

Frances Ridley Havergal

Few lives have left behind them a sweeter fragrance or holier influence than that of beautiful, talented, consecrated, Frances Ridley Havergal, who wrote "Take my life and let it be," and others of our most popular hymns. In tens of thousands of homes all over the world Miss Havergal's name is a household word. Countless multitudes have received blessing through her hymns and devotional works. Her little booklets, "My King," "Royal Commandments and Royal Bounty," "Daily Thoughts on Coming to Christ," "Kept for the Master's Use," and so on, have been the means of deepening the spiritual life of many of God's children. To Miss Havergal Christ was indeed "a living bright Reality; " " more dear, more intimately nigh, than e'en the sweetest earthly tie." One of her latest whispers was, "I did so want to glorify Him in every step of my way." Many Christians sincerely desire to know the secret of such a life as hers, and to attain its lofty heights of joy and peace.

Frances Ridley Havergal was the youngest child of Christian parents. She was born in 1836, at Astley, in Worcestershire, England, where her father was rector at the time. She was a very beautiful child, fond of romping and climbing trees. She was so full of life and vivacity that her father called her his "Little Quicksilver." She was very precocious, and could read simple books easily at three years of age. At four years of age she could write well and could read the Bible correctly. Her father was a composer and musician of no little merit, and at nine years of age Frances wrote long letters to her friends in perfect rhyme.

As a little girl Frances sang hymns sweetly, and she often sat upon her father's knee while he read the Scriptures ; but she did not remember having any serious impressions about religion until she was six years old. At that age she was deeply convicted of sin by hearing a sermon which dwelt much on the terrors of hell and of the judgment day. She told no one, but the sermon was on her mind day and night, and she sought relief in prayer. She remained in great distress about her soul for two years without telling anyone about it. She then ventured to tell a certain curate of the Church of England, in which church she was raised and of which she continued a member; but he attributed her feelings to a recent change of residence that her parents had made in moving from one rectory to another. He thought that she was simply homesick for the old home and friends, and advised her to be a good child and to pray. After this she did not open her heart to anyone for about five years, although she was under deep concern about her soul most of the time. Her mother died when she was twelve years of age, and this was a great blow to her. When between thirteen and fourteen years of age she went to the school of a Mrs. Teed, who was a godly woman, so filled with the Spirit that a great revival broke out in her school in which most of her pupils were converted to Christ. Many of the girls were so happy that "their countenances shone with a heavenly radiance." This deepened Frances' conviction of sin, and she prayed more earnestly than ever for pardon. After much anxious seeking, she ventured to tell a Miss Cooke — who afterwards became her step-mother — how willing she was to give up everything if she could only find Christ as her Saviour. Miss Cooke said, "Why cannot you trust yourself to your Saviour at once?" Miss Havergal says, "Then came a flash of hope across me, which made me feel literally breathless. I remember how my heart beat. 'I could surely,' was my response; and I left her suddenly and ran away upstairs to think it out. I flung myself on my knees in my room, and strove to realize the sudden hope. I was very happy at last I could commit my soul to Jesus. I could trust Him with my all for eternity." She then received a definite assurance of salvation. "Then and there," says she, "I committed

my soul to my Saviour. I do not mean to say without any trembling or fear, but I did — and earth and heaven seemed bright from that moment — I did trust the Lord Jesus.”

From the time of her conversion Frances lived a very earnest Christian life. She was in schools and colleges in England and Germany, and afterwards visited different parts of England, Switzerland, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, but everywhere she went she took a bold stand for Christ. She received a splendid education both in England and in Germany, and grew into a very beautiful and accomplished young lady. She won many of the highest honors, and became proficient in several languages, including Latin, Greek, French, German, and Hebrew. She was a talented musician, a gifted singer, and wrote many poems of considerable merit. She was the only truly converted person among the hundred and ten young ladies in her school in Germany, but she took a firm stand for Christ, and suffered much persecution on that account but won the hearts of some of her schoolmates. Returning to England in 1854, she was confirmed in Worcester Cathedral. When the bishop laid hands on her and prayed, “Defend O Lord, this Thy child with Thy heavenly grace, that she may continue Thine forever, and daily increase in Thy Holy Spirit more and more, until she come into Thy everlasting kingdom,” her heart entered into the prayer. “If ever my heart followed a prayer it did then,” says she, “if ever it thrilled with earnest longing not unmixed with joy, it did at the words ‘Thine for ever.’ ” She always observed the anniversary of her confirmation by spending the day in prayer and holy retirement.

Although Miss Havergal lived a very earnest Christian life, and sought to glorify God and serve Him by teaching in Sunday School, singing in churches and elsewhere, visiting the needy, and so on, she felt that she was only a little child in the spiritual life, and she longed for a deeper Christian experience. Her writings began to attract much attention, and her sweet Christian spirit was noticed on every hand. She was a great student of the Word of God, and at the age of twenty-two knew the whole of the Gospels, Epistles, Revelation, Psalms, and Isaiah by heart, and the Minor Prophets she learned in later years. She asked the Lord to direct her writing, and to give her every word, and even the rhymes of her poetry. Still she longed for a deeper, richer, fuller Christian experience. Many were her longings to be filled with the Spirit, and to have a closer walk with God. In “Gleams and Glimpses,” written in 1858, she says, “ — gleams and glimpses, but oh to be filled with joy and the Holy Ghost! Oh, why cannot I trust Him fully.” Later she wrote, “I still wait for the hour when I believe He will reveal Himself to me more directly; but it is the quiet waiting of present trust, not the restless waiting of anxiety and danger.” It was in 1852, at the age of 22, that she wrote the well known hymn “I gave My life for thee,” which reveals the deep longings of her heart to be more fully consecrated to Christ

Miss Havergal often met with dark places in seeking for a deeper experience. In 1865, she wrote, “I had hoped that a kind of table-land had been reached in my journey, where I might walk a while in the light, without the weary succession of rock and hollow, crag and morass, stumbling and striving; but I seem borne back into all the old difficulties of the way, with many sin-made aggravations. I think that the great root of all my trouble and alienation is that I do not now make an unconditional surrender of myself to God ; and until this is done I shall know no peace, I am sure of it.” Later she says, “Oh, that He would indeed purify me and make me white at any cost.” She prayed regularly three times a day, and every morning she prayed especially for the Holy Spirit. After a season of sickness, she wrote, “Oh, that He may make me a vessel sanctified and meet for the Master's use! I look at trial and training of every kind in this light, not its effect upon oneself for oneself, but in its gradual fitting of me to do the Master's work. So, in every painful spiritual darkness or conflict, it has already comforted me to think that God might be leading me through strange dark ways, so that I might afterward be His messenger to some of His children in distress.” She often wondered why others obtained so easily the blessing she had agonized and prayed for so long. Perhaps the Lord was letting her learn what trial was, so that her sweet

songs might better comfort others in distress. She says, "I suppose that God's crosses are often made of most unexpected and strange material. Perhaps trial must be felt keenly, or it would not be powerful enough as a medicine in the hands of our beloved Healer; and I think it has been a medicine to me latterly." Again, she says, "I have learned a real sympathy with others walking in darkness, and sometimes it has seemed to help me to help them." Concerning her trials she also wrote, "Did you ever hear of anyone being very much used for Christ who did not have some special waiting time, some complete upset of all his or her plans first; from St. Paul being sent off into the desert of Arabia for three years, when he must have been boiling over with the glad tidings, down to the present day?"

Miss Havergal traveled much throughout the British Isles, and made numerous trips to Switzerland; but wherever she was her soul still longed for a deeper experience. She spent much time in studying and marking her Bible, by the "rail-roading" method, and this increased her longings to lay hold of the "exceeding great and precious promises" by which we are made "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). At this time she wrote, "I have been appropriating all of the promises with a calm sort of twilight happiness, waiting for a clearer light to show me their full beauty and value."

At last the long looked for experience came, and it lifted her whole life into sunshine and gladness. The following account of how she was brought into a Beulah Land experience is from the pen of her sister Maria, who also enjoyed the same experience.

"We now reach a period in the life of dear Frances that was characterized by surpassing blessing to her soul. The year 1873 was drawing to a close, and she was again visiting Winterdyne.

"One day she received in a letter from N a tiny book with the title 'All for Jesus.' She read it carefully. Its contents arrested her attention. It set forth a fullness of Christian experience and blessing exceeding that to which she had as yet attained. She was gratefully conscious of having for many years loved the Lord and delighted in His service; but there was in her experience a falling short of the standard, not so much of a holy walk and conversation, as of uniform brightness and continuous enjoyment in the Divine life. 'All for Jesus' she found went straight to this point of the need and longing of her soul. Writing in reply to the author of the little book, she said, I do so long for deeper and fuller teaching in my own heart. 'All for Jesus' has touched me very much. . . . I know I love Jesus, and there are times when I feel such intensity of love for Him that I have not words to describe it. I rejoice too in Him as my "Master" and "Sovereign," but I want to come nearer still, to have the full realization of John xiv. 21 and to know "the power of his resurrection," even if it be with the fellowship of His sufferings. And all this, not exactly for my own joy alone, but for others. ... So I want Jesus to speak to me, to say "many things" to me, that I may speak for Him to others with real power. It is not knowing doctrine, but being with Him, which will give this."

"God did not leave her long in this state of mind. He Himself had shown her that there were 'regions beyond' of blessed experience and service; had kindled in her soul the intense desire to go forward and possess them; and now, in His own grace and love, He took her by the hand, and led her into the goodly land. A few words from her correspondent on the power of Jesus to keep those who abide in Him from falling, and on the continually present power of His blood ('the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin') were used by the Master in effecting this. Very joyously she replied: 'I see it all, and I have the blessing.'

"The 'sunless ravines' were now forever passed, and henceforth her peace and joy flowed onward, deepening and widening under the teaching of God and the Holy Ghost. The blessing she had received

had (to use her own words) 'lifted her whole life into sunshine, of which all she had previously experienced was but as pale and passing April gleams compared with the fullness of summer glory.'

"The practical effect of this was most evident in her daily true-hearted, whole-hearted, service for her King, and also in the increased joyousness of the unswerving obedience of her home life, the surest test of all."

To the reality of this I do most willingly and fully testify. Some time afterwards, in answer to my question, when we were talking quietly together, Frances said, 'Yes, it was on Advent Sunday, December 2, 1873, I first saw clearly the blessedness of true consecration. I saw it as a flash of electric light, and what you see, you can never unsee. There must be full surrender before there can be full blessedness. God admits you by the one into the ether. He Himself showed me all this most clearly. You know how singularly I have been withheld from attending all conventions and conferences; man's teachings has, consequently, had but little to do with it. 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.' "

In a letter to her sister Maria, written some months after the experience just described, Frances says with regard to it : "First, however, I would distinctly state, that it is only as and while a soul is under the full power of the blood of Christ that it can be cleansed from all sin; that one moment's withdrawal from that power, and it is again actively because really sinning; and that it is only as, and while, kept by the power of God Himself that we are not sinning against Him ; one instant of standing alone is certain fall! But, (premising that,) have we not been limiting the cleansing power of the precious blood when applied by the Holy Spirit, and also the keeping power of God? Have we not been limiting 1 John 1 : 7, by practically making it refer only to 'remission of sins that are past' instead of taking the grand simplicity of 'cleanseth us from all sin ? ' 'All ' is all; and as we may trust Him to cleanse us from the stain of past sins, so we may trust Him to cleanse us from all present defilement; yes, all! If not, we take away from this most precious promise, and, by refusing to take it in its fullness lose the fullness of its application and power. Then we limit God's power to keep;' we look at our frailty more than His omnipotence.

Where is the line to be drawn, beyond which He is not able?' The very keeping implies total helplessness without it, and the very cleansing most distinctly defilement without it. It was that one word 'cleanseth' which opened the door of a very glory of hope and joy to me. I had never seen the force of the tense before, a continual present, always a present tense, not a present which the next moment becomes a past. It goes on cleansing, and I have no words to tell how my heart rejoices in it. Not a coming to be cleansed in the fountain only, but a remaining in the fountain, so that it may and can, go on cleansing.

"Why should we pare down the promises of God to the level of what we have hitherto experienced of what God is ' able to do,' or even of what we have thought He might be able to do for us ? Why not receive God's promises, nothing doubting, just as they stand? 'Take the shield of faith, whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked; ' 'He is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things;' and so on, through whole constellations of promises, which surely mean really and fully what they say.

"One arrives at the same thing starting almost from anywhere. Take Philippians iv: 19, ' your need;' well, what is my great need and craving of soul? Surely it is now, (having been justified by faith, and having assurance of salvation,) to be made holy by the continual sanctifying power of God's Spirit; to be kept from grieving the Lord Jesus ; to be kept from thinking or doing whatever is not accordant with His holy will. Oh what a need is this! And it is said ' He shall supply all your need;' now, shall we turn round and

say ' all ' does not mean quite all? Both as to the commands and promises, it seems to me that everything short of believing them as they stand is but another form of 'yea, hath God said? '

"Thus accepting, in simple and unquestioning faith, God's commands and promises, one seems to be at once brought into intensified views of everything. Never, oh never before, did sin seem so hateful, so really 'intolerable,' nor watchfulness so necessary, and a keenness and uninterruptedness of watchfulness too, beyond what one ever thought of, only somehow different, not a distressed sort but a happy sort. It is the watchfulness of a sentinel when his captain is standing by him on the ramparts, when his eye is more than ever on the alert for any sign of the approaching enemy, because he knows they can only approach to be defeated. Then, too, the 'all for Jesus' comes in; one sees there is no half way, it must be absolutely all yielded up, because the least unyielded or doubtful point is sin, let alone the great fact of owing all to Him. And one cannot, dare not, temporize with sin. I know, and have found, that even a momentary hesitation about yielding, or obeying, or trusting and believing, vitiates all, the communion is broken, the joy is vanished ; only, thank God, this need never continue even five minutes, faith may plunge instantly into ' the fountain, open for sin and uncleanness and again find its power to cleanse and restore. Then one wants to have more and more light; one does not shrink from painful discoveries of evil, because one so wants to have the unknown depths of it cleansed as well as what comes to the surface. 'Cleanse me thoroughly from my sin;' and one prays to be shown this. But so far as one does see, one must 'put away sin' and obey entirely; and here again His power is our resource, enabling us to do what without it we could not do.

" 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 fullness, was just indescribable. I expected nothing like it short of heaven." Referring to the same experience, in a letter to a friend, she said, " The year 1873 has been a time of unprecedented blessing to me."

Miss Havergal's whole life was now lifted to a higher plane, and the few remaining years were the richest of her life, richest in Christian experience and richest in service for her King. Wherever she went her life was full of service, and her words were winged with a new spiritual power. It was at this time too that she wrote her great consecration hymn, "Take my life and let it be," She says, "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 everyone 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 consecration, and these little couplets formed themselves and chimed in my heart one after another, till they finished with, ' Ever, Only, ALL for Thee!'" She now refused to sing anything except sacred songs and hymns. Her voice, like her pen, was "always, only, for her King;" and many hearts were touched by her consecrated singing and writing. She considered every moment of her time as belonging to the Lord, and sought to use it to His glory. She was very fond of romping over the mountains in Switzerland, and her Alpine guide said that in climbing them she "went up like a chamois," but these rambles were for the benefit of her health, and she embodied in her writings the thoughts concerning God suggested to her by His handiwork in nature. She also sought to win souls for Christ during her numerous visits to Switzerland. Not only did she consider every moment of her time as wholly the Lord's, but she regarded every penny of her money as belonging to Him. "I forget sometimes," says she, "but as a rule I never spend a sixpence without the distinct feeling that it is His, and must be spent for Him only, even if indirectly." She did not feel free to spend her money for "costly array." She gave her jewelry for the missionary cause, and dressed plainly but neatly. Her idea of

the proper way for a Christian to dress was so as not to attract attention either by slovenliness or extravagance. "The question of cost I see very strongly," says she, "and do not consider myself at liberty to spend on dress that which might be spared for God's work; but it costs no more to have a thing well and prettily made, and I should only feel justified in getting a costly dress if it would last proportionately longer."

Miss Havergal's time was now occupied with her writing, in giving Bible readings and addresses, in visiting the poor, and in doing needlework for the Zenana missions and for the poor. In 1877 she took up temperance work as well. She spent much time in visiting from house to house, to read the Bible and point souls to Christ. She often gave Bible readings or addressed meetings in drawing rooms and other places, and frequently led consecration meetings. The first consecration meeting she was ever in was conducted by herself, and it was a time of rich blessing. Deeply spiritual and full of trust were her Bible readings and addresses. She often sang in churches, hospitals, and other places. Every morning she spent much time in studying and marking her Bible, sitting at her table to do so. Sometimes, on bitterly cold mornings, her sister would beg her to study with her feet to the fire. "But then," Frances would reply, "I can't rule my lines neatly; just see what a find I've got! If one only searches there are such extraordinary things in the Bible! "Many were the letters of comfort and consolation that she sent to all parts of the earth. Her books also carried a blessing with them wherever they went. Children flocked to her in crowds, and grown people corresponded with her from all quarters. From morning to night she was occupied in the Master's service.

Miss Havergal often referred to the experience of 1873, which made the closing years of her life such a blessing to others. In 1875 she said to her sister, "It's no mistake, Marie, about the blessing God sent me December 2, 1873; it is far more distinct than my conversion, I can't date that. I am always happy, and it is such peace," The same year she wrote, "He has granted me to rejoice fully in His will, I am not conscious of even a wish crossing it; I do really and altogether desire that His will may be done, whatever it is." Even when suffering from poor health, or after some great temporal loss, she could still "rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of her salvation" (Habakkuk 3: 18). When her American publishers failed, and she did not receive the money due for her books, she wrote, "I have not a fear, or a doubt, or a care, or a shadow upon the sunshine of my heart." Later, when many valuable stereotype plates of her music and songs were destroyed by fire, she was still happy, believing that God had a purpose in allowing adversities. She was a daily illustration of "Without Carefulness."

She suffered much from poor health; and as the years went on her health was more and more broken. She literally wore herself out ministering to others. When her friends sympathized with her sufferings in her last illness, she whispered, "Never mind I It's home the faster! God's will is delicious; He makes no mistakes." Shortly before she expired she requested that her favorite text, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin," should be placed on her tomb. On her dying bed she frequently exclaimed, "So beautiful to go ! " Near the end she said, "Oh, I want you all to speak bright, bright words for Jesus! Oh, do, do! It is all perfect peace, I am only waiting for Jesus to take me in."

Perhaps Miss Havergal's experience is best described in her own words, quoted by her sister:

There were strange soul depths, restless, vast, and broad,
Unfathomed as the sea;
An infinite craving for some infinite stilling;
But now Thy perfect love is perfect filling.
Lord Jesus Christ, my Lord, my God,

Thou, Thou art enough for me."