

ELIZABETH FRY.

CHAPTER FIRST.

EARLY LIFE

ELIZABETH FRY was born in Norwich, England, on the 21st of May, 1780. She was the third daughter of John Gurney of Earham, a liberal-spirited Quaker, "a man of ready talent, of bright discerning mind, singularly warm-hearted and affectionate, very benevolent, and in manners courteous and popular;" and of Catherine Bell, daughter of Daniel Bell, a London Merchant, and great-grand-daughter of Robert Barclay, the well-known and able expounder of Quakerism.

From this excellent stock eleven children, seven daughters and four sons, grew to maturity, and several of them became active and useful members of the Society of Friends, including Elizabeth Fry, Joseph John Gurney and Priscilla Gurney, whose memoirs have been given to the public.

From the "Memoir of the Life of Elizabeth Fry," edited by two of her daughters, the following extracts relating to her early life are taken:

"In the year 1786, Mr. and Mrs. Gurney removed to Earham Hall, a seat of the Bacon family, about two miles from Norwich. Mr. Gurney subsequently purchased an adjoining property, thus adding to the range and variety afforded to

his large young party, by that pleasant home. Earlham has peculiar charms from its diversified scenery. The house is large, old, and irregular; placed in the centre of a well-wooded park. The River Wensum, a clear winding stream, flows by it. Its banks, overhung by an avenue of ancient timber trees, formed a favorite resort of the young people; there, in the summer evenings, they would often meet to walk, read, or sketch. On the south front of the house extends a noble lawn, flanked by groves of trees growing from a carpet of wild flowers, moss, and long grass. Every nook, every green path at Earlham, tells a tale of the past and recalls to those who remember the time when they were peopled by that joyous party, the many loved ones of the number, who, having shared with one another the pleasures of youth, the cares of maturer age, and above all, the hope of immortality, are now together at rest!

"Of the twelve children of Mr. and Mrs. Gurney, nine were born before their removal to Earlham; one of them died in infancy. The three youngest sons were born after their settlement there.

"The mode of life at Bramerton was continued with little alteration at Earlham, till Nov. 1792, when it pleased God to remove from this large family, the kind mistress,—the loving wife,—the devoted mother. She died after an illness of three weeks, leaving eleven children, the eldest scarcely seventeen, the youngest not two years old. During a period of comparative leisure, Elizabeth Fry occupied herself in perusing her early journals. She thought it well to destroy all that were written before the year 1797, and to substitute the following sketch of their contents, assisted by her own recollections.

"*Dagenham, Eighth Month, 23d, 1828.*—My earliest recollections are, I should think, soon after I was two years old; my father at that time had two houses, one in Norwich, and one at Bramerton, a sweet country place, situated on a Common,

near a pretty village; here, I believe, many of my early tastes were formed, though we left it to reside at Earlham when I was about five years old. The impressions then received remain lively on my recollection; the delight in the beauty and wild scenery in parts of the Common, the trees, the flowers, and the little rills that abounded on it, the farm houses, the village school and the different poor people and their cottages; particularly a poor woman with one arm, whom we called one-armed Betty; another neighbor, Green-grass, and her strawberry beds round a little pond; our gardener, who lived near a large piece of water, and used to bring fish from it; here, I think, my great love for the country, the beauties of nature, and attention to the poor, began. My mother was most dear to me, and the walks she took with me in the old-fashioned garden, are as fresh with me, as if only just passed; and her telling me about Adam and Eve being driven out of Paradise: I always considered it must be just like our garden at Bramerton. I remember that my spirits were not strong: that I frequently cried if looked at, and used to say that my eyes were weak; but I remember much pleasure and little suffering or particular tendency to naughtiness, up to this period. Fear about this time began to show itself, of people and things: I remember being so much afraid of a gun, that I gave up an expedition of pleasure with my father and mother because there was a gun in the carriage. I was also exceedingly afraid of the dark, and suffered so acutely from being left alone without a light after I went to bed, that I believe my nervous system was injured in consequence of it; also, I had so great a dread of bathing, (to which I was obliged at times to submit) that at the first sight of the sea, when we were as a family going to stay by it, it would make me cry; indeed, fear was so strong a principle in my mind as greatly to mar the natural pleasure of childhood. I am now of opinion, that it would have been much more subdued, and great suffering spared, by its having been still more yielded to; by

having a light left in my room; not being long left alone; and never forced to bathe; for I do not at all doubt that it partly arose from that nervous susceptible constitution, that has at times, throughout my life, caused me such real and deep suffering. I know not what would have been the consequence, had I had any other than a most careful and wise mother, and judicious nurses, or had I been alarmed, as too many children are, by false threats of what might happen.

“I had, as well as a fearful, rather a reserved mind, for I never remember telling of my many painful fears, though I must often have shown them by weeping when left in the dark, and on other occasions: this reserve made me little understood, and thought very little of, except by my mother and one or two others. I was considered and called very stupid and obstinate. I certainly did not like learning, nor did I, I believe, attend to my lessons, partly from a delicate state of health, that produced languor of mind as well as body; but, I think, having the name of being stupid, really tended to make me so, and discouraged my efforts to learn. I remember having a poor, not to say low, opinion of myself, and used to think I was so very inferior to my sisters, Catherine and Rachel. I believe I had not a name only for being obstinate, for my nature then had a strong tendency that way; and I was disposed to a spirit of contradiction, always ready to see things a little differently from others, and not willing to yield my sentiments to theirs.

“My natural affections were very strong from my early childhood, at times almost overwhelmingly so: such was the love for my mother, that the thought that she might die and leave me used to make me weep after I went to bed, and for the rest of the family, notwithstanding my fearful nature, my childlike wish was, that two large walls might crush us all together, that we might die at once, and thus avoid the misery of each other's death. I seldom, if I could help it, left my mother's side. I watched her when asleep in the day with exquisite anxiety, and used to go gently to her

bedside to listen, from the awful fear that she did not breathe; in short, I may truly say, it amounted to deep reverence that I felt for my father and mother. I never remember, as a little child, but once being punished by my mother; and she then mistook tears of sorrow for tears of naughtiness, a thing that deeply impressed me, and I have never forgotten the pain it gave me. Although I do not imply that I had no faults, far from it, as some of the faults of my childhood are very lively in my recollection; yet, from my extreme love and fear, many of these faults were known almost only to myself. My imagination was lively, and I once remember, and only once, telling a real untruth with one of my sisters and one of my brothers. We saw a bright light one morning, which we represented far above the reality, and upon the real thing being shown us that we had seen, we made it out not to be it. My remembrance is of the pleasure of my childhood being almost spoiled through fear, and my religious impressions, such as I had, were accompanied by gloom; on this account I think the utmost care is needed in representing religious truth to children, that fearful views of it should be most carefully avoided, lest it should give a distaste for that which is most precious. First show them the love and mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and the sweetness and blessedness of His service; and such things in Scripture, for instance, as Abraham's sacrifice, should be carefully explained to them. I think I suffered much in my youth from the most tender nervous system; I certainly felt symptoms of ill health before my mother died, that I thought of speaking to her about, but never did, partly because I did not know how to explain them; but they ended afterwards in very severe attacks of illness. I have always thought being forced to bathe was one cause of this, and I mention it because I believe it a dangerous thing to do to children. What care is needful not to force children to learn too much, as it not only injures them, but gives a distaste to intellectual pursuits. Instruction should be adapt-

ed to their condition, and communicated in an easy and agreeable way.

"How great is the importance of a wise mother, directing the tastes of her children in very early life, and judiciously influencing their affections. I remember with pleasure my mother's bed for wild flowers, which, with delight, I used, as a child to attend to with her; it gave me such pleasure in observing their beauties and varieties; that though I never have had time to become a botanist, few can imagine, in my weary journeys, how I have been pleased and refreshed, by observing and enjoying the wild flowers on my way. Again, she collected shells, and had a cabinet, and bought one for Rachel and myself, where we placed our curiosities; and I may truly say, in the midst even of deep trouble, and often most weighty engagements of a religious and philanthropic nature, I have derived advantage, refreshment and pleasure, from my taste for these things, seeking collections of them, and various natural curiosities, although, as with the flowers, I have not studied them scientifically.

"My mother also encouraged my most close friendship with my sister Rachel, and we had our pretty light closet, our books, our pictures, our curiosities, our tea things, all to ourselves; and as far as I can recollect, we unitedly partook of these pleasures without any of the little jealousies or the quarrels of childhood.

"My mother, as far as she knew, really trained us up in the fear and love of the Lord. My deep impression is, that she was a devoted follower of the Lord Jesus; but that her understanding was not fully enlightened as to the fitness of Gospel truths: she taught us as far as she knew, and I now remember the solemn religious feelings I had whilst sitting in silence with her, after reading the Scripture, and a Psalm before we went to bed. I have no doubt that her prayers were not in vain in the Lord. She died when I was twelve years old; the remembrance of her illness and death is sad, even to the present day."

"Among the vast changes of the last century, there was no change greater than that which took place in the education of women.

"Addison and his coadjutors were among the foremost to teach the women of modern England, that they possessed powers of mind and capabilities of usefulness.

"Many, as they sipped their coffee with the Spectator of the morning in their hand, were awakened to the consciousness of a higher destiny for woman, than the labor of the tapestry frame, or pursuits of an entirely frivolous nature. A taste for reading became more or less general. The heavy wisdom of Johnson, the lighter wit of Swift, the satire of Pope, the pathos of Gray, and the close painting of Goldsmith, found among women not only those who could enjoy, but who could appreciate their different excellencies. Mrs. Montague, Mrs. Carter, Mrs. Chapone, with a group of gifted friends and associates, proved to the world the possibility of high literary attainments existing with every feminine grace and virtue. The stimulus was given, but like all other changes in society, the opposite extreme was reached before the right and reasonable was discovered. Infidelity was making slow though sure advances upon the continent. Rousseau and Voltaire were but types of the state of feeling and principles in France. The effects gradually extended to our own country, and England has to blush for the perversion of female talent, the evil influence of which was only counteracted by its showing as a beacon light, to warn others from shipwreck. Science, and philosophy, so called, advanced and flourished, but by their side flourished the Upas tree of infidelity, poisoning with its noxious breath the flowers and the fruits otherwise so pleasant to the eye, and so good for the use of man. The writings of Hannah More were well calculated to enlighten and improve her sex; she spoke as woman can alone speak to women; but she was then only rising into celebrity, and as an author was little known.

"Norwich had not escaped the general contagion. On the contrary, at the period of which we speak, it was noted for the charm, the talent, and the skepticism of the society of the town and neighborhood. The death of Mrs. Gurney had left her seven daughters unprotected by a mother's care to pursue the difficult path of early womanhood.

"They appear to have been rich in attraction and talent, lively and original, possessing a peculiar freshness of character, with singular purity of purpose and warmth of affection. But their faith was obscure, and their principles necessarily unfixd and wavering. They appreciated the beauty and excellence of religion; but it was more natural than revealed religion with they were acquainted.

"There was something of mysticism amongst the Quakers of that day, and by no means the clear and general acknowledgment of the doctrine of the '*Trinity in Unity*,' as revealed in the New Testament, which is now to be met with amongst the greater part of the Society of Friends. To the present time, that expression as designating the Deity is not in use among them, from its not being found in the Bible. The family of Mr. Gurney, thus left to their own resources, unaccustomed to the study of the Scriptures, and with no other source of information from which to learn, for a time were permitted to 'stumble upon the dark mountains seeking rest and finding none.'

"These remarks apply especially to the three older daughters, as they gradually advanced in life. The four younger ones, sheltered in the school room, were comparatively spared the difficulties through which their sisters were pioneering the way. Mr. Gurney's occupations, both public and private, and his naturally trustful disposition, prevented his seeing all the dangers to which they were exposed. They formed many acquaintances, and some friendships, with persons greatly gifted by nature, but fearfully tainted with the prevailing errors of the day. Great pain and bitter disappointment resulted from these connexions; but demanding

only an allusion here, as they indirectly affected Elizabeth through the suffering of others, and the experience gained to herself.

"To the gayeties of the world, in the usual acceptation of the term, they were but little exposed. Music and dancing are not allowed by Friends; though a scruple as to the former is by no means universal. Mr. Gurney had no objection to music: they all had a taste for it, though almost uncultivated; some of them sang delightfully. The sweet and thrilling pathos of their native warblings is still remembered with pleasure by those who heard them, especially the duets of Rachel and Elizabeth. They danced occasionally in the large ante-room leading to the drawing-room, but with little of the spirit of display so often manifested on these occasions. It was more an effusion of young joyous hearts, who thus sought and found an outlet for their mirth. When her health permitted it, no one of the party entered with more zest into these amusements than Elizabeth. Her figure tall, and at that time slight and graceful, was peculiarly fitted for dancing. She was also an excellent horse-woman, and rode fearlessly and well; but she suffered much from delicacy of constitution, and was liable to severe nervous attacks which often impeded her joining her sisters in their different objects and pursuits. In countenance, she is described as having been as a young person very sweet and pleasing, with a profusion of soft flaxen hair, though perhaps not so glowing as some of her sisters.

"She had much native grace, and to many people was very attractive. Elizabeth was not studious by nature, and was, as a child, though gentle and quiet in temper, selfwilled and determined. In a letter, written before she was three years old, her mother thus mentions her;—'My dove-like Betsey scarcely ever offends, and is, in every sense of the word, truly engaging.' Her dislike to learning proved a serious disadvantage to her after she lost her mother; her education, consequently being defective and unfinished. In

natural talent, she was quick and penetrating, and had a depth of originality very uncommon. As she grew older, enterprise and benevolence were two prominent features in her character. In contemplating her peculiar gifts, it is wonderful to observe the adaptation of her natural qualities to her future career; and how, through the transforming power of divine grace, each one became subservient to the highest purposes. Her natural timidity changed to the opposite virtue of courage, but with such holy moderation and nice discretion, as never failed to direct it aright. The touch of obstinacy she displayed as a child, became that finely tempered decision and firmness which enabled her to execute her projects for the good of her fellow creatures. That which in childhood was something not unlike cunning, ripened into the most uncommon penetration, long-sightedness, and skill in influencing the minds of those around her. Her disinclination to the common methods of learning appeared to be connected with much original thought, and a mind acting on its own resources; for she certainly always possessed more genius, and ready, quick comprehension, than application or argument.

"Such were the circumstances, and such the character of Elizabeth Gurney and her sisters, after the death of their mother: and years passed on, with few changes, but such as necessarily came with the lapse of time, and their advance in age. But He who had purposes of mercy towards them, in His own way, and in His own good time, was preparing for them emancipation from their doubts, and light for their darkness. Wonderful is it to mark how, by little and little, through various instruments, through mental conflicts, through bitter experience, He gradually led them, each one, into the meridian light of day—the glorious liberty of the children of God.

"At a time when religion in a more gloomy form might not have gained a hearing, when the graver countenance of rebuke would probably have been unheeded, a gentleman

became acquainted with the Earham family, of high principle and cultivated mind. With him the sisters formed a strong and lasting friendship. He addressed himself to their understandings on the grand doctrines of Christianity; he referred them to the written word as the rule of life: he lent them, and read with them, books of a religious tendency. He treated religion, as such, with reverence; and although himself a Roman Catholic, he abstained from every controversial topic, nor ever used his influence, directly or indirectly, in favor of his own church. There was another individual who proved an important instrument in leading the sisters to sound views of religion, though, when first acquainted with them, herself wandering in the wilderness of doubt, if not of error. This was Marianne Galton, afterward Mrs. Schimmel Penninck. Being a highly educated person, of great mental power, and accustomed to exercise her abilities in the use of her reason and an honest search after truth, she acquired considerable influence over them. As the truth of revelation opened upon her own understanding, and her heart became influenced by it, they shared in her advance, and profited by her experience. There were other individuals with whom they associated, whose influence was desirable, but less powerful, than that of either Miss Galton or Mr. Pitchford.

"They appear also to have derived advantage, at times, from the religious visits of Friends to Earham. The family of Mr. Gurney were in the habit of attending no place of worship but the Friends' meeting. The attendance of Elizabeth was continually impeded by want of health, and it is difficult to know when the habit of absenting herself might have been broken through, but for her uncle, Joseph Gurney, who urged the duty upon her and encouraged her to make the attempt. He was a decided Friend, and had much influence with her, both then and during her subsequent life. She was ready indeed to essay anything that might tend to satisfy her conscience, or meet the cravings of her heart for

a something which as yet she had not obtained. There is occasionally to be met with in the character of fallen man a longing after perfection—after that which can alone satisfy the immortal spirit: this she experienced in no common measure. Her journal is replete with desires after 'virtue' and 'truth.' She seeks and finds God in His works, but as yet she had not found Him as He stands revealed in the page of inspiration."

I shall now present such selections from the Journal as seem best adapted to give a clear and life-like portrait of Elizabeth Fry's mind, character and career. Happily the materials are so abundant as chiefly to require an exercise of judgment in omitting those which may, with least injury, be sacrificed to the demands of brevity.

"My mind is in so dark a state that I see everything through a black medium."

"I see everything darkly—I can comprehend nothing—I doubt upon everything."

"April.—Without passions of any kind how different I should be. I would not give them up, but I should like to have them under subjection; but it appears to me, as I feel, impossible to govern them; my mind is not strong enough, as I at times think they do no harm to others. But am I sure they will hurt no one? I believe by not governing myself in little things I may by degrees become a despicable character, and a curse to society; therefore my doing wrong is of consequence to others as well as to myself."

"April 25th.—I feel by experience how much entering into the world hurts me; worldly company I think materially injures; it excites a false stimulus, such as a love of pomp, pride, vanity, jealousy, and ambition; it leads to think about dress and such trifles, and when out of it we fly to novels and scandal, or something of that kind, for entertainment,

I have lately been given up a good deal to worldly passions. By what I have felt I can easily imagine how soon I should be quite led away.

"29th.—I met the Prince,* it showed me the folly of the world; my mind feels very flat after this storm of pleasure.

"May 16th.—There is a sort of luxury in giving way to the feelings! I love to feel for the sorrows of others, to pour wine and oil into the wounds of the afflicted: there is a luxury in feeling the heart glow, whether it be with joy or sorrow. I think the different periods of life may well be compared to the different seasons.

"I love to think of every thing, to look at mankind; I love to 'look through Nature up to Nature's God.' I have no more religion than that, and in the little I have I am not the least devotional; but when I admire the beauties of Nature I cannot help thinking of the Source from whence such beauties flow. I feel it a support; I believe firmly that all is guided for the best by an invisible Power, therefore I do not feel the evils of life so much. I love to feel good, I do what I can to be kind to everybody. I have many faults which I hope in time to overcome.

"Monday, May 21st.—I am seventeen to-day. Am I a happier or a better creature than I was this time twelve-month? I know I am happier; I think I am better. I hope I shall be much better this day year than I am now. I hope to be quite an altered person, to have more knowledge, to have my mind in greater order; and my heart too—that wants to be put in order as much, if not more, than any part of me, it is in such a fly-away state; but I think if ever it were settled on one subject it would never, no never fly away any more; it would rest quietly and happily on the heart that was open to receive it; it will then be more con-

*H. R. H. William Frederick, afterwards Duke of Gloucester, then quartered, with his regiment, at Norwich.