

Frances Ridley Havergal and the Consecration Hymn

By ROBERT D. KALIS

"WRITING is praying with me," wrote Frances Ridley Havergal, "for I never seem to write even a verse by myself, and feel like a little child writing; you know a child would look up at every sentence and say, 'And what shall I write next?' That is just what I do; I ask that at every line He would give me, not merely thoughts and power, but also every *word*, even the *rhymes*. Very often I have a most distinct and happy consciousness of direct answers."

Such is the personal testimony of Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879), considered universally as the foremost author of consecration hymns and literature. All of her writings were born out of deep experience. "If I am to write any good," she confessed to a friend, "a great deal of *living* must go to a very little *writing*, and that is why I have always been held back from writing a tithe of what I wanted to write; and I see the wisdom of it."

Frances was the fifth and youngest child of Rev. William Henry and Jane Havergal. Her father was a minister of the Church of England in Worcestershire. "Ridley" was taken from a friend of the family,

Rev. W. H. Ridley, a collateral descendant of the famous martyr, Bishop Ridley. Frances was a beautiful and brilliant child who learned to read at three, and at four years of age could read the Bible for herself. The study of French and music was undertaken next. Little Miss Havergal had no personal religious experience until she was almost eight years of age. At that time she came under strong conviction through a sermon on sin and judgment. This inspired her to seek the Lord in prayer every morning

and evening, but because she felt no change, she soon became discouraged and gave up.

About this time Frances' mother became seriously ill. "Fanny dear," her failing mother said one day shortly before her death, "Pray to God to prepare you for all that He is preparing for you." Although her mother's death failed to alter her spiritual life at the time, this prayer stayed with Frances all through her life, and she prayed it often.

Frances loved life and met every new study with great enthusiasm. Quickly she mastered Greek and Hebrew and also learned German while listening to someone else's lessons. As a pianist and vocalist Frances was somewhat of a prodigy, committing to memory all of the works of Handel, and many of those of Beethoven and Mendelssohn. Her piano rendition of "Moonlight Sonata" was considered perfect by a pupil of Beethoven.

Though frail in body, and subject to many fevers, Frances also enthusiastically learned mountain climbing. Many of Switzerland's rugged peaks were conquered by this lover of nature.



Frances Ridley Havergal

Miss Havergal attacked the spiritual world with equal vigor and enthusiasm. From the time that her soul was stirred by a zealous schoolteacher, she studied her Bible diligently and was faithful in prayer. Assurance of salvation came gradually several years later. Then she began to serve the Lord with her whole heart. If she did not give her all, she certainly did give her best to the Lord. Singing and playing for Jesus brought many opportunities to witness. Later she advised young converts to begin working for the Lord immediately upon conversion. "Cast in your sickle, and see if the Master won't give you a harvest."

Miss Havergal's pen was also enthusiastically employed as her hand moved "at the impulse of His love." While in Germany in 1858, she was inspired by a motto inscribed: *I gave My life for thee*. Instantly the lines of a poem flashed into her mind, and she hastily wrote them on a scrap of paper. Dissatisfied with the lines she threw them into the fire, but they fell out again unscathed. Thus was preserved the hymn that has blessed many.

Her poetry began to be widely circulated. This brought her both fame and fortune. All this was unhesitatingly consecrated to the Lord. Step by step, Miss Havergal was led to absolute surrender. Toward the end of 1873, when just finishing her thirty-seventh year, after praying for "a full realization of John 14:21, and also to know Him in the power of His resurrection," she "saw clearly the blessedness of true consecration." "I saw it," she recorded, "as a flash of electric light, and what you see you can never un-

see. There must be full surrender before there can be full blessedness. God admits you by the one into the other. He Himself showed me all this most clearly. First, I was shown that 'the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin,' and then it was made plain to me that He who had thus cleansed me had power to keep me clean; so I just utterly yielded myself to Him, and utterly trusted Him to keep me."

Regarding this deep experience, Miss Havergal wrote to a friend several months later: "One of the intensest moments of my life was when I saw the force of that word *cleanseth*. The utterly unexpected and altogether unimagined sense of its fulfillment to me, on simply believing it in its fulness, was just indescribable. I expected nothing like it short of heaven. I am so conscious of His direct teaching and guidance, through His Word and Spirit, in the matter that I cannot think I can ever unsee it again."

Springing from the fertile soil of such an experience, it is little wonder that Miss Havergal's *Consecration Hymn*, "Take My Life, and Let It Be," has borne such fruit. We are fortunate to have the story in her own words of how it came to be written:

"Perhaps you will be interested to know the origin of the consecration hymn, *Take My Life*. I went for a little visit of five days. There were ten persons in the house, some unconverted and long prayed for, some converted but not rejoicing Christians. He gave me the prayer, 'Lord give me *all* in this house!' And he just *did!* Before I left the house every one had got a blessing. The last night of

my visit I was too happy to sleep, and passed most of the night in praise and renewal of my own consecration, and these little couplets formed themselves and chimed in my heart one after another, till they finished with 'Ever, ONLY, ALL, for Thee!'"

From the day of her deep experience on December 2, 1873, Frances Ridley Havergal let God have His entire way, resulting in a majestic alteration of her life. Now she laid down her classical music and sang only for Jesus. Her singing brought many to the Lord.

Her silver and gold, also, were now entirely at the Lord's disposal. "The Lord showed me another little step," Miss Havergal wrote to a friend, "and of course I have taken it with extreme delight. 'Take my silver and my gold' now means shipping off all my ornaments to the Church Missionary House, where they will be accepted and disposed of for me. I had no idea I had such a jeweller's shop; nearly fifty articles are being packed off. I don't think I need to tell you, I never packed a box with such pleasure."

Her intellect was also given entirely to God and to the study of the Bible. Her sister states in her book, *Memorials of Frances Ridley Havergal*, that she committed to memory the four Gospels, the Epistles and Revelation as well as Isaiah and the minor Prophets. Her writings are filled with quotations and phrases of sacred origin. She herself testified, "I very seldom run on a dozen lines in a book without embodying a text. I don't see how one can put too large a portion of God's own

for the Lord bore such abundant fruit. To her sister she confided that the Lord had showed her that because her delight was in the law of the Lord — whatsoever she did prospered. Her Bible was a veritable gold mine of word studies and notes and markings.

One of the last and most fruitful undertakings was the writing of the little book, *Kept For the Master's Use*. It was based on her consecration hymn. The word *kept* was substituted for the word *take* at the beginning of each couplet of the hymn, and one chapter was devoted to each of the twelve couplets. The last chapter turns the couplets once more to show how God has given all this to us and more in His Son, Jesus Christ. This book was the crowning work of Frances Ridley Havergal's life.

Shortly after its completion, she became seriously ill, and on June 3, 1879, exactly ninety years ago, the Lord took His consecrated vessel unto Himself. In accordance with her wishes, her tombstone was inscribed with the verse that had so richly blessed her: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7).

Her consecrated life is still bringing forth fruit. Several hymns beside those already mentioned are still in use. Among them are: *True Hearted*, *Whole Hearted* and *Who Is On The Lord's Side?* Her numerous works continue to inspire readers to a closer walk with Jesus. Certainly the life as well as the writings of Frances Ridley Havergal illustrate the value of living "Ever, ONLY, ALL for Thee!"

Frances Ridley Havergal

words among our own. He never said *our* words should not return void.

Miss Havergal never ceased to be astonished when her work