

CHAPTER V.—1835-1836.

SCHOOL-LIFE—THE MONSTER ARITHMETIC AND ITS TERRORS—METAL SLATES—IN LOVE WITH OTHER STUDIES—“DROP INTO POETRY” NOW AND THEN—TEMPTATIONS TO VANITY—A BENEFICIAL “CALL-DOWN” FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT—ALL FOR MY OWN GOOD.

**B**EHOLD me, now, Miss Fanny Crosby, full-fledged student, in a city school! I assure you, it seemed a great step forward—and upward—to me; one that I had coveted through many years; one whose first joy I can never forget.

Some young ladies creep off to boarding-school unwillingly, and as a solemn duty, and maybe I would do so, were I in their place; but under all these circumstances, the occurrence was a great pleasure in my life, though for a time, as stated in the preceding chapter, I was a little homesick, and longed often to meet again my dear mother and friends.

But the world seems built a good deal like the track of a hurdle-race: you are apparently

*The Monster Arithmetic.*

skipping along at great speed, and all at once you encounter something that must be immediately overcome before you can go a step farther!

The first obstacle that I found standing in my way and looming up like a great monster, was Arithmetic. I have never been a very good hater, even when the best material was provided for the purpose; but I found myself ~~an adept at~~ noticing the art of loathing, when it came to the Science of Numbers. The culinary poet who in a fit of dyspepsia exuded the statement

“I loathe, abhor, detest, despise  
Those pastry-wrecks, dried apple pies”,

had a parodist in me. I could not agree with him concerning the article of food in question, for I like almost everything that a good cook can send to the table; but I *could* say, at that time,

“I loathe, abhor, it makes me sick  
To hear the word Arithmetic!”

However, this great foe to my peace of mind had to be conquered, and at it I went, with a vengeance—wishing that every assault would give the Arithmetic a twinge of pain. But no!

*Fanny Crosby's Life-Story.*

I was well aware of the fact that the sturdy old creature went right on, without minding me at all, through all the affairs of life, and that we could not do much of anything very long, without consulting him.

The great variety of resources that this terrible study possessed with which to frighten and appal the student, was something terrible to contemplate. Addition and Subtraction went on fairly well, and did not ~~give~~ <sup>give</sup> ~~me~~ <sup>me</sup> very much trouble; but when the Multiplication Table made its appearance on the scene, that was an entirely different matter. The only alleviation of its miseries was, that it came in a kind of poetical form—a swinging, rhymeless sort of poetry, to be sure—blank verse, I should call it; but that fact, as with many other students, aided me to remember it.

Our toil in Arithmetic was materially aided by metal slates, which had holes in them, with which we could count and realize the numbers as we went on. But I never became an accomplished mathematician, although our school upon the whole was said to be much more advanced in mathematics than students of the same age that could see.

Grammar, Philosophy, Astronomy, and Political Economy followed, among our studies; and with all of these I was in love. Our les-

*Bound to be a Teacher.*

sions were given us in the form of lectures and readings, and not many words that came to our ears managed to slip away from us. Indeed, we could not afford to let them do so; for we were closely examined each day by means of questions asked by the teachers, and our progress and standing in the school depended largely upon our ability to remember and recount these lessons.

Noticing the respect and deference paid to our instructors, and realizing how much more personal independence they had, feeling that I wanted to be financially as self-reliant as possible, and most of all wishing to please, comfort, and help my dear mother, I made up my mind to be a teacher, as soon as I could.

Nor did I forget the other friends of my babyhood and youthhood—especially the dear, gallant old grandfather who had so enthusiastically announced that “we had a poet in the family.” I composed several little poems from time to time, which, it is no more than fair to say, were received with great favor, by both teachers and fellow-pupils. In the mind of a girl in her “teens”, this would naturally produce a little feeling of self-gratulation, and it is possible that in my appearance or behavior, an “air” or two appeared.

Perhaps Mr. Jones, the Superintendent at

that time, noticed it: for one morning he came into the school-room, and said,

"I would like to have Fanny Crosby come into my room for a few minutes."

I went, readily enough; supposing that a new ode or other kind of lyric was to be ordered, to the honor of some distinguished person or event: and, perhaps, a little proudly, stood before the Superintendent, at his desk, awaiting his wishes, and hoping that I could find time, among my other duties, to accord to them.

His very first words were a most emphatic surprise, and fully disposed of my theory that I was to write a new poem by request.

"Fanny," he said, "your—your *attempts* at poetry, have brought you into prominence here in the school, and a great deal of flattery has been the result. Shun a flatterer, Fanny, as you would a snake!

"Now, I am going to give you some clean truth, which may hurt just now, but will be of great use one of these days.

"As yet, you know very little about poetry, or, in fact, anything else—compared to what there is to be known. You have almost all of it yet to learn.

"Do not think too much about rhymes, and the praises that come for them. Store your

mind with useful knowledge and think more of what you can *be*, than of how you can *appear*.

"The favor and laudation of the world, Fanny, is a very fragile thing upon which to depend. Try to merit the approval of God, and of yourself, as well as that of your fellow-creatures.

"Remember that the very air you breathe—the very food you eat—all the ability or talent that you may develop—come from God.

"Remember that you are always in His presence: and who has any right to be vain for a moment, when standing before the great Owner and Creator of all things?"

He talked to me in this way, kindly but firmly, for perhaps five minutes; and at the end of that time he had convinced me that instead of being the great poet Fanny Crosby, I was really the ignorant young school-girl, who as yet knew scarcely anything whatever.

His words were bomb-shells in the camp of my self-congratulatory thoughts: but they did me an immense amount of good. Something said to me, "He tells the truth, Fanny, and it is all for your own benefit."

Still, the hot tears came to my eyes, as perhaps they would have done to those of any ambitious girl: and I naturally felt much pain and mortification at his words. But a reaction

*Fanny Crosby's Life-Story.*

of feeling soon took place: and going around behind his chair, and putting my arms around his neck, I kissed him on the forehead. "You have talked to me as my father would have talked, were he living," I said, "and I thank you for it, over and over again. You have given me a lesson that I might have had to learn through bitter experience, and I shall profit by it."

And I believe I have done so: at least I have tried, through all these eighty-three years. I have done my best to remember that not my poor insignificant self, but the great God above, was entitled to the credit for whatever I could accomplish; and to keep the monster Egotism from coming up between my duty and me.

If in this autobiography, in which I am trying to give a true story of my life, the pronoun of the first person singular number is too often used, the reader must forgive: it is because it is unavoidable, and not because it is in my heart.

CHAPTER VI.—1835-1858.

INCITEMENTS TO AMBITION—GREAT PEOPLE WHO WERE BLIND—THE IMMORTAL HOMER—THE KING-POET OSSIAN—JOHN MILTON AND HIS GENIUS—FRANCIS HUBER, THE NATURALIST—OTHERS WHOSE CAREERS GAVE US ENCOURAGEMENT.

**A**MONG the interesting things that we were taught in our Institution, at the very outset, was the fact that scores and hundreds of individuals had achieved fame and fortune, in spite of blindness.

We were told about Homer, the greatest poet of antiquity, who, while traveling to get material for his immortal work, contracted a disease of the eyes, which made him blind forever: but who worked away with renewed ardor; and who, although he died poor, achieved an immortal fame—such as many people would be willing to go blind all their lives, if they could attain.

We were told of Ossian, the Celtic king—