

## Lives that Lift

C L Paddock 1935



### The Girl Who Lost Her Sight but not Her Vision

Just suppose, if when you were still a baby, before you had taken your first toddling steps, your eyesight had been taken from you and, surrounded by darkness, you developed into childhood! Then suppose, as you grew older, that you were told you would never be able to see! What, do you imagine, would your attitude toward life have been? Would you have been as cheerful and contented as was Fanny Crosby? Would you as courageously have set about making the very best use of the remaining senses as did she?

Fanny Crosby was only an infant in her mother's arms, when she became blind through the blunders of an ignorant country doctor. At the age of six weeks, she was taken ill and a weakness of the eyes developed. Those caring for her, poulticed her eyes and the indiscretion blinded her forever. Another loss, of which she was not aware until she was older, was the death of her father when she was not yet one year old.

When she was old enough to understand, her mother told her she would never see the blue sky, the green grass, the flowers, or the faces of her loved ones. But this wise and sympathetic mother told her more than that, and who knows but that the encouragement of her mother at this trying time helped to give to the sightless child a vision. She told her little daughter of two of the world's great poets who were blind, and explained to her that God in His wisdom sometimes withheld from His children life's sweetest blessings, for their highest good.

A short poem which the child wrote when only eight years of age should be an inspiration to any young person when the way seems dark. It runs as follows:

"Oh what a happy soul am I!  
Although I cannot see,  
I am resolved that in this world

Contented I will be.

How many blessings I enjoy,  
That other people don't.  
To weep and sigh because I'm blind.  
I cannot, and I won't."

This determination in childhood to be content, was a comfort to her all through her useful happy life. Many of us who possess all our physical faculties might make the same resolution with profit.

One of her companions of childhood was a pet lamb, which she called "Fanny's little lamb." They were almost as inseparable as was Mary and her famous pet.

Learning of her grand-daughter's blindness her grandmother came to the Crosby home to live. As best she could, she attempted to make up for Fanny's loss of sight. For hours at a time Fanny lay curled up in Grandma's lap as she sat in the old rocking chair and described to the child the beautiful sunset, the silvery moon, or the twinkling stars. By vivid word pictures she made real to Fanny the fleecy clouds with their odd shapes and colors, or perhaps a beautiful rainbow. Many an hour they spent out of doors, and through Grandmother's interesting and detailed descriptions Fanny learned to know the robin, the wren, and the whippoorwill; in fact she could tell almost any bird by its song. She loved flowers and knew them by their fragrance. The trees she recognized by touch.

Often in the evening twilight, Grandma and Fanny sat together in the old armchair, and the former told the simple, touching story of a kind Heavenly Father who loved us so much, that He was willing to give His only Son to die for us. During those quiet evening hours Grandma told her many a Bible story; then, when the story was finished, the child buried her sightless eyes in her grandmother's lap and said her simple prayers. Those days spent in the home-school were precious, and the lessons learned were never forgotten.

As a child, Fanny Crosby prayed daily that the way might be opened for her to go to school. At the age of fifteen her prayer was answered and she entered the Institution for the Blind in New York City. She reveled in her studies, especially poetry. She wrote some verses, but received no encouragement from her teachers. When they took her poems from her she continued to express her feelings in verse, but did not show them to her instructors.

From the time she was eight years old, the singing of the birds, the rippling of the brook, the roll of deep-toned thunder spoke to her soul, and she felt an inspiration to say something about them. It was a happy day for Fanny when a Dr. Combe of Boston came to the institution to examine the craniums of the students. When he came to her he exclaimed, "And here is a poetess; give her every possible encouragement. Read the best books to her, and teach her to appreciate the finest there is in poetry. You will hear from this young lady someday."

In writing of this experience Fanny says, "This was as music to my soul. I had waited long for someone to encourage me to adhere to what I already felt was to be my life work; hymn writing." Dr. Combe probably never realized that his words, spoken that day, fanned into a flame the little spark which had been smoldering in a girlish heart, and which, as a result, gave to the world those hymns which have brought courage, peace, and hope to millions. Her real work as a hymn-writer began when she met Mr. William B. Bradbury in New York, who asked her if she would write a hymn for him. This question she had been long wishing someone to ask her. The verses were set to music and Fanny Crosby's first hymn published.

She was overjoyed, the happiest woman in the world. She had found her work.

The hymn, *Pass Me Not, O Gentle Saviour*, followed soon after and won world-wide fame. It is not only an English favorite around the world, but has been translated into many foreign languages as well. It is wonderful how even a tune would suggest words to Fanny. William H. Doane one day told her he had a tune he would like words for. When he had played it for her she remarked, "That says, 'Safe in the Arms of Jesus,'" and going to her room, returned in just a half-hour with this beautiful hymn which has comforted so many sorrowing souls.

Among Fanny Crosby's dearest friends were Dwight L. Moody, Ira D. Sankey, George C. Stebbins, William H. Doane and Hubert P. Main. They assisted her in the publication and sale of many of her hymns. She also counted many famous men and women among her friends, including William Cullen Bryant, Jenny Lind, Phineas T. Barnum, President Van Buren, President James K. Polk and many, many others.

One evening, when in New York, she was asked to address a company of men at a rescue mission hall. At the close of the meeting she asked if there was a boy there who had drifted away from God and from the teaching of his mother? A young man of eighteen came forward and gave his heart to God. When she went to her room that night, the words "Rescue the perishing, care for the dying," kept running through her mind. Before she retired, the famous hymn bearing this title was ready, and the next day sent to Mr. Doane, who wrote the music for it.

The words for *Blessed Assurance* were suggested to her after a friend, who had composed the melody, had played it two or three times on the piano. At one time Mr. Doane sent her some music and suggested a subject. As a result we have the beautiful hymn, *Saviour More Than Life to Me*:

"Saviour more than life to me,  
I am clinging, clinging, close to Thee;  
Let Thy precious blood applied  
Keep me ever, ever near Thy side.  
Every day, every hour,  
Let me feel Thy cleansing power;  
May Thy tender love to me,  
Bind me closer, closer, Lord to Thee."

Her cheerful, optimistic outlook on life and her simple, childlike faith in God were woven into all her writings. If something went wrong she always reasoned that "it might have been worse." "I have long since learned," she said, "that 'what can't be cured, must be endured.' Some days are good, some days are ill. But it never pays to murmur, and it is useless to worry."

As she sat alone, thinking of her blindness, she said to herself, "Fanny, there are many worse things than blindness that might have happened to you. The loss of the mind is a thousand times worse than the loss of the eyes. Then I might have been speechless and deaf. I do not know but that on the whole it has been a good thing that I have been blind. How in the world could I have lived such a helpful life as I have lived had I not been blind? I never let anything trouble me, and to my implicit faith, and to my implicit trust in my heavenly Father's goodness, I attribute my good health and long life. In the case of my loss of sight I can see how the Lord permitted it. He didn't order it; He permitted it."

The hungering in her heart for love was satisfied for a few short years. She formed the friendship of a gifted young man of similar tastes to her own, Alexander Van Alstyne. He too was blind, and a

student in the Institute in New York. To them a child was born, but it died in infancy. Mr. Van Alstyne died in the year 1902.

After remaining in the Institution for the Blind as a student, she became an instructor in the same school, and was an inspiration to her pupils. In all, she spent twenty-three years in this Institution. Though confined to her room much of the time because of her blindness through the long, long years, she wrote more than eight thousand hymns, and they have been sung in all parts of the civilized world. From behind that wall of darkness came streams of light that shall never grow dim.

The whole world was saddened when the news of her death flashed around the globe, February 12, 1915. Words cannot tell of her greatness, helpfulness, and goodness. If ever she had a pessimistic thought, not one note of it ever crept into her songs. She preached faith, hope, and courage to millions, and, doubtless, there will be multitudes in heaven, whose hearts were changed and whose lives were uplifted by Fanny Crosby's gospel songs. Here is just one of them.

Once Jesus was a child like me,  
But O, so kind and true;  
His ever watchful eye can see  
The very things I do.

Refrain

Yes, Jesus was a child like me,  
But O, so pure and true;  
My blessèd Savior He will be,  
If I but love Him, too.

He played upon the village street,  
In such a pleasant way;  
And ran with glad and willing feet,  
His parents to obey.

I want to be His little child,  
And more like Him to grow;  
And ever truthful, good and mild,  
Because He loves me so.

And now to Jesus I will pray,  
To pardon me from sin;  
And if I serve Him every day,  
His blessing I shall win.