

CHAPTER XII.—1843.

A TRIP ON "THE RAGING CANAWL"—ITS WONDERS AND ITS DELIGHTS—THROUGH THE MOHAWK VALLEY AND AWAY TOWARD THE LAKES—AN EXPECTED FUNERAL PROCESSION TURNS INTO A "CIRCIS"—ENTERTAINMENTS ALL ALONG THE WAY—MAYORS OF TOWNS PRESIDE—BLIND AND SEEING PEOPLE COME FROM ALL DIRECTIONS—BUFFALO AND NIAGARA FALLS ARE REACHED.

ONE of the most enjoyable trips I ever took in connection with our Institution for the Blind, was—not in a daintily upholstered palace car—not in a finely appointed and swiftly gliding ocean-steamship—not in an exquisitely poised and jauntily driven mountain coach—but—strange to say!—upon a canal-boat.

Railroads were not bewilderingly plenty, in those days, as they are now; and it had not occurred to anybody that it would be desirable to build one along the valley of the Mohawk River, and then away off still westward—west-

*Longest Canal in the World.*

ward—to Buffalo—to Chicago—to the very Pacific Ocean itself! If any one had told us that such a thing would happen, "one of these days", we would have considered him as one of the blind who was trying to lead the blind.

But, largely through the energy and perseverance of Governor DeWitt Clinton, an artificial river had been stretched from the Hudson to Lake Erie; and few that are living now, can comprehend what a convenience and help to the country was this great highway of waves. Miniature ships—propelled by horses and mules, carrying great boat-loads of merchandise up and down through the country, may still be seen, by passengers on the New York Central Railroad trains, from the windows of its fast-flying coaches; and they think little of them.

But in those days they were among the principal commercial institutions of the country. When the Erie Canal was opened, Governor Clinton, who had dug the first spadeful of earth in the construction of the giant channel, was greeted, on his first trip, all along the line, with the ringing of bells, and the firing of cannon, and more or less eloquent speeches wherever he would stop long enough to hear them. It would be interesting if one could know how many people thronged the banks of

*Fanny Crosby's Life-Story.*

the Erie Canal, during those days of triumph, to see Governor Clinton go past!

One who from curiosity or other reason visits the crafts employed nowadays, can form little idea of the elegance with which passenger, or "packet" boats were fitted up, in those days. Many people preferred traveling in them, even when on business, to using stage-coach or carriage; and a long boat-ride, through the finest of scenery, among pleasant people, without jolting, and surrounded with the comforts of every-day life—was not half unenjoyable.

So we had, as it were, our "private car", all to ourselves; and were not long in taking possession of, and appropriating it. The crew, consisting of captain, driver, and maid, met us rather coldly, when we came on board, and acted as if they were afraid of us; but they soon found out, as they expressed it, that we'd "do." They explained, after getting acquainted, that they had supposed we would be a quiet, sad, sober, melancholy lot of people, moping about with grief on our faces, the constant burden of whose song was, "I'm blind, oh, I'm blind."

Without wishing to recommend too highly the vivacity of my companions and myself, I may say, that they revised their opinions, within about five minutes after we got on board.

*A "Show"-Trip.*

They found that we were inclined to enjoy life in every way that solid instruction and innocent amusement could give. It was not long before we knew our temporary aquatic guardians "as well as if we'd been through 'em with a lantern", as the captain luminously expressed it. We were all over the boat in a jiffy, and knew every nook and corner of it before the expedition started. "Well, you're a rum lot, Miss Crosby", the Captain confided to me, in one of our first conversations: "an' it's the jolliest crew I ever shipped. To tell the truth, I dreaded you, an' expected to strike a sort of fun'ral percession, the hull length of the big ditch; but I guess it's goin' to be a circis, all the way, an' a good one."

It was not a "circis" all the way, for there came times when we were very sober, staid, and circumspect; but we could not resist the exhilarating air of the hill-regions through which we passed, or the genial sunshine, or the smell of the flowers, or the cheery hail of boatmen and passengers whom we met along the moist way. We soon learned the construction of the locks, and how it was that our boat ran into the large basin and waited till that was filled or emptied, as the case might demand, in order to get us on the level required; and after the novelty of that was over, we often

*Fanny Crosby's Life-Story.*

ran ahead on the tow-path, accompanied by one of our "seeing" teachers, and had a nice little bit of exercise before our steady-going craft overtook us.

We stopped at all towns of any size on the way, such as Schenectady, Rome, Utica, Syracuse, Rochester, as well as many others, and gave entertainments. I may say, without exaggeration, that these affairs were the events of the evening, if not of the week and month, in the vicinity where we appeared.

The Mayor would generally preside; and give us as fine a speech of welcome as he had time to prepare. The Common Council, or Board of Aldermen, and other distinguished people, were very likely also to sit upon the platform; while hundreds if not thousands of the citizen-rank-and-file were down in front.

What with our singing, addresses, descriptions of our school, recitations, and such oratorical and musical help as we managed to borrow from local talent, we flattered ourselves that we made a pretty good "show", as we used playfully to call it; and we were always overwhelmed with praises, and invitations to "come again."

Besides this, we generally netted a snug little sum for the Institution: although the main object of the excursion was the rousing

*Oliver Wendell Holmes Confirmed.*

of public interest in our educational work.

After a day or two of rest in a town, meeting kind friends, partaking of splendid hospitality, encouraging sightless people who heard of and came to us from all directions—we would set sail again, and start for the next "stand"—delighted to get back again to our dear old canal-boat—containing, as Dr. Holmes used to say, "many of the pleasures of navigation, with none of its perils."

And so we went on and on—till at last Buffalo was reached, and after arriving there we were not long in making a pilgrimage to the great Niagara Falls.