Leadeth Me," "Jesus Loves Me," "Depth of Mercy," "Even Me," "Sweet Hour of Prayer," "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us," and "The Solid Rock." He also became the manufacturer of musical instruments, was credited with introducing the teaching of music into the public schools of New York City, and was credited with being a pioneer in teaching the American people the songs that helped pave the way for the revival efforts of Moody and Sankey.

It was in 1849, shortly after he returned from his musical studies in Europe, that Bradbury composed the tune, "Woodworth," which was first used for the hymn, "The God of Love Will Soon Indulge." Years later, Thomas Hastings, another gospel songwriter, united Charlotte Elliott's poem, "Just As I Am," with Bradbury's tune, "Woodworth."

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## Part 5 THE CONCLUSION

During some 52 years of suffering, Charlotte Elliott never regained normal health. Hers was a prolonged battle to "conquer the ills that beset." Concerning this long struggle, she once wrote: "He knows, and He alone, what it is, day after day, hour after hour, to fight against bodily feelings of almost overpowering weakness, languor and exhaustion, to resolve not to yield to slothfulness, depression and instability, such as the body causes me to long to indulge, but to rise every morning determined to take for my motto, 'If a man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'" On another occasion she wrote, "God sees, God guides, God guards me. His grace surrounds me, and His voice continually bids me to be happy and holy in His service just where I am."

The 7th verse later added to "Just As I Am," seems to be that shown below. It seems to me that there are too many words in line 2, making it difficult to quote or sing them in the established meter of the poem, but the message of the verse is like that of a finally-victorious overcomer. If she maintained its sentiments to the end, I venture to say that on September 22, 1871, Charlotte Elliott's suffering forever ended, making the "Suffering Charlotte" once again "Carefree Charlotte," and that forevermore. It is not hard to imagine her responding to the Savior's call, "O LAMB OF GOD, I COME!"

Just as I am, of that free love  
The breadth, length, depth, and height to prove,  
Here for a season, then above,  
O Lamb of God, I come!

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## APPENDIX

(I have appended below, the words to another one of Charlotte Elliott's hymns. I regret that somehow I lost its title during the writing of this article.)

O holy Savior, Friend unseen,  
The faint, the weak on Thee may lean,  
Help me, throughout life's varying scene,  
By faith to cling to Thee.

Blessed with this fellowship divine,

Take what Thou wilt, I'll ne'er repine;  
E'en as the branches to the vine,  
My soul would cling to Thee.

Far from her home, fatigued, oppressed,  
Here she has found her place of rest  
An exile still, yet not unblest,  
While she can cling to Thee.

What though the world deceitful prove,  
And earthly friends and joys remove,  
With patient, uncomplaining love  
Still would I cling to Thee.

Though faith and hope may long be tried,  
I ask not, need not aught beside;  
How safe, how calm, how satisfied,  
The souls that cling to Thee!

Blessed is my lot, whate'er befall;  
What can disturb me, who appall,  
While as my Strength, my Rock, my All,  
Oh, Savior, I cling to Thee!

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THE END