

"Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken"

By ROBERT D. KALIS

A DEEP PERSONAL EXPERIENCE and an eloquent gift of poetic expression are the ingredients that make this hymn one of the most perfect in the English language. The author, Henry Francis Lyte, was born in Scotland on June 1, 1793. Sorrow came in youth to Henry, for he was orphaned at an early age. The sensitive youth began his education as a charity student in an Irish boys' school. Loving the finer things of life, young Lyte determined to get an education and so, despite poverty, he enrolled at Trinity College, Dublin.

Lyte had intentions of becoming a medical doctor but altered his intentions and became a minister. In 1815, one year after his graduation from Trinity College, he was ordained a minister of the Church of England. The promising young clergyman was not content. Something was lacking.

One day the youthful preacher was called to the deathbed of a neighboring minister, who was unprepared to meet his Maker. To his chagrin, Henry Lyte realized that he, too, although a minister, was ignorant of the way of salvation. Together the two clergymen searched the Scriptures and found, especially in the writings of Paul, that which they sought. The clergyman testified to having peace and assurance before passing away. Henry Lyte came away from this experience a better minister. Concerning it he testified, "I was greatly affected by the whole matter and brought to look at life and its issue with a different eye than before, and I began to study my Bible and preach in another manner than I had previously done."

Now he was ready to take up his cross and follow Jesus, and it was after this great rebirth that Henry F. Lyte wrote *Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken*. He settled down at his next post of duty, a coastal fishing town named Lower Brixham. The fisherfolk were coarse, uneducated, and rough, completely contrary to his natural tendencies. Here in obscurity he lived and served them with a will. He visited them on their boats and made sure that every vessel had a Bible. He loved their children and gathered them around him, trained 70 Sunday school teachers, and in days when Sunday schools were few, he had as many as 800 children enrolled.

The raw winters and strenuous labor took their toll, and the pastor's health failed. Several winters were spent in the south. Still Lyte's health declined, and as he prepared to journey to the warmer climate again in 1847, both he and the congregation realized that it would probably be their last farewell.

A final communion service was announced for September 4, and despite the entreaties of those nearest him, Lyte dragged himself to the pulpit and spoke once more to his flock. Tears coursed down many weathered cheeks. The Pastor fed his flock at the Communion for the last time. Retiring to a rocky knoll later as the sun set, Henry F. Lyte wrote his last hymn: *Abide with Me*.

Henry Lyte never reached his southern destination. He travelled as far as Nice, France; where on November 20, 1847, the Lord called him higher and he laid aside the cross he had so willingly taken.