



Her Heart Can See: The Life and Hymns of Fanny J. Crosby (Library of Religious Biography (LRB))

By Edith L. Blumhofer

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Her Heart Can See offers an intimate, informed look at Fanny J. Crosby (1820–1915), the most prolific of all American hymn writers. Having lost her sight in infancy through a doctor's negligence, Fanny went on to compose more than 9,000 hymns, as well as various other songs, cantatas, and lyrical productions. Crosby's hymns, including such all-time favorites as "Blessed Assurance," "Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior," "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross," "Rescue the Perishing," "Safe in the Arms of Jesus," and "I Am Thine, O Lord," continue to be sung around the world.

Celebrated in her own day for her gospel hymns, Crosby was also very publicly involved with New York City's rescue missions and with other benevolent efforts. She rubbed shoulders with the likes of Henry Clay, Grover Cleveland, Winfield Scott, Dwight L. Moody, Ira Sankey, Jenny Lind, P. T. Barnum, and many other famous figures who people these pages. More than two dozen black-and-white photographs depict the people and settings among which Crosby moved.

Drawing on primary sources -- including thousands of unpublished Crosby manuscripts -- Edith Blumhofer sorts fact from fiction in the life of this remarkable woman. Blumhofer responsibly limns Crosby's life as a gifted nineteenth-century northeastern Protestant woman, in the process showing why "this diminutive woman" was -- and is -- so beloved.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Anyone who has stood in church and sung "Blessed Assurance" or "Redeemed, How I Love to Proclaim It" is familiar with the work of Fanny Crosby (1820–1915), one of America's most esteemed and prolific Protestant hymn-writers. In a marvelous new biography, Wheaton College history professor Blumhofer tells Crosby's story. The musician, blind from infancy, was educated at the New York Institute for the Blind, where she later taught. In 1858, she married Alexander van Alstine, but their marriage was unusual, in that they lived apart for lengthy spells and led largely separate lives. Though she played the piano, harp, organ and guitar, and published several volumes of poetry as a young woman, she didn't turn to hymnody until midlife. Crosby was well-educated, but she never learned to write legibly, so she composed verses in her head and remembered the words until someone turned up to take dictation; sometimes she "wrote" an entire hymn in 20 minutes. She was also active in urban mission work and gave her time to institutions like the YMCA and the Bowery Mission. Not only does Blumhofer offer a lively account of Crosby's many accomplishments, she also contextualizes Crosby's life in larger currents of American history, including the rise of Sunday schools and the mid–19th-century movement to "elevat[e] the nation's musical taste" and "introduc[e] music into the public schools." This is a splendid and entertaining contribution to American religious history. (*May*)

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From the Back Cover

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About the Author

Edith L. Blumhofer is professor of history and director of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois.

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