

CHAPTER IX.—1836-1842.

“STRENUOUS” WORK—HOW A BLIND PERSON CAN TOIL, INTELLECTUALLY—BECOME ONE OF THE TEACHERS—THE “WITCHING SPRITE” OF POETRY—FORBIDDEN TO COMPOSE ANY POETRY FOR THREE MONTHS—PHRENOLOGY TO THE RESCUE!

I THINK it may be said truly that I toiled night and day. “How can a blind person work intellectually?”—you ask. Better perhaps than one that can see. It is not necessary for us to record in writing as we go along, everything we think and accomplish: we can put it upon the tablets of memory, and copy it down or have it copied as we get opportunity. Memory, when cultivated, grows a wonderful treasure-house of ripened grain.

I do not want to boast of my progress; but as I look back over the past, it gives me a little feeling of pride to be able to say that at the rather early age of twenty-two, I was considered competent to teach Grammar, Rhetoric, and Ancient and Modern History; and became



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*Woody by the Muses.*

one of the regular instructors of the Institution.

What a pleasure it then was, to feel that I was imparting to others the same blessings of knowledge for which I had longed, through so many weary days and nights!

While preparing for this position, there was still one restless, witching little sprite that kept creeping up to me by night and day, and inviting me to take trips with her into the unknown; and the name of that sprite was Poetry. She was ever tugging away at my hands, or my hair, or my heartstrings, and whispering, "Sister Fanny, come with me."

The faithful Superintendent seemed in doubt whether to encourage me in my poetical pursuits or not. He finally talked to me a long while on the subject, said there were a great many people who wrote rhymes because they were poetry-lovers rather than poets, and finally gently but firmly forbade my producing any more of the dangerous article, for three months.

I did not understand his object in doing this; but suppose now that it was to see if a certain amount of abstinence would not cure me of the habit, or disease, whichever he considered it.

I did not like it, "a little bit"; but, feeling that the good Superintendent knew what was

*Fanny Crosby's Life-Story.*

best for me, I acquiesced, and religiously avoided a rhyme as I would the measles.

It was one of the trials of my life: for, whether or not I would "lisp in numbers", they inevitably "came."

Singularly enough I soon gained my little triumph in the matter; for about this time we had a visit from Dr. George Combe, a distinguished phrenologist, of Scotland. Dr. Combe had found himself a convert to the science, in Edinburgh, while Spurzheim was there; and had published several works on the subject.

When he came to America, he "took in" our school, among the other sights; and several of us had the honor of feeling the touch of his learned hand upon our throbbing, and, I trust, not distended heads.

Just before he came to me, he examined the phrenological organs of one of our boy-pupils. "Why, here is a splendid mathematician!" he exclaimed. "He could do anything in mathematics!" And the Doctor was right; for this little fellow was almost another Zera Colburn. He could already do a great many wonderful things: for instance, he could listen to two persons talking to him at the same time, and then, while singing a song, could inform both of them the number of seconds they were old—they, of course, first giving him the years,

*"Write all the Poetry you Want to."*

months and weeks. (I used to notice, by the way, that very few ladies availed themselves of the offered courtesy.)

When I heard the boy praised, and reflected on those wonderful things he could do, I was almost envious, and wondered why the good Lord could not have given *me* a few of the figures and groups of figures that seemed to line every portion of his brain. I trembled when my turn came to have the head examined, and felt a wild impulse to run. Dr. Combe said,

"Why! here is a poet! Give her every advantage that she can have; let her hear the best books and converse with the best writers; and she will make her mark in the world."

The next morning our Superintendent sent for me to come to his room. "Fanny," he exclaimed, "you may write all the poetry you want to." From that time, the advice of Dr. Combe was followed: I was prompted to write poetry, was taught how lines should rhyme, and in every way encouraged. And I am bound to say that for a great part of this favorable decision as regarded the wooing of my muse, I was indebted to Phrenology, and the good Dr. Combe.