

# "Holiness Unto the Lord"

The Story of Mrs. C. H. Morris

By ROBERT D. KALIS

WHO is this woman, 'Mrs. C. H. Morris,' whose name appears on so many of our well-known gospel songs?" This question in various forms has been asked numerous times.

Haldor Lillenas, hymn writer, composer, and publisher said of Mrs. C.H. Morris, "I do not think that a writer has ever lived whose songs are as full of scriptural truth and who at the same time wrote the music to so many singable and effective songs." Mrs. Morris indeed wrote words and music for about 1500 gospel songs. More than a dozen of these are well-known and loved today. Paging through several hymnbooks at hand, I found 63 hymns by Mrs. C. H. Morris. Certainly she deserves a place in the top rank of our gospel song writers.

Mrs. Morris was born Lelia Naylor, April 15, 1862, just one year after the start of the Civil War, in the town of Pennsville, Ohio. She was the fifth of seven children. Her father, John T. E. Naylor, was away at war at the time when Lelia was born. When he returned at the close of the war, he moved his family to Malta, Ohio, a distance of about ten miles. Here and in its twin city, McConnelsville, just across the Muskingum River, Lelia was to spend almost all of the rest of her life. Shortly after the move to

Malta, John Naylor died, leaving his wife, Olivia, to raise the seven little ones. Times were very difficult. Later, Mrs. Morris remembered that they had no carefree childhood days. There was always work to be done and the constant need to stretch every penny to the limit.

In school, Lelia was an outstanding pupil. She had a "perfect record." She also inherited a lively sense of humor. Mother taught the family how to live Christian principles and took them faithfully to church and Sunday school. They attended the Methodist Protestant Church across the river in McConnelsville. Lelia sang the hymns lustily and loved the Bible stories.



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In a "winter revival" of 1872-3, Lelia was born again. Of that occasion she wrote: "When I was ten years old, I was led to give my heart to God. It was not a form. I knew that I needed a Savior. Three different years I went forward to the altar and prayed and prayed until a man came and laid his hand on my head and said, 'Why, little girl, God is here and ready to forgive your sins.'"

From that time on, Lelia was a devoted follower of the Lord Jesus. Oh, how she sang! A neighbor offered her the use of a piano, and somehow, her mother managed to get lessons for her talented daughter. In just three years, she was able to play for the mid-week prayer meeting at the church. In every activity in which Lelia participated, she became a leader. She sang in the choir. At the winter revivals, she persuaded many of her friends to go to the altar to seek the new birth. Lelia's days were spent in the small millinery shop which her mother opened. There she learned to sew and cut and shape hats skillfully. Evenings were devoted to singing classes, spelling contests, literary society meetings, etc. But Lelia's greatest delight was in the activities of the church.

In 1881, when Lelia was nine-

teen years old, she was married to Charles H. Morris, the only son of a well-to-do family from McConnelsville. Charles's father built the young couple a beautiful home high up on the hill at the edge of town. Here the Morrises lived almost all the rest of their lives. Charles worked as a plumber and tinner, but, most of all, he loved to study nature. His articles on bird life and nature gained him recognition as an authority on the subject. So Lelia Naylor became Mrs. C. H. Morris, and by that name was to become known to Christians all over the world.

The new home was blessed with four little ones. Fanny, the oldest, later helped much with the songs her mother wrote. Mary and Will were twins, and Fred was the youngest. The large home on Kennebeck Avenue became a gathering place for the people of the Methodist Episcopal Church which Mrs. Morris joined after her marriage. She and her husband gradually gathered good books until their library became the finest in the county. The Morris library was always available for the children of the town, and nothing seemed to be too much trouble for Mrs. Morris to do to help the young people in their studies.

In the summer of 1892, when Mrs. Morris was thirty years old, she attended a Methodist camp meeting at Mountain Lake Park, Maryland. There, for the first time, she heard of a second work of grace offered to believers. The evangelist explained that this operation "cleanses the heart, gives power to the spirit, and fills the waiting child of God with the Holy Ghost." Although the teaching was a vital doctrine in the days of Wesley (see Wesley's tract on *Christian Perfection*),

through neglect the light had almost been lost. At many of the Methodist camp meetings, just before the turn of the century, this light was restored in a revival that became known as the "Holiness Movement."

Mrs. Morris said of this teaching: "I read in books about the Holy Spirit and how that we might have the Holy Spirit come into our lives. I had read this over and over again, but thought it was for bishops and preachers and those doing great work for God. I did not suppose it was for me. Only did I find out in the preaching that it was for the young, such as I. I was so glad when I found that I might have the Holy Spirit in my life. So I opened my heart and let the Holy Spirit come in."

Simply and wonderfully, the Spirit of God filled her to overflowing. There was a new sense of cleansing and sanctification. Mrs. Morris made a thorough study of "holiness" in the Bible and listed every reference. In later years, she was always ready to speak or teach on this subject and also made it the theme of many of her songs. Yet, "holiness" meant to her not so much a doctrine or an experience as the person of the Holy Spirit dwelling within. It was her testimony: "I have tried to honor the Holy Spirit. . . . We are living in the times of the Holy Spirit. If we honor Him, our lives will radiate joy and gladness. This I have tried to do."

This new blessing unexpectedly brought to Mrs. Morris the gift with which she has served and blessed the whole Christian church. Upon returning from the camp meeting, while sewing clothing for her children, she sang and sang. She often told the story:

"I was sitting in the corner. . . stitching on my machine and singing at my work. Suddenly I realized that I was singing a message from my heart. I walked over to the piano and played it. From that time on, I have written and played little hymns. New songs crowded into my mind, four or five a day. You just would not believe how fast they came." Years later she recalled: "I opened my heart and let the Holy Spirit come in, without any thought of writing a song, for I had never tried to, but when I found the Lord, He led me into writing songs. So many songs cropped into my heart. I would run to the piano and write them and hide them for fear of being made fun of. I never expected to give them to a publisher. One day I told my mother, 'Play some for me, Daughter,' said my mother. She then told me that they were of the Spirit. It was through the Holy Spirit I have just kept on writing these little messages as they come into my heart and mind."

The choir leader at the Methodist church in McConnelsville persuaded her to take some of her early compositions to Dr. H. L. Gilmour at Mountain Lake Park Camp. Dr. Gilmour, who led the singing at the camp meeting, gave the help and advice necessary to have the songs published.

On a Sunday morning at the camp at Mountain Lake Park, Rev. L. H. Baker preached a powerful service on repentance. Many came forward to the altar. One outstanding woman, obviously of culture and refinement, knelt amongst them. She seemed to be having a great inner struggle. Mrs. Morris knelt beside her, and, slipping her arm around the penitent, she said, "Just now your

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doubting give o'er." Dr. Gilmour, standing nearby interjected, "Just now reject Him no more." Then the preacher cried out, "Just now throw open the door." Mrs. Morris made the last appeal: "Let Jesus come into your heart." So a beautiful invitation hymn was born, and a precious soul was born, too, into the Kingdom. Mrs. Morris finished the song before the camp meeting ended. It became one of her most successful songs. Scores of testimonies came in regarding the blessing and help given through it.

Her best song is probably "Nearer, Still Nearer." It was published in 1898. It compares favorably with Elizabeth Prentiss's hymn, "More Love To Thee," and comes closer to being a true "hymn" than any other of her songs.

For twenty years, while the children were maturing, the pattern of song-writing continued. One of the songs written at this time was "Holiness Unto The Lord." Many of the readers will recognize this as the theme song of Pilgrim Camp at Brant Lake, N. Y. "Victory All The Time" and "Sweet Will Of God" are two of her early compositions that have stood the test of time. Among others that have also retained their popularity are "Bring Your Vessels," "I Know God's Promise Is True," "The Fight Is On," and "What If It Were Today?"

Mrs. Morris wrote both words and music for all of her songs. It is an outstanding characteristic of her songs that the music matches the words beautifully. Her compositions are greatly varied as well. There are songs with plaintive melodies and martial music

which almost sounds like John Philip Sousa. She often used triplets in her music as in "Holiness Unto The Lord," in "Keeping Power," and others. Though Mrs. Morris never studied the subject, she worked out all of her own harmony for her songs, and seldom did the publishers change a chord. Some of her works are best suited for choirs and instrumentations, such is the inspiring "Let All The People Praise Thee" and "'Tis Marvelous and Wonderful."

At the age of 51, Mrs. Morris began to lose her sight. Her son Will built a large blackboard 23 feet long with five lines of the music staff cut into it. By this means she was able to continue her song-writing. But, at the end of the year, her sight failed completely. Despite the handicap, Mrs. Morris devised ways to remember her songs till Fanny (now Mrs. W. P. Lunk) came for a visit. Fanny then would write out the music and prepare the songs for publishing. During the next fifteen years, Mrs. C. H. Morris overcame her handicap so well that people often forgot that she was blind. Like one of her most famous songs, she grew "Sweeter As The Years Go By."

Many honors were bestowed on Mrs. Morris in these years. A great meeting was arranged where many of her songs were sung. Letters of congratulations poured in from all over the country. They came from publishers and fellow song writers. As she was presented with a bouquet of beautiful roses, the large audience spontaneously rose and broke into applause. When asked to speak a word, she responded: "I have been afraid of this meeting and tried to beg off from it. It is hard for me because I am rather backward, but I am not afraid anymore. It brings me into

such beautiful fellowship. All are one great big family, and what an opportunity to make a little music and sing a little song. I trust God may be honored."

Despite the success of her songs, Mrs. C. H. Morris felt her greatest work was in another field. "The greatest thing I have ever done, in my estimation, was the rearing of a daughter to go to China as a missionary. While attending a camp meeting, a call was given for those young people attending, pledging for life service. There were several young people who gave themselves, among them my daughter. The person in charge said, 'Girls, when you go home and tell your mothers what you have done, they will not let you go to China or Alaska or Africa, for they will say, "We need you right at home." 'Now', said she, 'I have a message for you mothers in the audience. Would you be willing to let your daughters go?' I said this, too, and when the test came and I heard that my daughter was to go to China, I said, 'Yes, Lord: everything on the altar. She is not mine anymore.' A great many persons have said she should be at home with her blind mother. She is married and has the duties of a wife. I have been so happy to receive her letters in which she tells of being able to give a message for the first time to those darkened minds and hearts. I think you will agree with me that this is the best thing I have ever done."

Marv Morris married Reverend Frank T. Cartwright, and together they have served the Lord eleven years in China.

Finally in 1928, "Mammy More," as she was affectionately called by the grandchildren, consented to leave the home in McCornelsville to spend the rest of

her days with Fanny in Auburn, N.Y. There, just a year later, on July 23, 1929, Mrs. C.H. Morris went to be with her Lord.

The next time you sing one of the songs with her name at both the upper right and left corners of the music, you will know better and appreciate more the work of this woman of whom a fellow worker said, "She is the most perfect Christian I have ever known."