

*Fanny J. Crosby*



*Fanny J. Crosby*  
*An Autobiography*

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## Dedication

Go, little book, with many a prayer  
Go on thy pinions light as air  
The story and the life portray  
Of her who sends thee forth today  
Go, little book, God's goodness tell  
Whose praise her soul enraptured sings  
Who gave the harp she loves so well  
And in her childhood tuned the strings  
Go, little book, her years recall  
With countless friends so richly blest  
She murmurs not what'er befall  
But feels the power of perfect rest  
Go, little book, should some lone heart  
Forget in thee one throb of pain  
Shouldst thou but play this humble part  
Thy author has not toiled in vain



Fanny Crosby in her eighty-sixth year

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## Introductory Statement

**F**OR those friends and acquaintances, who have expressed a wish to read the complete story of my life, from my childhood to the present time, I have undertaken the writing of this book. By including even some incidents that, in themselves, may seem trivial, I have tried to make this account a full and accurate autobiography. In modesty, however, I have also desired to render my story as simple as possible, in fact, to give a vivid picture of my work, my opinions and my aspirations, not only as a teacher but also as a writer of sacred songs; and if I have spoken with a frankness that may seem akin to egotism, I hope that I may be pardoned; for I am fully aware of the immense debt I owe to those numberless friends, only a few of whom I have been able to mention, and especially to that dear Friend of us all, who is our light and life.

Throughout the pages which follow I have availed myself of the kind assistance of several persons; and I desire to acknowledge here especially the services of the Biglow and Main Company for permission to make a few quotations from my copyrighted poems;

to J. L. B. Sunderlin, for the use of a number of articles that originally appeared in the "Albany Rail-roader"; to I. Allan Sankey, Hubert P. Main; Dr. William H. Doane and Mrs. Mary Upham Carrier, for corrections, suggestions and stories of the hymns; to my sister, Mrs. Carrie W. Rider, for the single-hearted devotion with which she has aided me in every way she could to make this story of my life all that a loving sister would wish it to be; to my friend, Miss Eva G. Cleaveland, who has warmly seconded my sister's efforts; and to my cousin, William Losee, for pictures of my early home and its surroundings.

In the work of compiling, copying and arranging this book, I am indebted to the valuable services of H. Adelbert White. Like my old physician, Dr. J. W. G. Clements, through whose generous efforts my first book of poems was issued, he has sacrificed every other consideration and patiently devoted himself to my interest. This he has done, however, as a gift of friendship; and I realize that this book never would have been possible without his assistance.

But, if this little volume shall be the means of transmitting sunshine into any life, I am sure that all those, who have so generously given their aid, will feel abundantly rewarded. For myself, it is a rare privilege and pleasure to twine the blossoms I have been gathering in the garden of memory along the journey of life into a wreath which must forever be a token of fellowship and good will.

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**I**

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## Flowers That Never Fade

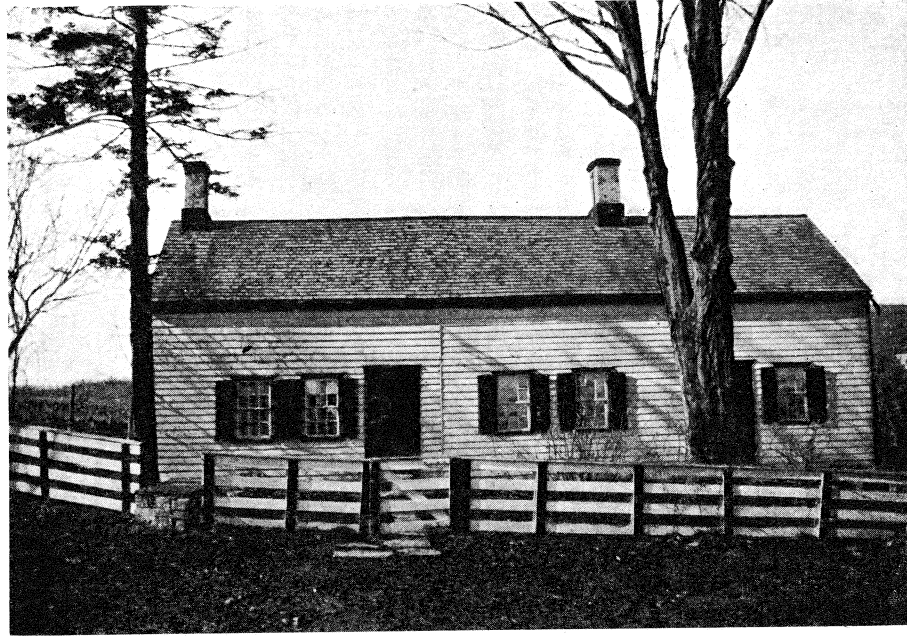
**M**any of the flowers I planted in the garden of memory during a happy childhood are still blooming sweet and fair after a lapse of more than eighty years. Those that are somewhat faded, because they have not recently been watered, and those which have been crushed in the press of a long and busy life, I will try to revive until I have finished the life story that I am about to tell. Amid

Giant rocks and hills majestic,  
Sunny glade and fertile plain,

as one of my own poems describes the surroundings among which I was reared, these blossoms of expectant youth, some of them frail promises of future harvests, were gathered in the good old town of Southeast, Putnam County, New York. In that re-

gion the traveler, perhaps to a greater degree than the inhabitant, remembers the country as one of wonderful wildness and grandeur. The scenery is sublime because natural, and more majestic than any handiwork designed by man. During the summer months the neighboring hills are studded with great masses of foliage; and this here and there is touched with small masses of gold and brown; and in winter the same landscape is covered over with spread of virgin snow. These gracious gifts of natural scenery left their own indelible imprint upon my mind; for, although I was deprived of sight at the age of six weeks, my imagination was still receptive to all the influences around me; and the surrounding country, in its native beauty, was real enough to me; in one sense, was as real to my mind as to the minds of my little companions. At least the inner meaning of all the objects that they could see with their physical vision, to my mental sight by imagination was made somewhat more plain than may be supposed.

Near the humble cottage in which I lived for the first few years of my childhood ran a tiny brook, one of the branches of the Croton River; and the music of its waters was so sweet in my ears that I fancied it was not to be surpassed by any of the grand melodies in the great world beyond our little valley. During pleasant summer days I used to sit on a large rock, over which a grapevine and an apple tree clasped hands to make a bower fit indeed for any race of fairies, however ethereal in their tastes. The voices of nature enchanted me; but they all



Birthplace of Fanny Crosby

spoke a familiar language. Sometimes it was the liquid note of a solitary songster at eventide in the distant woods; or the industrious hum of a bee at noon, when every creature but himself and the locusts was sleeping in the shade; or the piping of a cricket as night was drawing on; and how could I help thinking, now and then, that the fairies themselves were bringing messages directly to me? In childhood the tender language of the heart is the only familiar speech; and imagination the only artist of the beautiful that seems to satisfy the childish soul. In these later years, therefore, I sometimes drink from the springs whose waters were once so cool and inspiring, and then I often think that I have indeed discovered the fountain of perpetual youth, flowing from the heart of nature.

Of the family of my father, John Crosby, we have unfortunately little record; and of him I have no recollection, for he died before I was twelve months old. My mother came of a very hardy race; earnest and devout people; noted for their longevity. She herself lived till past ninety-one; and her great-grandmother attained the goodly age of one hundred and three years, and after she was eighty-two she rode from Putnam County, New York, to Cape Cod and back again, through the half-cleared wilderness.

My mother's maiden name was also Crosby; and her line traces back to Simon and Ann Crosby, who came to Boston in 1635 and settled across the Charles River three miles from town. Simon Crosby was one of the founders of Harvard College; and his

son Thomas Crosby graduated from that institution in 1653.

My great-grandfather, Isaac Crosby, was noted for his wit. While in the Revolutionary War, wishing a furlough that he might visit his home to see a child born during his absence, he told his general that he had nineteen children at home and had never seen one of them. Of course his request was granted. He was the son of Eleazer Crosby and Patience Freeman, the grand-daughter of Elder William Brewster; and through Zachariah Paddock, another ancestor on my mother's side, we are also descended from Thomas Prence and Major John Freeman. When General Warren was killed at Bunker Hill it was a Crosby, I am told, who caught up the flag as it fell from his hands. Enoch Crosby, the spy of the Revolution, was a cousin of my grandfather's; and I have always read, with much interest, the account of him, given by Cooper in his novel, *The Spy*, where he passes under the name of Harvey Birch. This daring and brave patriot sleeps near one of the charming little lakes in Putnam County, not many miles from my own birthplace.

My grandmother was a woman of exemplary piety and from her I learned many useful and abiding lessons. She was a firm believer in prayer; and, when I was very young, taught me to believe that our Father in heaven will always give us whatever is for our good; and therefore that we should be careful not to ask him anything that is not consistent with his holy will. At evening-time she used to call me to her dear old rocking chair; then we would

kneel down together and repeat some simple petition. Many years afterward when grandmother had departed from earth and the rocking chair had passed into other hands, in grateful memory, I wrote a poem entitled, "Grandma's Rocking Chair":

There are forms that flit before me,  
There are tones I yet recall;  
But the voice of gentle grandma  
I remember best of all.

In her loving arms she held me,  
And beneath her patient care  
I was borne away to dreamland  
In her dear old rocking chair.

She was always kind, though firm; and never punished me for ordinary offenses; on the contrary, she would talk to me very gently, and in this way she would convince me of my fault and bring me into a state of real and heartfelt penitence. My playmates always knew that I was interested in nearly every kind of childish mischief; and they were not in the least hesitant about inviting me to engage in any of their most daring exploits.

On one occasion grandmother slapped my hands for some breach of good behavior. This grieved me greatly; and at once bitter resentment sprang up in my heart. Thinking to soothe me, a little companion called me out to play with him, but, as I went, something within said, "Yes, I will play with you;

but I will hurt you, for grandma has hurt me." And so I threw a stone at him, but missed my aim; and the cloud soon passed and all was sunny again. Fifty years later, to my great surprise, when I was lecturing in Yonkers, New York, a man whispered in my ear, "Don't you remember David Ketcham, your early playmate?" Certainly I remembered him and we had a good laugh over the incident that I have just related; and, I am happy to say, over many others of a more pleasing character.

When I was three years of age mother moved to North Salem in the neighboring Westchester County, where we remained five years among a number of delightful Quaker families, who taught me to use what they called the "plain language," or the common speech of the Friends. One good man and I became constant companions; and often when he was going to mill he found me a very willing passenger, and sometimes an uninvited guest. But whenever I persisted in going he generally gave way after the first feeble resistance.

"No, thee ain't going with me," he would say; and I as surely replied,

"David, I tell thee I *am* going to mill with thee."

"Well, get thy bonnet and come along."

When I had exhausted all the methods of entertainment at my command, mother came to me and said,

"I think I have found something that will please you." Then she placed in my arms a tiny lamb, that had lost its mother; and the little orphan at once was received into the warmth of my affections.

Through the fields and meadows we romped when the days were warm; occasionally I fell asleep under a great oak tree with my pet by my side. But he soon grew into a strange creature, quite unlike the gentle lamb that I had first known, for he used to throw me to the ground and tear my dress and make me cry. For a time I forgave him, but at last he disappeared, and not many days thereafter the family had mutton for dinner. My pet had not returned; I knew at once what had become of him; so I refused to eat meat that day, and slipped off into a corner so as not to betray the tears that I could not restrain. For many weeks I wore mourning in my heart for him, and among those who vainly tried to comfort me was Daniel Drew, who offered to replace my pet from the flocks that he drove by our door, though, much to the surprise of all my friends, I declined his gift. I reasoned, why should I again be deprived of a dear pet? I will have none; then there will be no chance of it.

The old Quaker church still stands about as it did when we worshiped there; and the remembrance of these kind Westchester people is one of the fadeless flowers.

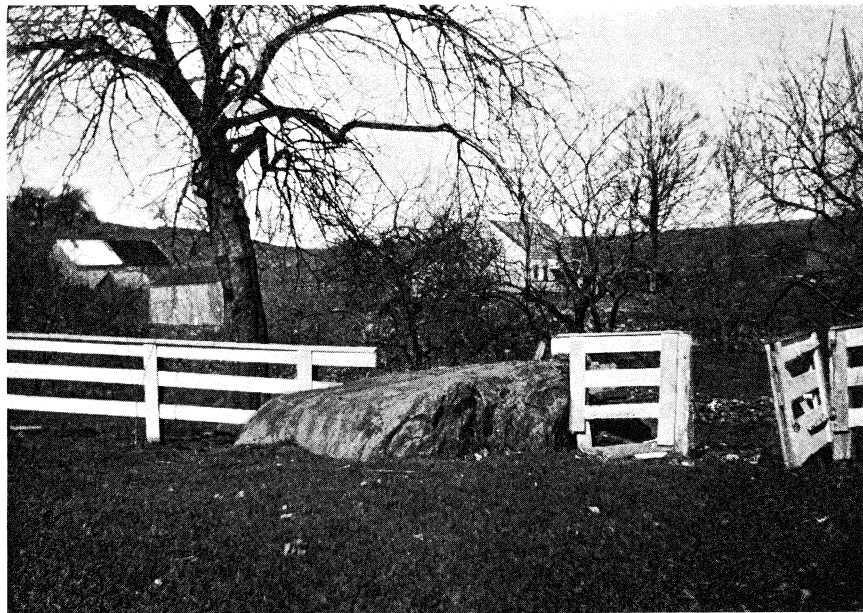
I had a cousin who was fond of writing comic poetry. In our neighborhood there lived an old lady, named Mary Barbor, who was a trouble wherever she went. One time she came to his father's house to remain over Sunday, and asked that he write for her a verse of poetry. At first he declined; but when she persisted a long time he gave her the following:

Aunt Mary Barbor  
Has had a good harbor  
All through this holy Sabbath day;  
Tomorrow morning  
I have her take warning,  
And pack up her duds and march away.

## The Training of the Blind

Hail, holy light, offspring of heaven, first born,  
And of the eternal, co-eternal being!  
May I express thee unblamed, since God is Light,  
So much the rather thou, celestial light,  
Shine inward and the mind with all her powers  
Irradiate; there plant eyes; all mist from thence  
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.—*Milton*

**T**o look forth over the wide expanse of ocean and behold the white capped billows in their playful moods chasing each other as if impatient for the coming of the pure morn; or to look forth from the highest peak of some gigantic mountain in wonder and astonishment on the endless variety of scenes, arising like a magical forest in the distance—the ability to do this is a gift the full significance of



Rock where Fanny Crosby spent many happy hours

Will Losee

which thought can scarcely conceive or language picture. This gift of seeing is one that ought to inspire in the heart of him who possesses it many tender emotions of gratitude to the eternal one, who, amid the splendors that encircled his throne, lifted a mighty voice, and through the chaotic gloom that held in midnight darkness the silent deep, uttered the sublime command, "Let there be light."

It has always been my favorite theory that the blind can accomplish nearly everything that may be done by those who can see. Do not think that those who are deprived of physical vision are shut out from the best that earth has to offer her children. There are a few exceptions that instantly come to my mind. For example, through the medium of sight alone, does the astronomer mark the courses, the magnitudes and the varied motions of all the heavenly bodies; and only through the medium of the eye can the sculptor produce a beautiful statue from the rude and uncut marble. His sight must guide him in reproducing the image that is already modeled in his own mind; and so, likewise, of the painter, for he frequently pauses in his busy hours and turns his gaze toward the rich crimson clouds which fall so gracefully amid the glories of the autumnal sunset. He must try to reproduce the vision that he gets from them, and it is only through the eye that the picture of the actual cloud enters.

From attaining high rank in these fine arts the blind of necessity, are debarred; but not so from poetry and music, in which the mind gives us a true image of the reality. Almost every lad at school

is able to relate stray bits of legendary lore of ancient and modern artists who have been blind. Indeed, who can forget Euclid, the blind geometrician; or Homer, the blind bard; or Milton, the author of that beautiful apostrophe to light which was quoted in the beginning of this chapter.

A great many people fancy that the blind learn music only by ear, never by note; and yet a number of musical experts have told me that their blind pupils learn as proficiently as others by the latter method. It is truly wonderful—marvelous—to what a degree the memory can be trained, not only by those who rely upon it for most of their knowledge of the external world, but by all who wish to add to their general intellectual culture.

But why should the blind be regarded as objects of pity? Darkness may indeed throw a shadow over the outer vision; but there is no cloud, however dark, that can keep the sunlight of hope from the trustful soul. One of the earliest resolves that I formed in my young and joyous heart was to leave all care to yesterday and believe that the morrow would bring forth its own peculiar joy; and, behold, when the morrow dawned, I generally have found that the human spirit can take on the rosy tints of the reddening east. Early and late I played with the children of my own age; and our elders were in the habit of remarking that Fanny Crosby was certain to be interested in any mischief that occurred. With the agility of a squirrel I used to climb trees, and ride horses as fleet as the wind, while I hung on to their manes for dear life, and climb stone fences, in

every respect, just like other children. Whenever I tore my dress I managed to keep out of mother's sight until I fancied she would not notice it, which was a very rare occurrence indeed.

When I was six weeks of age a slight cold caused an inflammation of the eyes, which appeared to demand the attention of the family physician; but he not being at home, a stranger was called. He recommended the use of hot poultices, which ultimately destroyed the sense of sight. When this sad misfortune became known throughout our neighborhood, the unfortunate man thought it best to leave; and we never heard of him again. But I have not for a moment, in more than eighty-five years, felt a spark of resentment against him because I have always believed from my youth to this very moment that the good Lord, in his infinite mercy, by this means consecrated me to the work that I am still permitted to do. When I remember his mercy and lovingkindness; when I have been blessed above the common lot of mortals; and when happiness has touched the deep places of my soul,—how can I repine? And I have often thought of the passage of Scripture: "The light of the body is the eye; if, therefore, thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

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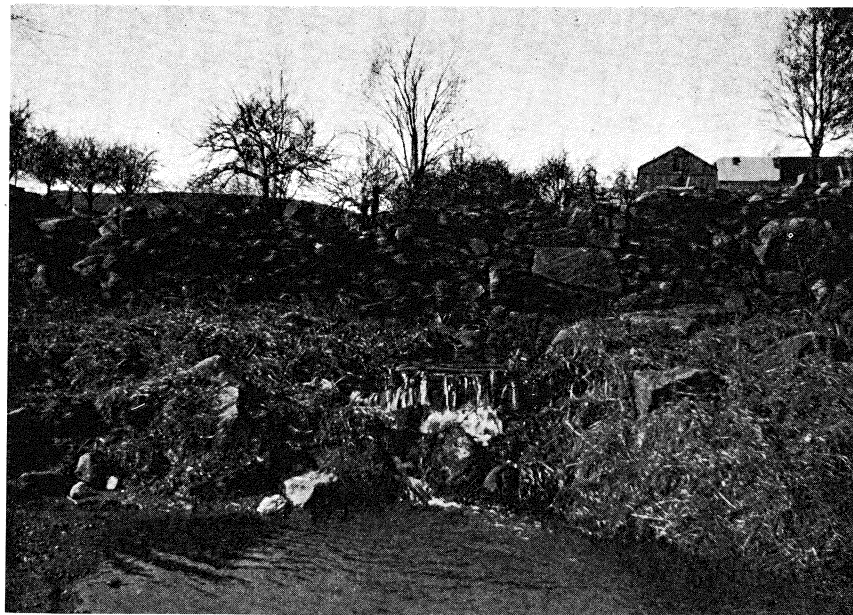
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## First Visit to New York

**I**n the present era, with its many modes of rapid transit, one is quite liable to forget that most of them have come into being within less than fifty years, and I am sometimes amazed at the thought that not until after I was born did the first locomotive turn a wheel on this Western continent. When I ride in the mighty express trains that fly across the country, how marvelous it seems! But do not think that I belong to that class of people who looking back over many years, think the old times better than our own. It is only the memory of the past that I cherish and that memory thrills me with a pathos which I cannot, nor do I wish to forget. As I am writing, the horseback journeys of our old postman seem to have been but last week, so well do I remember how horse and rider used to flit across the landscape like the shuttle in an ancient loom, and I see again the tall, well-built kindly man (which the sound of his voice told me he was) when



One of Fanny's childhood playgrounds

Will Losee

he came to our door the first time. We were staunch friends in a few days, for one of my household duties was to get the mail from him each Thursday. I was greatly interested to know that he had a little girl about my own age and size, and in my fond daydreams I hoped for a meeting with her some time when both of us became a little older. But I never met her, although her father continued his weekly visits for a number of years, until one morning a younger man came with the mail and announced himself as the son and successor of our old post-rider. But he did not succeed to the place in my affections occupied by his father.

A few weeks after my fifth birthday, one balmy morning in early April, mother called me to her side and said,

"We are going to New York to consult Dr. Valentine Mott regarding your eyes."

That announcement pleased me, not so much on account of the purpose of the visit, for I was contented with my lot, as the mere fact that I was to learn something of the world outside. The best that we could do in those early days was to take a sailing vessel from Sing-Sing, and a common market wagon was the only available conveyance to get us to this town. We were glad of even this, however, and so the next morning about eight o'clock we began the momentous journey. At three in the afternoon we arrived at Sing-Sing, where we went on board the vessel and one hour later the white sails began to take the wind and we were again on our way to the city at the mouth of the great Hudson River.