

CHAPTER XIX.—1847.

ASKED TO WRITE POEMS ON ALL SORTS OF SUBJECTS—A DIRGE FOR DANIEL WEBSTER BEFORE HE WAS DEAD—DEATH OF HENRY CLAY'S SON—POEM UPON THE SAME—THE GREAT STATESMAN VISITS OUR INSTITUTION—HIS PATHETIC ACTIONS AND WORDS.

ANOTHER disadvantage attendant upon my position as a kind of poet laureate of the Institution, was the fact that I was expected, whenever anything unusual happened, to embalm the event in rhyme and measure. I may say, too, that not only the important events, but some of the most trivial of subjects, have from time to time been offered me as themes for my humble muse. People do not always stop to reflect that a poem is not an anecdote, or a table of statistics; and that an incident so near and interesting to them that they consider it worthy an epic, might be almost ridiculous to the world at large, if set in rhyme.

But there was and is no lack of events well

A Premature Dirge.

worthy any poet's best endeavor, and I found them frequently.

I remember one evening, as I was going through the street, with a party of friends, we heard newsboys proclaiming the death of Daniel Webster, and offering papers for sale with full accounts of the melancholy event. "You must write a poem on the subject at once, Fanny," every one said, "while the inspiration of the sad event is on."

I went to my room, and began the mournful but (to me) interesting task. I remember commencing as follows:

"A casket has broken—a jewel has fled—
The mighty has fallen—the peerless is dead!
And the heart of the nation is bleeding once
more,
For her eagle lies low on her desolate shore!"

I was just repeating this stanza over to my friends, so as to gather from it inspiration for the next, when a gentleman, who had come into the room in time to hear it, exclaimed, "O Fanny! Fanny! the heart of the nation isn't bleeding, or the casket broken, or the eagle lying dead on the desolate shore! That news was all a 'get-up' to sell papers: Webster

Fanny Crosby's Life-Story.

isn't dead! Don't let the poem go on any farther: you might kill him yet!"

I was personally glad to know that the great expounder of the Constitution "still lived"; but must say that my "muse" was a little disappointed, at having plumed herself for flight, and been ruthlessly brought down to earth again by Mr. Webster's oversight in not dying.

On the 23d of February, 1847, Henry Clay, Jr., a brave son of the magnificent statesman and orator, was killed while fighting in the Battle of Buena Vista, in the Mexican war. I wrote a poem on this event, and, with help of friends, summoned courage to mail it to the afflicted father.

The lines, which I quote from memory, were as follows:

ON THE DEATH OF COL. CLAY.

Lo on the blood-stained battle-field,
A wounded hero lying;
Dim is the lustre of his eye,
For he, alas! is dying!

See, how with feeble hands he grasps
The sword, so faithful ever!
Now drops the weapon from his side,
To be resumed—no, never!

Visit from Henry Clay.

O gallant Clay!—though for thy brow
Its laurels Fame is weaving,
Vain trophies these!—thy bosom now
Its last faint sigh is heaving.

Back, tyrants!—would ye deeper make
The wounds already given?
You, from an aged father's heart,
Another tie have riven.

Intrepid warrior!—thou hast left
A deathless name behind thee:
That name, unsullied, bright shall shine,
Though the dark grave may find thee!

Thou by thy General's side hast fought;
And Taylor will deplore thee,
And many a heart that loved thee dear,
Will weep in silence o'er thee.

It was only a short time afterward that Henry Clay visited New York, and, among other places, came to our school. He was now seventy years of age; and might easily be called one of the grandest old men of whom the country could boast. He had been in public life almost continuously for forty-three years; only three years before, he had been nominated for the Presidency, and although defeated, it was believed the Whigs would name him again for

Fanny Crosby's Life-Story.

the ensuing canvass. Zachary Taylor finally received that nomination and election, and went to Washington and to death; but Clay was re-elected United States senator in the year following that, and so continued for the remainder of his life.

Of course, we were all very much flustered and "put about" at the coming of this great orator—rivalled only by Webster in his silver-tongued eloquence. We had our own band of music, containing twenty pieces; and it met him with a burst of instrumental melody.

Mr. Clay made us one of the finest addresses we had ever heard. His voice was sweet and gentle, and sympathetic in tone—qualities valued and appreciated very highly, by the blind. I remember feeling that no one of sensibility could stay in his presence very long, without being powerfully influenced by its magnetism.

He mentioned the different things he had seen on a late tour through the country—a journey that had to be made mostly by steamers and horse-coaches—vastly different from the lightning progress made by politicians nowadays, in their tours through the country. He related several pleasant incidents that occurred during the journey, and said none had been more enjoyable than the present. It

Statesman and Blind Girl.

was a luxury to him, he remarked, to see so many of us there, who, although the good Lord had thought fit to deprive us of our sight, were still so comfortable and so happy.

At the conclusion of this part of his speech, I heard him coming back on the platform to where I sat, and felt him take my arm. I had half hoped that he had forgotten the poem I sent him, although it was my heartfelt wish that it might give him some little comfort in his terrible affliction; but it was evidently not in his nature to forget anything kindly meant. He gently drew me toward the front of the stage, and said to the audience: "My friends, this is not the first time I have felt the comforting presence of this young friend, although I never saw her before. Into the deep wound of my sorrow, she poured the balm of consolation."

He continued to hold my arm while he talked on, in the same strain, for what seemed, to poor, shrinking me, a full hour, although it was not really more than ten minutes. I could not control my feelings, and we actually stood there and wept together.

Only five years more, and the great Kentucky orator was to rejoin the son whom he loved so fervently and lamented so deeply.