

*From the Archives: Frances Havergal's Letter to Hannah Whitall Smith about her Sanctification Experience*

One of the most used collections in the Archives and Special Collections of B.L. Fisher Library are the Papers of Hannah Whitall Smith (Feb. 7, 1832 – May 1, 1911).<sup>1</sup> This Quaker woman and her husband, Robert Pearsall Smith, experienced sanctification and were influenced by the teachings of William E. Boardman. As a result, they became leaders in the early Holiness Movement in the United States. She and her husband carried the teachings to England, where they were instrumental in forming the Higher Life Movement. Hannah became a major speaker and writer on holiness with one of her books, *The Christian's Secret to a Happy Life* becoming a holiness classic found all over the world.

But Hannah's interests carried her into many different arenas and connected her with women active in social movements in the U.S. and the United Kingdom. She worked closely with Frances Willard of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and corresponded with women like Susan B. Anthony, Clara Barton, Frances Power Cobbe, and Josephine Butler. Hannah also became a strong supporter of the women's suffrage movement and spoke out for women's rights. She valued her experience of sanctification, but also recognized the inherent dangers the experience carried. She collected materials in her "Fanaticism Files" on groups that expressed interest in and an experience of sanctification, but frequently left orthodoxy. Hannah wrote, "My first introduction to fanaticism, if I leave out all that I got from the Quakers to start with, which was a good deal, came through the Methodist doctrine of entire sanctification. That doctrine has been one of the greatest blessings of my life, but it has also introduced me into an emotional region where common sense has no chance, and where everything goes by feelings and voices and impressions."<sup>2</sup>



**Hannah Whitall Smith Signed Photograph (From the Papers of Hannah Whitall Smith)**

It is this almost scientific-like interest in the experience of sanctification that led Robert Pearsall Smith to ask Frances Havergal about her own personal experience. Frances Ridley Havergal (Dec. 14, 1836-June 3, 1879) was born into the family of an Anglican clergyman and except for a short time studying and traveling in Germany and Switzerland; she remained at home, frequently in ill health. She did not marry or have children and she died at the young age of 42 years old. She wrote

religious poetry, hymns, tracts, and some literature for children, most of which was published after her death by her sisters. But as her letter reveals, she was influenced by the holiness teachings of Robert Pearsall Smith and Hannah Whitall Smith. Because of her early death, and the fact that much of her work was published after her death, her letter to Hannah might be the most complete and full accounting of her sanctification experience. While the name of Frances Havergal is not a household name today, her most famous hymn became a powerful anthem in both holiness and missionary circles, a hymn still widely sung and loved today:

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.  
Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.  
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love.  
Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King.  
Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from thee.  
Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold.  
Take my intellect, and use every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart, it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.  
Take my love, my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure store.  
Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.



*Frances R. Havergal*

**Frances Ridley Havergal (Dec. 14, 1836 – June 3, 1879) Image in the Public Domain**

The following is an image of the pages of Frances Havergal's moving account of her spiritual experience written to Hannah Whitall Smith in 1875. The image is followed by a transcription of the page to make it easier to read.

43. Briarwood Avenue, Leesington  
 (From Francis Ridley Havergall  
 author of "This Heart I Give for Thee") Oct. 12, 1875

Dear Mrs. Smith

I must send a line of thanks for your dear husband's kind note to me, but it shall be through you, in case he is not well enough to be teased with letters. It seems to me the first & easiest lesson to cast one's own care on the Lord, but a harder one to leave one's friends & their matters in His hands, & hardest of all to trust Him about His own affairs! And so, while it is long since I had the least ripple of care about anything to do with myself, I have, until quite lately, failed to learn the other two lessons, & the Master has made use of you (i.e. both of you, Susan) & that part of His cause of which you are the champions, to show me the failure & teach me the lesson! Oh how I have been vexing & chafing over the prejudice & opposition & false witness, & how I have been mourning because so many who should have been helping were hindering (apparently) the Lord's own work! And how I have wanted to captivate & speak my mind!

43 Briarwood Avenue, Leamington  
Oct. 18, 1875

Dear Mrs. Smith

I just want to send a line of thanks for your dear husband's kind note to me, but it shall be through you, in case he is not well enough to be tended with letters. It seems to me the first and easiest lesson to cast one's own care on the Lord, but a harder one to leave one's friends and their matters in His hands, and hardest of all to trust Him about His own affairs! And so, while it is long since I had the least ripple of care about anything to do with myself, I have until quite lately, failed to learn the other two lessons, and the Master has made use of you (i.e. both of you, I mean) and that part of His cause of which you are the champions, to shew me the failure and teach me the lessons! Oh, how I have been vexing and chafing over the prejudice and opposition and false witness and how I have been mourning because so many who should have been helping were hindering (apparently) the Lord's own work! And how I have wanted to explode and speak my mind!

Well, it is all over now - the silently  
silence of N.P.S. & W.W.S. has shown  
 me a more excellent way, and at last  
 I have seen how foolish and sinful  
 it was not to leave your affairs and  
this affairs as entirely & resolutely to Him  
 as my own. Oh I am so thankful  
 for this place of silence given to you,  
 for I believe the eloquence of it, is  
 gradually & surely reasoning, & witnessing  
 for the truth of God as no defence of  
 your selves could possibly do. Just as  
 if He would not vindicate His own  
 witnesses! And just as if the Enemy  
could prevail against His truth! I am  
 so glad He has taught me at last  
 to trust Him entirely in all this mat-  
 ter - I did not know there was such  
 a gap in my armour. One good  
 must have at once resulted from Mr  
 Smith's illness - I suppose thousands  
more prayers went up for him than  
 if he had been kept in health - when  
 I heard of it I really felt inclined  
 to congratulate him! for I knew how  
 the hearts of God's people would be stirred  
 up to pray for him. And I knew a little  
 too, of how tenderly precious the Master

Well it is all over now- the saintly silence of R.P.S. and H.W.S. has shown me a more excellent way, and at last I have seen how foolish and sinful it was to leave your affairs and His affairs as entirely and restfully to Him as my own. Oh, I am so thankful for this grace of silence given to you, for I believe the eloquence of it is gradually and surely resounding and witnessing for the truth of God as no defense of yourselves could possibly do. Just as if He would not vindicate His own witnesses! And just as if the Enemy could prevail against His truth! I am so glad He has taught me at last to trust Him entirely in all this matter- I did not know there was such a gap in my armour.

One good must have at once resulted from Mr. Smith's illness- I suppose thousands more prayers went up for him than if he had been kept in health- when I heard of it I really felt inclined to congratulate him! For I knew how the hearts of God's people would be stirred up to pray for him. And I knew a little too, of how tenderly gracious the Master

Himself would be to him, & what praise  
 he would be sure to have to give for  
 this unexpected "calling apart". For my-  
 self, I don't know how to thank God  
 enough for my own illness, it is a retro-  
 spect of unmingled praise. I cannot  
 imagine why He is so very good to me,  
 having no mysteries in His dealings  
 with me, but letting me see a mar-  
 vellous array of wonderful, wise reasons  
 why He did just as He did with me,  
 & why it was just at that time. From  
 the very day I trusted myself wholly  
 to Him. He has always let me see  
 this clearly - I hardly know how to  
 express, but I think you will under-  
 stand me if I say that, though con-  
 stantly testing my trust in a sin-  
 gular variety of ways, He never yet  
 (these two years) seems to have tried  
 it so that I shall be conscious of any  
strain upon it; I entrusted it to Him  
 & He so keeps it, that in every test  
 it has been as if He almost changed  
 the faith into very sight, while the  
 testing lasted. I want to tell every  
 one who shrinks from illness & pain that

Himself would be to him, and what praise he would be sure to have to give for this unexpected “calling apart.” For myself, I don’t know how to thank God enough for my own illness, it is a retrospect of unmingled praise. I cannot imagine why He is so very good to me, having no mysteries in His dealings with me, but letting me see a marvelous array of wonderfully wise reasons why He did just as He did with me, and why it was just at that time. From the very day I trusted myself wholly to Him, He has always let me see thus clearly in everything- I hardly know how to express, but I think you will understand me if I say that through continually testing my trust in a singular variety of ways, He never yet (these two years) seems to have tried it so that I shall be conscious of any strain upon it; I entrusted it to Him, and He so keeps it, that in every test however severe it has been as if He almost changed the faith into my sight while the testing lasted. I want to tell every one who shrinks from illness and pain that

they really need "fear no evil." I  
 am getting well now, but not at all  
 strong. I do not somehow think it  
 likely I ever shall be. I was by no  
 means strong before my illness, but  
 I am considerably below my former  
 level. a very little extra talking or  
 walking knocks me up for days. I  
 have been deluging me thinking that  
 we can <sup>re</sup>enact the miracle of the loaves  
 & fishes as to our work - that the bles-  
 sing can make a few words feed  
 many thousands, & multiply one hour's  
 day, one minute's work, if He will,  
 to the value of weeks or years of effort  
 & labour. And even supposing one  
 could not do anything, at all again  
 on earth, one might well acquiesce  
 in a lifetime of passive moulding  
 & waiting for the grand service  
 of eternity - for the Master's use  
 above.

You asked me <sup>more than</sup> a year  
 ago to tell you whether I had been  
 for any length of time consecrated  
 before realizing union with Jesus or  
 words to that effect. I could not  
 answer <sup>them</sup> because I was taken ill. I

they really need “fear no evil.”

I am pretty well now, but not at all strong, and I do not somehow think it likely I ever shall be. I was by no means strong before my illness, but I am considerably below my former level, a very little eater talking or walking knocks me up for days. I have been delighting in thinking that He can re-enact the miracle of the loaves and fishes as to our work- that His blessings can make a few words feed many thousands and multiple one hour's way, one minute's work, if He will to the value of weeks or years of effort of labor. And even supposing one could not do anything at all again on earth, one might well acquiesce in a lifetime of passive molding and meetening for the proud service of eternity- for the Master's use above.

You asked me more than a year ago to tell you “whether I had been for any length of time consecrated before realizing union with Jesus” or words to that effect. I could not answer then because I was taken ill. I

think not. For some 2 or 3 years I  
 had been more desirous to follow fully,  
 & had practically given more & more  
 of love & time & strength to Christ,  
 but consecration as a "definite trans-  
 action" had never been brought before  
 me - I did not know the real meaning  
 of my own words "full & glad surrender"  
 & of what "deliverance from sin" might  
 mean. I had no notion. I had been  
 a long, long time learning to realize  
 justification, & latterly had gone on  
 from that to entering into the comforts  
 & praise-awakening doctrines of God's  
 sovereign grace in election & final  
 perseverance, & from this platform  
 I worked for more happiness & success,  
 fully among others. I found out what  
 He would teach me weak, having  
 been very conscious of progressive  
 teaching. Then came what Mr. Smith  
 told me he called "conviction for holiness,"  
 some weeks <sup>of</sup> craving for justification &  
 hardly knew what, then three days  
 of seeing what I wanted & tremendous  
 turmoil of soul about it. Then - just

think not. For some 2 or 3 years I had been more desirous to “follow fully” and had practically given more and more of love and time and strength to Christ, but consecration as a “definite transaction” had never been brought before me. I did not know the real meaning of my own words “full and glad surrender” and of what “deliverance from sin” might mean. I had no notion. I had been a long, long time learning to realize justification and latterly had gone on from that to entering into the comforting and praise awakening doctrines of God’s sovereign grace in election and “final perseverance” and from this platform I worked far more happily and successfully among others. I wondered what He would teach me next, having been very conscious of progressive teaching.

Then came what Mr. Smith told me he calls “conviction for holiness” some weeks neither dissatisfaction or craving for I hardly knew what, then three days of seeing what I wanted and tremendous turmoil of soul about it. Then—just

one sentence in a letter from Mr  
 Wrenford - "For conscious sin there  
 is instant confession & instant for-  
 giveness - for unconscious sin the  
 blood of Christ <sup>cleanseth, i.e.</sup> goes on cleansing!"  
 That was the message of ~~deliverance~~ <sup>to me!</sup>  
 I really seemed as if I saw everything  
 at once, just as you see a whole  
 landscape in one flash where before  
 you saw nothing! Everything which  
 I have read or seen since seemed there  
 at once - consecration, definite, total,  
 rapturous - then & there! Trust, equal;  
 definite & entire, seemed a matter  
 of course! The definite purpose to sin  
 no more because the precious blood  
 could & would go on cleansing, the  
 instant vision, as clear as daylight,  
 that every sweep of care was to be  
 cast on Him, & every shard of  
 unbelief renounced for ever - that  
 He meant all He said, that no  
commands were impossible, no  
promises unattainable - all this  
 seemed simultaneous! And no human  
 teaching had anything whatever to  
 do with it - it was all new to me.

one sentence in a letter from Mr. Wrenford<sup>3</sup> - "For conscious sin there is instant confession and instant forgiveness- for unconscious sin the blood of Christ cleanseth, i.e. goes on cleansing"! That was the message of deliverance to me! I really received as if I saw everything at once, just as you see a whole landscape in one flash where before you saw nothing! Everything which I have read or seen since seemed there at once- consecration, definite, total, rapturous- then and there! Trust equally definite and entire, seemed a matter of course! The definite purpose to "sin no more" because the precious blood could and would go on cleansing, the instant vision, as clear as daylight, that every scrap of care was to be cast on Him, and every shred of unbelief renounced for ever- that He meant all He said, that no commands were impossible, no promises unattainable- all this seemed simultaneous! And no human teaching had anything whatever to do with it- it was all new to me,

so what could it have been but the  
 Spirit himself teaching me! It was  
 not till weeks after that I first  
 read anything on the subject, and  
 then I found it all in print! I am  
 so exceedingly thankful that He taught  
 me thus - that I have not the regret  
 of having heard before accepting - of  
 having hesitated to receive the full  
 salvation, & delayed my surrender &  
 trust. He sent the power with the  
first word of definite obedience  
 which had reached my ear or eye -  
 so don't you think I have extra cause  
 for praise! Others tell me of having  
 read books & been to conferences, &  
 known all about it ever so long,  
 & then being taught to receive the  
 teaching line by line, gradually,  
 getting hold of it a little bit at a  
 time; but to me it was as if He  
 poured out more treasure into my lap  
 at once than I have had time even  
 to count yet! It is a strong  
 contrast to all this previous teaching  
 of me, & was peculiarly gradual. - I

so what could it have been but the Spirit Himself teaching me!

It was not till weeks after that I first read anything on the subject, and then I found it all in print! I am so exceedingly thankful that He taught me this- that I have not the regret of having heard before accepting- of having hesitated to receive the full salvation and delayed my surrender and trust. He sent the power with the first word of definite deliverance, which had reached my ear or eye- so don't you think I have extra cause for praise! Others tell me of having read books and been to Conferences, and "known all about it ever so long" and then being taught to receive the teaching line by line, gradually getting hold of it a little bit at a time; but to me it was as if He poured out more treasure into my lap at once than I have had time even to count yet! It is a strange contrast to all His previous teaching of me, which was peculiarly gradual. I



cannot tell when to date my conversion!

It is rather curious how all along He has been keeping me isolated. I have hardly read anything about it. I have been to no meeting, nor come in contact with any teacher, except meeting Mr. Smith at Leamington and hearing that one address of yours at Mildmay (July/74). I wonder whether this is that I may not echo phraseology? But that in what I say or write, I may express myself more freshly than I should probably do if I had been hearing a great many addresses- it would be so difficult to avoid unconsciously or even consciously reproducing the words and form of ideas which one had been drinking in. For I know He is teaching me the same things which I should have been learning at Brighton and Oxford if I had been able to go. Nevertheless, if He did open the way for me to go, I should not thankfully embrace the opportunity of further help through human channels. I should not have inflicted such a screed on you, but that you expressed a wish to know.

Yours in heartfelt love,

Frances R. Havergal

The archives of the B.L. Fisher library are open to researchers and works to promote research in the history of Methodism and the Wesleyan-Holiness movement. Images, such as these, provide one vital way to bring history to life. Preservation of such material is often time consuming and costly, but are essential to helping fulfill Asbury Theological Seminary's mission. If you are interested in donating items of historic significance to the archives of the B.L. Fisher Library, or in donating funds to help purchase or process significant collections, please contact the archivist at [archives@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:archives@asburyseminary.edu).

## End Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Hannah Whitall Smith, from her introduction to the Overcomers and Anna Spafford (chapter six) in *Religious Fanaticism: Extracts from the Papers of Hannah Whitall Smith*, edited with an introduction by Ray Strachey, published by Faber & Gwyer Limited (1928), page 203.

<sup>3</sup> Mr Wrenford refers to Rev. John Tinson Wrenford (1825-1904), a prolific Anglican writer and clergyman, who formed a close bond with Frances Havergal. She sent him the first copy of her hymn “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee” in manuscript form as soon as it was written. He then helped publicize this hymn through his ministry.