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'Take my Life, and Let it be.'

(Dr. L. F. Benson, in 'The Wellspring.')

The Story of the Hymn.

The hymn of Frances Ridley Havergal records a deep experience in her own spiritual life. It was her way to be perfectly outspoken about such matters, because she thought her frankness would prove helpful to others. And after her death her family, no doubt for the same reason, opened to the world the last reserves of her soul, and printed her most intimate letters and conversations. We are thus relieved of any sense of intrusion in our study of the hymn.

Toward the close of the year 1873 a little book that came into Miss Havergal's hands awakened within her great longings for unreached depths of spiritual experience and a fuller entrance into God's peace. It was not long before she received what she called 'The blessing,' that lifted her whole nature into sunshine, and threw an uninterrupted gladness over the remaining years of her life. 'It was on Advent Sunday, December 2, 1873,' she wrote her sister, '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 other.' It is this full surrender of herself to which she then attained that is recorded and expressed in the hymn.

The hymn was written, while on a visit to Arely House, on February 4, 1874. Miss Havergal afterwards gave the following account of the circumstances: '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!"'

Miss Havergal had her own characteristic way of writing hymns; and here again it will be best to let her speak for herself: 'Writing is praying with me, 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 say 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 very rhyme. Very often I have a most distinct and happy consciousness of direct answers.'

Miss Havergal's way was not that of a literary artist, but all her work glows with a spiritual beauty reflected from her own personality. Her hymns have proved

abundantly helpful to the spiritual life of others, and for more than this she did not ask.

The Author of the Hymn.

It has been said of Miss Havergal that she was born in an atmosphere of hymns. Her father, the Rev. William Henry Havergal, certainly wrote many, but is now best remembered for his services to church music and by his tunes 'Evan,' 'Zoan,' 'Patmos,' and others. She was baptized by another hymn-writer, the Rev. John Cawood, author of 'Hark! What Mean Those Holy Voices?' and 'Almighty God, Thy Word is Cast.'

Miss Havergal was born in the rectory of the little English village of Astley, December 14, 1836. The family removed to the city of Worcester in 1845, when her father became rector of one of its churches. The story of her child life there, its joys



FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGAL.

and griefs, and the beginnings of her work for others in the Sunday-school and 'The Flannel Petticoat Society,' Miss Havergal herself has told other children in her 'The Four Happy Days.' She went away, first to an English school, under whose strong religious influences she began 'to have conscious faith and hope in Christ' and afterwards to a school in Germany.

With a real love of learning and an ambition to make the most of herself, she carried on her studies until she became a very accomplished woman. She was at home in Hebrew and Greek as well as in modern languages. In music she cultivated her special gift to such a degree that she was sought after as a solo singer in public concerts; and she became a brilliant performer on the piano. How she did it may be gathered from her poem 'The Moonlight Sonata.' Her own sense of power in her music, and the delight of public applause, enforced the advice from professional sources that she make music her career. She knew, too, that she held the pen of a ready writer and the promise of poetic achievement; and when there is added the influence upon her of marked social attentions evoked by the charm of her personality, and quickening her natural fondness for life and gaiety, it will readily be understood that for a while the precise turn her life would take seemed somewhat problematical.

But it was never really in question. Love and service were the only ideals that could satisfy her nature, and to these she yielded herself so completely as to efface all other ambitions. Her gifts were thenceforward 'Kept for the master's use.' She considered literal 'Singing for Jesus' her most direct mission from him, and after 1873 sang nothing but sacred music, and that only for spiritual purposes. Her great work was that of personal spiritual influence upon others, and was carried forward to the extreme limit of her strength, by writing many leaflets and books of prose and poetry, by personal interviews, addresses, teaching, society work, and correspondence. Many of her hymns were written for a hymn book, 'Songs of Grace and Glory,' of which she was one of the editors. She also edited her father's Psalmody, after his death in 1870.

Miss Havergal's later years were spent at Leamington, her last days at Caswell Bay, Swansea, Wales, where she had gone for rest. She died on June 3, 1879, in the forty-third year of her age, and was buried in the Astley churchyard beside her father and close to the church and home of her childhood.

The proper use to make of a hymn such as this deserves more thought than it gets. Miss Havergal herself meant just what she said in these verses, and often made personal use of them to see how far her actual living measured up to their standard:—

'I had a great time early this morning, renewing the never regretted consecration. I seemed lead to run over the "Take my life," and could bless him verse by verse for having led me on to much more definite consecration than even when I wrote it, voice, gold, intellect, etc. But the eleventh couplet, "love,"—that has been unconsciously not filled up. Somehow I felt mystified and out of my depth here: it was a simple and definite thing to be done, to settle the voice, or silver and gold! but "love"? I have to love others, and I do; and I've not a small treasure of it, and even loving in him does not quite meet the inner difficulty. . . . I don't see much clearer, or feel much different; but I have said intensely this morning, "Take my love," and he knows I have.' (From her letter of Dec. 2, 1878.)

Miss Havergal also made much use of the hymn in her consecration meetings:—

'At the close of the meeting, my sister gave to each one a card with her Consecration hymn, specially prepared and printed for this evening. Her own name was omitted, and a blank space left for signature. As she gave the cards, she asked them to make that hymn a test before God, and if they could really do so, to sign it on their knees at home. Then the hymn was sung.' (From a memorandum of Miss M. V. G. Havergal, April 17, 1879.)

No one will question the fitness of the words for such uses. But to encourage a promiscuous assembly or Sunday-school to sing them, without special spiritual pre-