



*"For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."* (1 Corinthians 13:12)

I would like to introduce you to a lady who has a greater vision of the face of Christ than any I have ever studied. She is the author of more than 8,000 hymns – enough to fill sixteen modern hymnals – and the most prolific hymn-writer of all times. Her hymns speak always of "seeing the face of Christ," yet, Fanny Crosby (1820-1915) was blind from early childhood. Amazingly, Fanny Crosby did not begin to write hymns until she was in her mid-forties. During her first nine years of hymn-writing, she composed:

- **"Safe in the Arms of Jesus,"**
- **"Blessed Assurance,"**
- **"Pass me Not O Gentle Saviour,**
- **"Jesus Keep my Near the Cross,**
- **"I Am Thine O Lord,"**
- **"All the Way my Saviour Leads Me,"**
- **"Praise Him, Praise Him,"**
- **"Jesus is Tenderly Calling Thee Home,"**
- **"A Wonderful Saviour is Jesus My Lord,"**

and many, many more. I knew of Fanny Crosby's work as a toddler because my mother sang all of her songs while she was going about the house every day. The strong words of faith became a part of my sub-conscience because they were so indelibly etched in my memory by my mother's singing of them.

Poetry, like painting or sculpting, is an art-form that attempts to imitate the idyllic beauty of the Creation of God, and Fanny achieves that goal admirably in her

hymns. When Fanny was ninety-three years old, a well-meaning friend commented, "Fanny, look at all the hymns you have written over the past fifty years as a blind person. Just imagine what you could have achieved if you had been blessed with sight." Fanny Crosby responded, "No, no, my friend. I am well pleased that I have been blind all of these years because the first thing I shall ever see will be the smiling face of my Lord." Fanny was never bitter at being blind, but considered such a condition a blessing of God to draw out the one great talent with which He had so abundantly blessed her.

One of Fanny's more beautiful, though lesser known, hymns is "**My Saviour First of All**" written at the Chataugua Institute near Lake Erie, in New York, in 1877. *Conversing after an evening of Bible study with Mr. John R. Sweeney (a musical composer), Sweeney asked Fanny, "Do you think when we get to heaven that we will know each other?" Fanny responded that she did believe we would know each other even better than presently, however, she went on to add, "But, John, the question that is really on your mind is: 'Fanny, you are blind and have never seen a human being before; therefore, how will you recognize your friends and especially the Lord?'" She then added, "John Sweeney, I've thought about that quite often and I know that I will not have a bit of trouble recognizing my friends or my beautiful Saviour; however, contemplating that there might be a problem, I have this to offer. Mind you, I still believe I won't have any problem, but just in case I do, I'll go to the One whom I feel is my Saviour and will say, 'May I please look at your hands?' John, I'll know it's my Saviour by the prints of the nails in His Hands."* **Alfred Smiths Treasury of Hymn Histories.** Sweeney was struck by the profound beauty of the beauty of terms and insisted that Fanny write a hymn to incorporate the thought. She retired to bed and next morning, called for Sweeney and gave him the hymn.

Please note in the first stanza the reference to seeing "**the glorious morning**" and the second stanza's reference to **viewing "His blessed face."**

### **My Saviour First of All**

*When My life work is ended, and I cross the swelling tide,  
When the bright and glorious morning I shall see;  
I shall know my Redeemer when I reach the other side,  
And His face will be the first to welcome me.*

#### **Chorus:**

*I shall know Him, I shall know Him,  
And redeemed by His side I shall stand,  
I shall know Him, I shall know Him  
By the print of the nails in His hand.*

*Oh, the soul-thrilling rapture when I view His blessed face,  
And the luster of His kindly beaming eye:  
How my full heart will praise Him for the mercy, love, and grace,  
That prepare for me a mansion in the sky. (chorus)*

*Oh, the dear ones in glory, how they beckon me to come,  
And our parting at the river I re-call;  
To the sweet vales of Eden they will sing my welcome home;  
But I long to meet my Saviour first of all. (chorus)*

*Thro' the gates to the city in a robe of spotless white,  
He will lead me where no tears will ever fall;*

*In the glad song of a-ges I shall min-gle with delight;  
But I long to meet my Saviour first of all.*

This hymn takes us to the first order of artistic employment of words and beauty. I can picture the full account of the saints of God gathered on the distant shore of Jordan Waters. I can see the faces of loved ones ready to welcome us home as we cross the 'swelling tide' of those turbulent and stormy banks. I can feel the absolute gratitude we shall bear with us in our hearts of our Lord who made our passage possible. In actuality, we, having eyes to see, see not as clearly and remarkably as blind Fanny Crosby. The jubilate throng of loved ones awaiting our landing shall not deter us from our first priority – to see Christ and His nail-scarred hands. Looking into those Eyes of pure Love and Mercy will truly be a most rapturous delight. Shall we not, as Fanny says, "Praise Him for His mercy, grace and love" ere we are shown to our mansion in the sky? We shall recognize our friends, our parents, and others with whom we have shared the Bread and Cup of the Lord's Supper seeking to gain our attention as we hurry to the feet of Christ. There shall be ample time – eternity in fact – to mingle and fellowship with those to whom we last bade adieu at Jordan Banks, but Christ is before us with arms wide for the embrace – the same embrace given the Prodigal by the patient and loving Father who he had deserted. That 'best robe' will be the White Robe of Righteousness that only Christ can supply.'

I believe that the biblical beauty that characterizes all of Fanny Crosby's hymns is the result of her close fellowship and vision of Christ out of eyes that were blind to the world, but full of the vision of Heaven.