

Francis Ridley Havergal and the Fragrance of Christ

John Harris

The singing of praise to God is so much a vital and integral part of our worship that it is perhaps surprising that we have not devoted more attention to those who have contributed so helpfully to this part of our Christian experience. Whilst we rightly emphasise the importance of preaching in our services of worship, we ought not to undervalue the place of singing—it is what we will be doing in heaven!

We give thanks to God for the contribution of Frances Ridley Havergal which is indisputably very substantial in this respect. She was a very typical Victorian maiden lady—middle-class, gracious, gentle, dignified, dutiful and full of good works. It is easy to picture her sitting in her drawing room embroidering samplers and antimacassars. It is easy, too, to mock gently but there is no question that she was a very attractive and accomplished woman with a pleasing disposition and personality which won the hearts of all who met her. She remained unmarried but that was not for want of offers and we must not think of her as a frumpish old spinster. On one occasion she commented that Christian women should dress attractively, though modestly, arguing that if the King's daughter was to be 'all glorious within' (Ps. 45) then she 'must not outwardly be a fright'. There was an infectious vivacity about her and she was warm, humorous, sympathetic and joyful. She was also remarkably accomplished—she had learnt to read by the age of two and became proficient in German, French, Italian, Latin, Greek and Hebrew. By the age of twenty she had memorised the gospels, epistles, Revelation, Psalms and Isaiah. She was widely read, raiding her father's library to explore the Puritans. She loved serious poetry and read in the fields of travel, science, philosophy, and biography. She had, however, no time for novels, drama or the theatre, disliking Shakespeare as she considered him to be 'of the earth, earthy'! She was very talented musically as a pianist, a contralto singer and composer and could have been professional in any one of these areas but drew back from the fear of pride and the conviction that these gifts should only be used in the Master's service. She was quite a remarkable lady by any standards but we must not conclude that life was always easy for her with her advantages of a middle class background and education.

166 | Churchman

She knew much of physical weakness—an illness in her teens could well have left her blind and in her latter years several bouts of typhoid caused her much suffering. She lost her mother at the age of twelve, and though her father remarried in 1851—something which initially brought delight to Frances who was very close to him—subsequently the relationship with her stepmother became extremely difficult as she proved to be possessive and jealous. These hard experiences she bore with much patience but there is some evidence that they had a depressive effect upon her spirit.

How can we assess and account for the great influence she exerted in Christian circles in her day (and still does today) through her hymns? She was a typical Victorian lady hymn writer. We may think of others of her generation like Charlotte Elliott or Fanny Crosby and point out the similarities between them. She was also typical of the best of Victorian hymn writers of either sex. There is less of the theological acuteness or deeper experimental emphasis of the writers of the eighteenth century but in her hymns, like others of her day, there is much of Christ—a sweetness and a fervour which is most appealing. Her life is well documented and her letters and writings still widely available in second-hand bookshops. I will concentrate, therefore, not on extensive biographical detail but rather on three specific areas—her conversion (for reasons which will be evident later); an aspect of her experience which is most fascinating; and then some of her hymns.

Her Conversion

Frances Ridley Havergal was born in December 1836. Her father was an Anglican clergyman well-known for his hymn tunes. He was Curate-in-Charge of a church in Astley which is between Kidderminster and Worcester. She was known as Fan or Fanny until her first book was published in 1869 and then she felt it was a little undignified. The Ridley in her name came from her godfather and she was very proud of her connection with that sixteenth century martyr. She loved her country birthplace, having a great affection for nature so that when her father was moved to Worcester in 1845 when she was nine she felt the change keenly, describing herself as ‘a caged lark’. These were difficult years—her sister Maria who wrote a biography of her says of Frances at this time that she was ‘a little wilful and troublesome’. Given that Maria worshipped the ground she walked on and found it almost impossible to say anything critical of her, that may be interpreted as code for ‘a real pain in the

Frances Ridley Havergal and the Fragrance of Christ | 167

neck’! Her mother died in 1848 and her eldest sister Miriam married and moved away leaving Frances feeling lonely and with a very troubled spirit. But the real cause of her distress was deeper—there was a spiritual conflict going on in the teenager’s heart. In many ways it was very typical of the experience of children who grow up in a Christian home. We note one or two features (largely in her own words).

- (a) She never doubted the existence of God.

We went to St. Nicholas Rectory in 1845 and it was in very great bitterness that I bade *adieu* to my pleasant country life and became, as I remember dear papa calling me, a caged lark. This made a great difference to me, for I do think that the quiet everyday beauty of trees and sunshine was the chief external influence upon my early childhood. Waving boughs and golden light always touched and quieted me and spoke to me and told me about God.

So unbelief was not a problem.

- (b) She knew she was not a Christian but desperately wanted to be.

I think I had a far more vivid sense of the beauty of nature as a little child than I have even now; and its power over me was greater than anyone would imagine. I have hardly felt anything so intensely since, in the way of a sort of unbearable enjoyment. Especially, and I think more than anything else, the golden quiet of a bright summer’s day used to enter into me and do me good. But I did not feel happy in my very enjoyment; I wanted more. I do not think I was eight when I hit upon Cowper’s lines, ending ‘My father made them all!’ That was what I wanted to be able to say; and after once seeing the words, I never saw a lovely scene again without being teased by them. One Spring (I think 1845) I kept thinking of them and a dozen times a day said to myself, ‘Oh, if God would but make me a Christian before the summer comes!’ because I longed so to enjoy his works as I felt they could be enjoyed. And I could not bear to think of another summer coming and going and finding and leaving me still ‘not a Christian’.

- (c) She knew she was a sinner.

I knew I was ‘a naughty child’, never entertained any doubts on the subject; in fact, I almost enjoyed my naughtiness in a savage desperate

168 | Churchman

kind of way, because I utterly despaired of getting any better, except by being 'made a Christian'. Never for one moment, even from my earliest childhood, have I ever been tempted to think otherwise of myself than as a great and miserable and helpless sinner. Never have I dared to think myself 'as good as others' for even as a little child I knew and felt the sinfulness of my own heart. Never has the shadow of a hope in my own righteousness, or of any trust in myself, crossed my mind.

So the struggle was on. She describes it herself—

I did so want to be happy and be 'a Christian' which term embraced everything I could possibly think of in the way of happiness. And I didn't at all see how I was to be, except by praying very hard; and that I had done so often that I got quite disheartened at its resultlessness. At this time I don't think I had any clear ideas about believing on the Lord Jesus and so getting rid of the burden which had pressed so long upon my little soul. My general notion was that I didn't love God at all and was very bad and wicked altogether; that if I went on praying very much, something would come to me and change me all at once and make me like many whom I read about and a few whom I saw. As for trying to be good, that seemed of next to no use; it was like struggling in a quicksand, the more you struggle the deeper you sink. I had never yet spoken a word to any mortal about religion; but now I was so uneasy that, after nearly a fortnight's hesitation, taking the emboldening opportunity of being alone with the curate one evening when almost dark, I told him my trouble; saying especially that I thought I was getting worse, because since I had come to St. Nicholas I had not cared at all for Sunday afternoon reading and prayer. His advice did not satisfy me. He said the excitement of moving and coming into new scenes was the cause most likely of my feeling worse and that would soon go off; then I was to try and be a good child, and pray, etc., etc. So, after that, my lips were tightly sealed to all but God for another five years, or rather more. Even when feeling most, I fancied I could as soon speak Sanskrit or die, as utter a word to a human being as to what was only between me and God. This intense reserve must have grieved those who loved me.

Here she is, desperately alone, feeling outside of that which she desired most, unable to speak to anybody and yet not amenable to be spoken to. At thirteen she was sent to boarding school—to Belmont, Campden Hill, Kensington, to

Frances Ridley Havergal and the Fragrance of Christ | 169

be taught along with sixty to eighty other upper middle-class girls. The headmistress, a Mrs. Teed, was a converted woman of compelling and winning manner, who prayerfully desired that all her girls should come to Christ and spoke to them directly about their souls. When Frances was there a definite spiritual work was going on. In her own words—

November came and with it a marked increase of anxiety among undecided and earnestness among decided ones. I remember a feeling of awe stealing over me sometimes, at the consciousness that the 'power of the Lord was present' among us. For so indeed it was. As day after day passed on, one after another might be observed (even though little or nothing were said) to be going through the great sorrow which seemed to prelude the after-sent peace; and day after day one after another, hitherto silent, spoke out and told what peace and joy in believing they had found and blessed God that they ever came to Belmont. Religious topics became the common subjects of conversation among the girls for even those as yet untouched could not but be struck with what passed around them. In very general conversation I occasionally joined, but more reservedly than any almost, and never alluding to my own feelings, though I knew what it was for my heart to feel as if it must burst. As I heard of one and another speaking in such terms of confidence and gladness, my heart used to sink within me, it seemed so utterly unattainable. I prayed desperately, as a drowning man cries for help who sees no help near. I had prayed and sought so long and yet I was farther off than these girls, many of whom had only begun to think of religion a few weeks before. It was so very dark around me; I could not see Jesus in the storm nor hear his voice.

They spoke of his power and willingness to save but I could find nothing to prove that he was willing to save me and I wanted some special personal evidence about it. To know, surely, that my sins were forgiven and to have all my doubts taken away, was what I prayed and waited for. Every day as it passed while more were added to the rejoicing ones around me, only left me more hopeless, more heartsick at the hope deferred and often almost lost. Yet I drank in every word (and they were many) that I heard about Jesus and his salvation. I came to see that it was Christ alone that could satisfy me. I longed intensely to come to him, I wept and prayed day and night; but 'there was no voice nor any that answered'.

170 | Churchman

Around her a number of girls including her closest friends were being converted. She envied them, longed to share in their blessing and yet, in a strange way was even more disheartened. A period of some months then ensued, which she described as—

a course of weary seeking, inconstant and variable: often departed from but as often renewed and by God's grace never entirely given up: brightened from time to time with a gleam of hope; sweetened from time to time with a drop, though but a drop, of the still fountain of heavenly peace; yet as a rule, passed in the cold mists of doubt and the chilly storms of temptation and inward strife and the dim twilight of miserable and even disappointed longing.

But she is now not far from the kingdom and the one who came to seek and save that which was lost was drawing near. In February 1851, a Miss Caroline Cooke, a former teacher at the school and an old family friend (and later, incidentally, to become Frances' stepmother) undertook to talk to her about her soul. Let her tell us herself how she came to Christ—

At last, one evening (I remember it was twilight), I sat on the drawing room sofa alone with her and told her again how I wanted to know that I was forgiven. She asked me a question which led to the hearty answer that I was sure I desired it above every thing on earth, that even my precious papa was nothing in comparison—brothers and sisters and all I loved, I could lose everything were it but to attain this. She paused and then said slowly, 'Then, Fanny, I think, I am sure, it will not be very long before your desire is granted, your hope fulfilled.' After a few more words she said, 'Why cannot you trust yourself to your Saviour at once? Supposing that now, at this moment, Christ were to come in the clouds of heaven and take up his redeemed, could you not trust him? Would not his call, his promise, be enough for you? Could you not commit your soul to him, to your Saviour, Jesus?' 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 realise the sudden hope. I was very happy at last. I could commit my soul to Jesus. I did not, and need not, fear his coming. I

Frances Ridley Havergal and the Fragrance of Christ | 171

could trust him with my all for eternity. It was so utterly new to have any bright thoughts about religion that I could hardly believe it could be so, but I had really gained such a step. Then and there, I committed my soul to the 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.

So at fourteen she found the Lord and began that life of faithful service which God has so greatly blessed to the church ever since. Here it is worth making some comments that may be of help and encouragement to Christian parents and the children of Christian homes for, in many ways, her experience is quite typical.

(a) Such children can be well aware from an early age of their real condition and need. Our fears that they may be presuming that their parents' faith renders them secure are often unfounded.

(b) Such children, like Frances, may have a real difficulty in sharing their deepest soul concerns with their parents. That can be quite hurtful and distressing but it is understandable—parents know us too well. There is a real need for the Miss Cookes of this world—somebody a little removed from the immediate situation but able to get alongside and gain the child's confidence. May God preserve us from the likes of that foolish curate who had no appreciation of the fact that even quite young children can have deep concerns about their spiritual state.

(c) Finally Frances' experience helps us to see the important distinction between belief and trust. Young people from Christian homes may well have firm persuasions as to the truth of the gospel but need to be encouraged to take Christ at his word and cast themselves upon him. Perhaps the best advice is that given by the only one of her school friends to whom she felt able to speak about her soul's distress: 'Go to Jesus, tell him you want to love him but cannot and then he would teach you to.'

Full Surrender

Frances Ridley Havergal's Christian service was by any standard prodigious. The natural ardency and wholeheartedness of her character was thrown entirely into her Master's service. Her time was taken up with Sunday School

172 | Churchman

teaching and she held Bible classes for young women four times a week. She had a keen interest in many forms of missionary activity and gave her talents and her money to the Church Missionary Society, The Irish Society (an anti-Catholic, pro-Bible movement), the YWCA, the temperance movement and other institutions concerned with religious education and Scripture reading. She would have loved dearly to have been a missionary but her health made it impossible. She was involved in evangelistic missions where she used her fine voice in a ministry of song. She wrote extensively—articles, books, Bible study notes and countless letters as well as her poems and hymns—and all this while acting as a governess to her nieces and nephews! But there is one particular feature that I wish to focus on now. A most significant occurrence took place in 1873 that had a profound effect on the rest of her life and from it came the distinctive emphasis of many of her hymns and the motivation of her Christian service. She describes it in conversation with her sister Maria.

Yes, it was on Advent Sunday, 2nd December, 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 the full blessedness. God admits you by the one into the other. He himself showed me all this most clearly. You know how singularly I have been withheld from attending all conventions and conferences; man's teaching 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.

Beyond doubt this was a most important experience in her life. We must concede its genuineness in the light of the effect it had upon her. It was no fleeting emotion but a lasting memory to which she frequently alluded, particularly on each anniversary of its occurrence. The clearest expression of it is found in the hymn "In full and glad surrender" but it also underlines her most popular hymn "Take my life and let it be". She does not always use the term 'surrender' and sometimes speaks of 'full consecration' or 'dedication'.

Now it is at this point that we might begin to feel somewhat uneasy. For example, the word 'surrender' in relation to the Christian life is not a New

Frances Ridley Havergal and the Fragrance of Christ | 173

Testament word. It does, however, have strong overtones of that influence which swept over this country in the last quarter of the nineteenth century known as the 'higher life' movement. This teaching, based upon the concept of sanctification by faith, frequently used the word 'surrender' and other phrases bearing the same connotations such as 'let go and let God' or 'the rest of faith'. It depicts the ideal Christian life as being without trouble or conflict and has frequently moved on from that position to a doctrine of perfectionism.

By contrast however, the words and phrases which the New Testament most frequently applies to the life of the believer are not of this type at all. 'Wrestle', 'fight', 'strive', and 'run' are some of the verbs used to express the responsibility of the Christian as he/she works out his/her salvation in fear and trembling.

How may we evaluate this experience which clearly meant so much to her? What follows has been my own assessment—you may wish to question it. My suggestion is that she misinterpreted what had happened to her. Listen to further descriptions in her own words—

I cannot help telling you that the wonderful and glorious blessing which so many Christians are testifying to having found, was suddenly, marvellously sent to me last winter and life is now what I never imagined life on earth could be, though I knew much of peace and joy in believing before. He has done exceedingly abundantly above all I asked or thought—I never could say that before, I say it in adoring wonder now. It seems as if a call were going forth to his own children to make a more complete surrender of their whole selves and lives and to enter into a fullness of consecration which I for one had never realised before. I send you a tiny book, *All for Jesus*, which has been an unspeakable blessing to me and now I want you to be 'all for Jesus'. It is very marvellous how God lately seems to have been stirring up thousands and thousands of Christians to consecrate themselves utterly to him and seek and find in him more than ever before. I have shared this blessing and now I want you to have it too!

There is an inconsistency in these excerpts. At first sight it suggests that the blessing is granted in response to an act of consecration on the part of the believer yet, on the other hand, she speaks of it being 'suddenly, marvellously

sent to me'. It was both unexpected and astonishing! How then could it have been the result of any act of surrender on her part?

Other descriptions from her letters of the same events also seem to give a very different view of what happened. With regard to many of the promises there seems no room for even the exercise of faith. It is not that I believe them or grasp them but that I find them all come true as I never did before. The sense of his unutterable loving kindness to me is simply overwhelming. Several times lately I have felt literally overwhelmed and overpowered with the realisation of God's unspeakable goodness to me. I say it deliberately and with thankfulness and joy for which I have no words. I have not a fear, or a doubt, or a care, or a shadow upon the sunshine of my heart. Every bit of longing for—one hardly knew what—taken away and instead 'satisfied with his goodness'. Do you know, I deliberately thought that could not be fulfilled to me in this life; I never expected it at all and yet he has done it for me—just 'satisfied' me. One would like to die for him but he has not asked that! So one wants to live for him.

Oh it was so sweet, so glorious to see something of that, the being his very own, the serving him and pleasing him, the being utterly at his disposal, and with him and in him and all for him, on and on through the ages of eternity. My whole heart said, 'whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire but thee!'

It appears from these latter quotations that she sees the experience as no less than a visitation of God. God came to her, gloriously manifested his presence and overwhelmed her with his love. Is not this a much more satisfactory explanation of what happened to her? Are we not able to recognise echoes of the experiences spoken of by Mrs. Jonathan Edwards, John Flavel, Howell Harris, George Whitefield and many others? If then we grant that she enjoyed this manifestation of God to her soul, why should she be so insistent that the process was 'full surrender' and exhort others to seek it in those terms? This may be easily understood in the light of the days in which she lived and provides a fascinating insight into religious life in late eighteenth century Great Britain. The year 1873 signalled a period of intense religious activity in England. Moody and Sankey landed at Liverpool and began their two year crusade. Mr. and Mrs. Pearsall-Smith, principal propagators of the 'higher life' movement, began to

Frances Ridley Havergal and the Fragrance of Christ | 175

hold meetings in London. There then followed a series of gatherings of ever increasing size and popularity, culminating in the first Keswick convention in 1875. Confusion of thought often attends such vigorous activity and all the talk was of 'surrender' and 'consecration', the catchwords of this type of teaching. Francis Ridley Havergal could not fail to be aware of, and be affected by, all this and it can surely explain her misconceptions. She was also influenced in a small way by a booklet called *All for Jesus* by an Anglican clergyman, J. T. Wrenford, who was himself very much involved in the holiness movement. If we add to this the very real and praiseworthy spirit of passionate devotion to Christ which permeated all her thinking we can then appreciate how vulnerable she was to such misunderstanding. When she writes, as she often does, exhorting others to seek this experience, she uses the language current in the renewal movement. We could hardly expect otherwise given the prevailing emphases in the circles in which she moved.

There are several other observations worth making. In the first place, she never attended any convention or conference which specifically dealt with 'holiness' teaching. Indeed, she pointedly refers to her experience as one coming direct from God and states that any human agency was minimal. Secondly, she most vehemently denied any suggestion of perfectionism, either in herself or in anybody else but Christ and so was preserved from the aberration which so often has been the outcome of this teaching. Significantly we can note the endorsement of her by no less a respected theologian than B. B. Warfield. In his important book, *Perfectionism*, he comments, 'Frances Ridley Havergal is as fundamentally evangelical in her thought as Mr. Trumbull is fundamentally unevangelical in his.' (p. 366) Finally, we must note the profound effect on her of a deeper understanding of 1 John 1:7—'the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin.' Significantly, it was the understanding that the word 'cleanses' means 'goes on cleansing' that most impressed her in Wrenford's tract and not his 'holiness' emphasis. This text, which became very precious to her, appears on her tombstone.

However, it is noticeable that when she uses this text in connection with 'full surrender' she really means complete trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and his blood for salvation, forgiveness and keeping in the Christian life. We surely cannot disagree with that but we might wonder what it has to do with 'surrender'! Her instincts were right even if her language is open to

misunderstanding. Note a comment she wrote to friends—‘I must tell you how glad it makes me to know that you have given yourself to Jesus or rather, he has taken you for himself.’ Her Jesus is not a weak figure waiting helplessly on the whims and fancies of human beings but a Sovereign Lord who asserts his rights. All these points would tend to reinforce the view that the visitation of God to her soul was real, profound and wonderful but that a certain confusion of mind, undoubtedly caused by the climate that prevailed in the religious life of her times, led her to misinterpret her own experience.

Her Hymns

Finally we shall say a few words about that for which she is best remembered—her hymns. However let us not forget that she was also well known in her generation for her prose writings. Here is a sample of her very clear, direct and effective style.

But what is coming? One’s very familiarity with the terms used to express spiritual things, seems to have a tendency to make one feel mystified about them. Their very simplicity makes one suspicious, as it were, that there must be some mysterious and mystical meaning behind them, because they sound too easy and plain to have such import. ‘Come’ means ‘come’—just that, and not some occult process of mental effort!

What would you understand by it, if you heard it today for the first time, never having had any doubts or suppositions or previous notions whatever about it? What does a little child understand by it? It is positively too simple to be made plainer by any amount of explanation. If you could see the Lord Jesus standing there, right before you, and you heard him say ‘Come!’ would you say ‘what does come mean?’ And if the room were dark, so that you could only hear and not see, would it make any difference? Would you not turn instantly towards the ‘Glorious Voice’? Would you not, in heart, and will, and intention, instantaneously obey it? That is, if you believed it to be himself. ‘For he that cometh to God must believe that he is.’ The coming so hinges on that, as to really be the same thing. The moment you really believed, you would really come; and the moment you really come, you really believe. (*The Royal Invitation.*)

Frances Ridley Havergal exhibited a poetic gift from early years and her output

Frances Ridley Havergal and the Fragrance of Christ | 177

was prolific. It is worth noting that though she had a few poems printed in a magazine earlier, all her published work was produced in the last ten years of her short life. She was a very busy lady! Her poetry is now largely forgotten although it was extremely popular in a day when Christian poetry enjoyed a greater vogue than it does now. It does avoid some of the traps that were characteristic of many gifted Victorian women and is therefore never too slushy or sentimental. Her hymns, of course, are widely remembered and, used as expressions of love, devotion and praise, are still valued. She claimed that each line could be traced to Scripture and no line was outside her experience. She definitely felt they were 'God-given'.

I have a curious vivid sense, not merely of my verse faculty in general being given me, but also of every separate poem or hymn, nay every line, being given. It is pleasant thus to take it as a direct gift, not a matter of effort but purely involuntarily. That is how the verses come. The Master has not put a chest of poetic gold into my possession and said, 'Now use it as you like!' But he keeps the gold and gives it me piece by piece just when he will and as much as he will and no more.

She knew exactly the circumstances of each hymn, they were scribbled on bits of papers instantly and sometimes the music as well.

A General Assessment

They do not inspire great thoughts of God, humbling the mind at his majesty and causing the soul to wonder at his grace as do the hymns of Watts. They do not plumb the depths of spiritual experience as does Wesley. They do not really meet the needs of poor weak sinners and speak of the welcome in the loving arms of the Saviour like the hymns of Newton. They are almost exclusively addressed to the second person of the Trinity, that is, to Christ and although that provides an unlimited source of inspiration, in her case it does mean a certain sameness. However they breathe sincerity and genuineness and display a personal devotion to Christ with a sense of the reality of his felt presence. Her desire to follow and serve the Master along with the consecration, dedication and submission involved well describes the scope of her hymns and admirably serve that same purpose for us. She wrote over seventy hymns and such is their consistency that she should be considered among the best of the nineteenth century writers. One or two deserve more detailed comment.

178 | Churchman

“Thy life was given for me” was her first hymn written in 1858. She wrote it in the first person, i.e., she put the words in the mouth of Christ himself—‘I gave my life for thee. My precious blood was shed.’ Most editors of modern hymn books have felt uneasy about ascribing words to Christ like this and have changed it to the form we now sing i.e., ‘Thy life was given for me.’ It was changed in her lifetime with her consent although she much preferred the original. That may be a little too scrupulous and significantly it isn’t done to Cowper in his well known ‘Hark, my soul it is the Lord’. (‘Thou shalt see my glory soon...’.) The hymn was written on a visit to Germany when she had come in feeling very tired and saw a picture of the crucified Christ bearing the words ‘I did this for thee, what hast thou done for me?’. (Interestingly the same story is told of Count Zinzendorf the Moravian 150 years earlier. Sometimes these stories get transferred but there’s no reason why both should not be accurate and they both saw the same picture). The lines immediately flashed into her mind and she wrote them down. She was dissatisfied with them and threw them into the fire but they fell out, unburnt. So she kept them and showed them some months later to her father who encouraged her to keep them.

“Take my life and let it be” is perhaps the best known of her hymns. She wrote—

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 to Areley House. There were 10 persons in the house, some converted and long prayed for, some converted but not rejoicing Christians. He gave me a 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 and these little couplets formed themselves and chimed in my heart one after another, till they finished with, ‘Ever, only, all for thee!’

“Lord speak to me that I may speak” is a fine hymn of Christian service and a longing for souls which was so characteristic of her whole life.

Oh use me Lord, use even me,
Just as thou wilt and when and where
Until thy blessed face I see,
Thy rest, thy joy, thy glory share.

Frances Ridley Havergal and the Fragrance of Christ | 179

“I am trusting thee, Lord Jesus” was her own favourite and was found in her pocket Bible after her death. One other hymn is worthy of mention.

I could not do without thee,
 Thou Saviour of the lost,
 Whose precious blood redeemed me
 At such tremendous cost;
 Thy righteousness, thy pardon,
 Thy precious blood must be
 My only hope and comfort,
 My glory and my plea.

One thing is certain, her hymns demonstrate her life. That, with all its powers and gifts was consecrated to one sole object and so her verses are filled with the fragrance of passionate and adoring love to Christ. That word ‘fragrance’ leaves the thought that I can use to sum up her life, work and influence.

There are some points to be critical about. For example, the place of women in the ministry of the church—did she do more than the New Testament warrants?—but it sprang from an overwhelming desire to be of service to Christ and out of a genuine love for souls. There might be reservations about the ministry of song on which she often embarked which could be the beginning of a trend that marked the Moody and Sankey campaigns and that has come through the Billy Graham crusades to our present day. But for her it was not music for its own sake, or for effect, but designed for evangelistic ends and serving Christ in the way she felt she was best gifted. So while the purists might have some slight problems about such things it is impossible to doubt her sincerity, the reality of her devotion and the depth of her experience of the living Christ. Hearts warm towards her and, in an attempt to fit her into a biblical pattern, thoughts are directed to Mary of Bethany. Two things impress us about Mary—her love for Christ in giving everything (Frances Ridley Havergal would have given that perfume), and the comment that the perfume filled the house. That is to say, there was an influence on others that stemmed from her devotion to the Lord. That is the residue left after reading about Frances Ridley Havergal and her works—a fragrance and a perfume that is all pervasive and permeates all her words and points to Christ.

Miss Havergal passed away in 1879 (at the early age of 42) in the home she was sharing with her sister Maria in Swansea. She had developed peritonitis

180 | Churchman

after another bout of typhoid. Her death was a glorious one. On being told she was going home soon, she said, 'Beautiful! Too good to be true...it is the Lord Jesus who is so dear to me. I can't tell you how precious! There has not failed one word of his promise.' At her own request, all the materials decorating the funeral procession were white rather than black.

A verse from her best known hymn gives us a goal which is almost terrifying in its challenge but which should be the desire of all sinners saved by grace.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour
At thy feet its treasure store,
Take myself and I will be
Ever, only, all for thee.

Biographical quotations are taken from *Memorials of Frances Ridley Havergal* by Maria Havergal.

REVD. JOHN HARRIS, Mirfield, from a lecture given at Stanton Lees Bible School, 2002.