

CHAPTER SECOND.

MARRIAGE AND THE MINISTRY.

We have now seen Elizabeth Gurney, at the age of nineteen, developed into an earnest, pious and sensible Quakeress, lovely in person, agreeable in manners, and full of benevolent impulses and aspirations, already conscious of a call to the highest work of which man is capable, and steadily engaged in the preparatory offices of teaching the young and giving help to the needy. In addition to her Sabbath evening class in the Testament, she had for some time kept a charity day school for poor children, at her father's residence. This school enlarged until it numbered eighty-six pupils, all of which she taught and governed with a tact peculiar to herself. She also visited the sick, reading and conversing with them as opportunity offered. All this appears to have been done, less from sense of duty, than from the kindly impulses of her own heart.

"At this time, Elizabeth Gurney wore the cap and close handkerchief of Friends, and with the dress had adopted their other peculiarities. This added to her comfort and spared her many difficulties. Of the truth of their principles she had long been convinced, and had deliberately chosen Quakerism as the future religious profession of her life.

"Her mind, being thus established on matters of the first

importance, was better prepared to entertain a subject which now claimed her consideration—proposals of marriage from Mr. Joseph Fry, at that time engaged with his brother, Mr. William Fry, in extensive business in London. Her timid, sensitive nature shrank at first from so momentous a question, and for a time she seemed unable, or unwilling to encounter the responsibility. Gradually, with individual preference, her mind opened to the suitability of the connection. Her habits and education had rendered affluence almost essential to her comfort; whilst entering Mr. Fry's family and the prospect of residing among Friends offered great and strong inducements to her feelings. Her anxious desire to be rightly guided in her decision is marked by the following letter to her cousin Joseph Gurney Bevan." (Memoir.)

The following minute of self-examination is given before the letter referred to as it precedes it in date.

"*Twelfth Month, 12th. (1799)*—I believe the true state of my mind is as follows. I have, almost ever since I have been a little under the influence of religion, thought marriage at *this* time was not a good thing for me; as it might lead my interests and affections from that source in which they should be centered; and also if I have any active duties to perform in the church, if I really follow, as far as I am able the voice of Truth in my heart, are they not rather incompatible with the duties of a wife and mother? And is it not safest to wait and see what is the probable course I shall take in this life, before I enter into any engagement that affects my future career? So I think, and so I have thought. But to look on the other side. If Truth appears to tell me I may marry, I should leave the rest, and hope, whatsoever my duties are, I shall be able to perform them; but it is now, at this time the prayer of my heart that if I ever should

be a mother I may rest with my children, and really find my duties lead me to them and my husband; and if my duty ever leads me from my family, that it may be in single life. I must leave all to the wisdom of a superior Power, and, in humble confidence, pray for assistance, both now and forevermore, in performing the Divine will."

Clapham, Fourth Month, 1800.

"My dearest Cousin:—

It is not pleasant to me having a subject that now is of no small importance to me unknown to thee, for I feel thee to be, and love thee as my kind friend. Some time ago Joseph Fry, youngest son of William Storrs Fry of London, paid us a visit at Earham and made me an offer of marriage. Since our stay in the neighborhood he has renewed his addresses. I have had many doubts, many risings and fallings about the affair. My most anxious wish is that I may not hinder my spiritual welfare, which I have so much feared as to make me often doubt if marriage were a desirable thing for me at this time, or even the thoughts of it. But as I wish (at least I think I wish) in this as in other things to do the will of God, I hope I shall be shown the path right for me to walk in. I do not think I could have refused him, with a proper authority at this time. If I am to marry before very long it overturns my theories, and may teach me that the ways of the Lord are unsearchable; and that I am not to draw out a path of right for myself; but to look to the One who only knows what is really good for me. But the idea of leaving my station at home is to me surprising, as I had not thought that would have been the case, and perhaps it may not now happen, but it does not seem improbable. How anxiously do I desire I may, through all, strive after the knowledge of God, and one day, if it be right, obtain it. Excuse this hasty scrawl and believe me, my dear cousin, thy very affectionate

E. GURNEY."

"*Earham, Fifth Month, 30th.*—I have written lately many melancholy journals, and I seem rather inclined this morning gratefully to mention the calm and sweet state I feel in. Even if the feelings be only for this time, it is a blessing to have them. My feelings towards Joseph are so calm and pleasant, and I can look forward with so much cheerfulness to a connection with him.

"*Sixth Month, 6th.*—I felt rather nervous and weak this morning. I wrote to Eliza Fry, and worked and talked. I might talk too much. I received a letter I liked from Joseph, and answered it this afternoon. I felt unwilling to represent my own faults to him, although I told him how faulty I was; yet it is much more unpleasant to acknowledge any real fault committed than the natural inclination to faults.

"*Eighth Month 13th.*—This morning the Fellows were here; nothing particular happened until evening when all my poor children came. It was rather a melancholy time to me. After having enjoyed themselves playing about I took them to the summer-house and bade them farewell; there were about eighty-six of them; many of them wept; I felt rather coldly when with them, but when they went away I shed my tears also; and then my desires took the turn of anxiously longing for the spiritual welfare of us all, as a family."

I now quote at some length from the Memoir, chapter fifth.

"The marriage of Joseph Fry and Elizabeth Gurney took place on the 19th of August, 1800, at the Friends' Meeting house in Norwich; her own description of the day is:—

"I awoke in a sort of terror at the prospect before me, but soon gained quietness and something of cheerfulness. After dressing we set off for Meeting; I was altogether comfortable. The Meeting was crowded: I felt serious and locking in measure to the only sure place for support. It

was to me a truly solemn time; I felt every word; and not only felt but in my *manner* of speaking expressed how I felt; Joseph also spoke well. Most solemn it truly was. After we sat silent some little time Sarah Chandler knelt down in prayer; my heart prayed with her. I believe words are inadequate to describe the feelings on such an occasion; I wept good part of the time, and my beloved father seemed as much overcome as I was. The day passed off well, and I think I was very comfortably supported under it, although cold hands and a beating heart were often my lot.

"Leaving the home of her childhood was a great effort to her. Driving through Norwich for the last time as a residence 'the very stones of the street seemed dear' to her. On the 31st of the same month she says:—

"We arrived at Plashet about three o'clock; it was strange to me. I was much pleased with the place, and admired the kindness of its inhabitants."

"Her home, however, was for some years, to be in scenes far less congenial to her early habits than Plashet House, in Essex, then the residence of her husband's parents. It was a much more prevailing custom in that day than it is now, for the junior partner to reside in the house of business, in conformity with which Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Fry prepared to establish themselves in St. Mildred's Court, in the city of London. The house was large, airy, commodious, and what in the city is a still more rare advantage, quiet; and continued to be an occasional residence of different members of the family till it was pulled down in consequence of alterations in London.

"Elizabeth Fry was by her marriage, brought into completely new circumstances; her husband's family had been members of the Society of Friends since an early period after its foundation. In this it resembled her own; but, unlike her own parents, her father and mother-in-law were 'plain and consistent Friends;' she was surrounded by a large circle of new connections and acquaintance who differed

from her own early associates, in being, a 'most exclusively, strict Friends. Thus she found herself the 'gay instead of the plain and scrupulous one of the family.' This for a time brought her into occasional difficulty and trial, from the incongruity of the parties assembled at her house, formed of her own family and nearest connections whom she so tenderly loved, and those with whom she was in strict religious communion, but whose habits and sentiments differed from theirs; and she feared for herself, lest in the desire to please all she should in any degree swerve from the line of conduct which she believed right for herself.

"George Dilwyn from Philadelphia, a Friend engaged in religious service in London, became their guest on the 7th of November, only a week after the young married pair had arrived at their home; he remained with them upwards of a month, and his company appears to have been useful and agreeable to them, although his presence brought the bride into difficulty on a point which at the present time seems almost inconceivable—that of reading the Holy Scriptures aloud after breakfast. Family devotion among all persuasions was much less common at that period than it is now; and the habit of assembling the household at a stated hour daily for domestic worship was almost unknown. Mr. and Mrs. Fry's servants were not partakers of this privilege, except on Sunday evenings, until some years after their marriage."

"*Eleventh Month, 7th.*—George Dilwyn came to-day; I feel almost overcome with my own weakness, when with such people.

"*11th.*—After breakfast I believed it better to propose reading the Bible, but I felt it, particularly as my brother William was here; not liking the appearance of young people like us, appearing to profess more than they who had lived here before us. However I put off, and put off, till both William and Joseph went down; I then felt uneasy

under it, and when Joseph came back I told him, as I did before, what I wished. He, at last, sat down, having told George Dilwyn my desire. I began to read the 46th Psalm, but was so overcome that I could hardly read, and gave it to Joseph to finish.

"12th.—I rather felt this morning it would have been right for me to read the Bible again, and stop George Dilwyn and Joseph reading something else. Now stopping G. D., was a difficult thing; for a person like me to remind him! however I did not fully do as I thought right, for I did not openly tell G. D., we were going to read, but spoke to my husband so as for him to hear; then he read, I knowing I had not done my best.

"14th.—I again felt some difficulty at reading the Bible; however I got through well. George Dilwyn encouraged me by saying he thought I portioned the reading well. After a little bustling we set off for Hampstead. I was there told by —— he thought my manners had too much of the courtier in them, which I knew to be the case, for my disposition leads me to hurt no one that I can avoid: and I do sometimes but just keep to truth with people from a natural yielding to them in such things as please them. I think doing so in moderation is pleasant and useful in society. It is amongst those things that produce the harmony of society for the truth must not be spoken out at all times, at least not the whole truth. I will give an instance of what I mean. Suppose any one was to show me the color of a room that I thought pretty, I should say so, although I thought others more so, and omit saying that. Perhaps I am wrong; I do not know if I be not; but it will not always do to tell our minds. This I have observed (and I am sorry for it) that I feel it hard, when duty dictates, to do what I think may hurt others. I believe this feeling of mine originates in self-love, from the dislike of being myself the cause of pain and uneasiness."

The above is a fine illustration of character. Through her entire want of self-esteem she takes to herself discredit for that disposition which won her almost universal favor and enabled her to accomplish very difficult reforms without making an enemy—a disposition wanting which many well-meaning, but not wholly well-feeling, people often do as much harm as good in trying to do what they conceive to be their duty. I said, without making an enemy. Perhaps she made one, and that through inattention, as she thought, to the principle above noted, not always to speak what is in our mind. In her humane zeal to save a poor weak girl from the gallows for passing counterfeit money at the persuasion of her lover, she offended the Secretary of State, Lord Sidmouth, by reflecting on the conduct of certain bank officers, concerned in the case, and the inhuman Judge let the unhappy girl die, and closed his ears thereafter to appeals from her intercessor. It may have been an indiscretion, though it seems born of the Spirit which cried "Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" and which brought the wrath of those murderers on the head of Him who could not brook wrongs to the poor.

"15th.—George Dilwyn said for our encouragement this morning, that he had seen, since he had been with us, the efficacy of reading in the Bible the first thing,—he thought it a good beginning for the day."

The next step, so delicately pointed to by the guiding Finger of Light in her mind, she found equally difficult to take, and did not take, until long afterwards, perhaps in consequence of her shrinking from the first gentle command.

"9th. (December)—Anna Savery drank tea here; we had

not sat long after tea before we fell into silence. During the time I first felt a sort of anxiety for the welfare of us young travelers, and it came strongly across my mind openly to express it. This put me into an agitation not easily to be described; and I continued in this state, which was a truly painful one, nearly feeling it my duty to pray aloud for us; oh how hard it did seem! I tried to run from it, but I found the most safety in trying to wait upon God; hoping if it were imagination, to overcome it; if it were a duty that I might be obedient. Towards the latter end I felt *more* inclined towards obedience. But what an obstacle is my not holding my will in subservience to that of my Maker; for perhaps, after all, it was only a trial of my obedience that would not have been called for, but to show me how far I was from a resigned state of heart. I felt oppressed the rest of the evening.

"10th.—I woke in a burdened state of mind; I thought it better to relieve it to my dear husband and found comfort in doing so; he warned me against imagination. I must try to trust in the Lord, and I hope to find safety. I felt quite in a state of agitation till we went to Meeting; it made me feel almost ill in body, both last night and this morning. However my mind was sweetly calmed in Meeting, and I felt vastly relieved from my terrors, and a little love and trusting in the Heavenly Master. I was *almost* ready to do whatever might be right for me. Oh! may I give up to what is called for at my hand; and may I not be deceived, but follow the true Shepherd, for my feet seem much inclined to wander!"

That fatal "*almost!*" How many have been wrecked upon it! "*Almost* thou persuadest me to be a Christian." The Jews were almost ready to go into the Promised Land, but turned back, alarmed by their false spies. So it is with all of us. Even faithful Elizabeth Fry was no exception.

Had she been able to yield to the simple impulses of her heart when she felt longings for the welfare of herself and Anna Savery, and, asked God to bless and guide them, as she would have asked her earthly parent for aid had she needed it, her entrance upon the open work of the ministry would have been easy and natural. Battles she would have had still to fight, but victory would have been given to faithful obedience. She was, however, not ripe for it, as the event proved. She turned back because she was still in bonds, spiritually. She was trying to do God's work as a servant, rather than as a child—under compulsion, instead of from love. She still needed the baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire which would bring the Spirit of Christ into her very soul, before a true and efficacious gospel ministry could flow from it. After nine years of incessant and often bewildering struggle with life, in a crowded city home, and the birth of six children, and when her beloved father lay dead in the home of her childhood, having breathed out his soul, after a severe struggle with conscience, in a lively hope of Heaven—then, at last, the subdued flame of piety burst forth in prayer and thanksgiving in the sight of men.

If we could only be faithful to the first, or even the second call, how much sorrow would be spared. But because we are then only half converted, because we have Christ before our eyes, instead of in our hearts, because, though the spirit is willing the flesh is yet weak, we slumber while the crucial hour of fate is passing; and after twice rousing us, and again silently looking upon our prostration, the Lord says to us, "Sleep on now and take your rest;—he is at hand that doth betray me." The traitor is indeed at hand in all our hearts when either the fear of man or the love of gain

effectually closes our eyes and ears to Christ's appeal. The minute in her Journal succeeding that last given shows that the Spirit was now to some extent withdrawn.

"14th.—I attended both Meetings as usual, and as usual, came from them flat and discouraged. To attend our place of worship, and there spend almost all the time in worldly thoughts is I fear too great a mark of how my time is mostly spent; indeed my life appears, at this time, to be spent to little more purpose than eating, drinking, sleeping and clothing myself. But if we analyze the employment of most, what do they more than, in some way attend to the bodily wants of themselves or others? What is our work, the good we do for the poor, &c., &c., but for the body?"

"Third Month, 15th. (1801).—I felt really better this morning (alluding to a previous indisposition) and went to Meeting, but all my small efforts to quiet my thoughts were ineffectual; the same in the afternoon; it is very serious. Really when I awake in the morning I feel a flatness; when I find my great object of the day no longer appears to be even to wish to do the will of my Creator. But I am as one who has, in some measure, lost his pilot and is tossed about by the waves of the world. But I trust that there is yet a power that will prevent my drowning. I draw some consolation from my dreams of old, for how often was I near drowning, and yet at last saved.

"25th.—I feel almost overcome with the multiplicity of visitings and goings out.

"15th. (June)—If I can with truth acknowledge it to be my first wish to do my best, although I may not feel the sensible gratification of doing my duty, I may yet be really doing it. If I do all I can, I have no occasion to fear sooner or later meeting with my reward. I was rather disappointed at our having company: indeed we have now little time a one. It is quite a serious thing, our being so constantly liable to interruptions as we are. I do not think since we

married we have had one-fourth of our meals alone. I long for more retirement, but it appears out of our power to procure it; and therefore it is best to be as patient under interruptions as we can, but I think it a serious disadvantage to young people setting out in life.

"15th. (August)—I have had an interesting talk with my dear sister Rachel: She appears to me to have perceived that which will direct her steps. But how hard it is deeply, strictly, and for a long time together, to have our first object to serve our Creator—for at first there is a natural glee, as for something new, and then we feel we have to pass through lukewarmness which is a dangerous state; I believe one where many are lost. May I be carried through it!

Her maternal trials and pleasures, succeeded each other apace, adding what all mothers understand to the anxieties as well as charms of a busy life.

"Tenth Month, 1st.—My present feelings for the babe, are so acute as to render me at times unhappy from an over anxiety about her, such a one as I never felt before for any one. Now it appears to me this over anxiety arises from extreme love, weak spirits and state of health, and not being under the influence of principle that would lead me to overcome these natural feelings, as far as they tend to my misery. For if I were under the influence of principle, I might trust that my dear infant indeed was under the care and protection of an infinitely wise and just Providence that permits her little sufferings for some good end that I knew not of. How anxiously do I hope this poor dear baby may be held by me in resignation to the Divine will. Oh! that I might feel dependence on that Almighty arm about her, and about other things. Beyond everything else I wish to do my duty, idle and relaxed as I am in performing it.

"Fourth Month, 19th, (1802)—Oh! may my obedience keep pace with my knowledge, at this time; my knowledge of good appears small; my longings to be better are only