

CHAPTER THIRD.

MOTHER AND MINISTER.

Ministers in the Society of Friends, both men and women, are usually called to a very active life. In addition to their ordinary avocations, which they are expected to leave only when summoned temporarily to higher duties, and to the regular semi-weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly gatherings, they frequently make excursions of various lengths to neighboring communities of their own, or other people, following as nearly as they can the intimations of the good Shepherd, as to where His thirsty flocks most need attention. Elizabeth Fry soon became engaged in this missionary labor, for which she was admirably adapted, as well as in services within and about her own home. A few of the most important of these earlier engagements will now be noticed. The first is dated February, 1812, about four and a half months after the events last related.

"3rd.—The prospect I have had for some months of going into Norfolk to attend the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings is now brought home to me, as I must apply to my next Monthly Meeting for permission. It is no doubt a sacrifice of natural feeling to leave the comforts of home and my beloved husband and children; and to my weak, nervous habits, the going about, and alone (for so I feel it in

one sense, without my husband), is, I have found from experience, a trial greater than I imagined; and my health suffers much I think, from my habits being necessarily so different. This consideration of its being a cross to my nature I desire not to weigh in the scale; though no doubt, for the sake of others as well as myself, my health being so shaken is a serious thing. What I desire to consider most deeply is this:—Have I authority for leaving my home and evident duties? What leads me to believe I have? for I need not doubt that when away, and at times greatly tried, this query is likely to arise. The prospect has come in that quiet, yet I think powerful way, that I have never been able to believe I should get rid of it; indeed hitherto I have hardly felt anything but a calm cheerfulness about it, and very little anxiety. It seems to me as if in this journey I must be stripped of outward dependences, and my watchword appears to be, —'My soul, wait thou ONLY upon God; for my expectation is from Him.'

"20th.—My sister, Elizabeth Fry, means to go with me into Norfolk: my Uncle Joseph is likely to go another way; it appears as if I could not mind much who is to go with me. But I feel disposed to a very single dependence, and if I be rightly put forth to this service, may He who puts me forth be with me; if I have to minister food to others may it be that which is convenient for them, and which will tend to their lasting nourishment. I have often thought that in this little prospect I must go like David, when he went to slay the giant. I am ashamed of the comparison; but I only mean it in this respect, I go not trusting in any power or strength of my own; I feel I dare look to no helper outwardly. I feel young and a stripling, without armor, yet I trust the Lord will be with me, and make the sling and stone effectual, if He please to make use of His poor child to slay the giant in any one.

"Earlham, Third Month, 14th.—Have I not renewed reason for faith, hope and confidence in the principle which

I desire to follow? In the night I had to acknowledge that the work must be Thine, O Lord! and that it is to me wonderful. My fears and causes of discouragement were many, for some little time before I set off my own poor health, and my little ones; then my lowness and stupidity. In the first place my health and the dear children's improved so much, and inwardly so brightened, that I left home very comfortably. As I went on my way such abundant hope arose that light, rather than darkness appeared to surround me. I have now attended the Monthly Meetings and three other Meetings. I have also had frequent opportunities of a religious nature in families; the most remarkable were one in a clergyman's family, in supplication for him and his house, and another where he had to supplicate for my help. May I ever remember how utterly unfit I am in myself for all these works: unto me alone belongs abasedness. I can take nothing to myself. As Thou hast seen meet, O Lord! Thou who art strength in weakness, thus to make use of Thy poor handmaid as an instrument in Thy service, be pleased to keep her from the evil, both in reality and appearance, that she may never, in any way, bring reproach upon Thy cause."

After her return she thus balances the account:—

"May I now be enabled to attend to my own vineyards, and after having been made instrumental thus to warn and encourage others may I not become a cast away myself. I hardly understand what Friends mean by reward for such services, for I do not feel the work mine, and no reward is due. As for reward, is it not enough to feel a Power better than ourselves influencing and strengthening us to do the work that we humbly trust is His own? for what honor, favor, or blessing so great as being engaged in the service of Him whom we love, in whatever way it may be, whether performing one duty or another, and having a little evidence granted us that we are doing His will, or endeavoring to do

it? I peculiarly feel, in ministerial duties, that I have no part, because the whole appears a gift,—the willing heart, the power, and everything attending it; the poor creature has only to remain as passive as possible, willing to be operated upon.

"*Plashey, Third Month, 28th.*—I will first mention how it was with me in the Norwich Quarterly Meeting. I went, looking to Him who has hitherto helped me; my beloved uncle Joseph said a few words, as a seal to what I had expressed, and it was, I believe, a peculiarly solemn and favored time: much blessed in a few words of supplication at the Grove before dinner. In the adjourned meeting I felt it safest to go to the Men's Meeting,* where I had to bid them farewell in the Lord, after I had been helped with a few words of tender love and encouragement. Sarah Bowley said a little, and then my dear sister Elizabeth Fry arose and said, 'She hoped what had passed that day would not be attended to as a tale that was told, but as everlasting truths;' which appeared to bring great solemnity and sweetness with it. In the Women's meeting we also had a very solemn time at parting, in which I bade them farewell, desiring that we might all ascend, step by step, that ladder which reaches from earth to heaven. Before we set off I had, after reading, in heart-felt and heart-tendering supplication, to pray for the preservation of the family, and our support in the day of trial, and amidst all the various turnings and overturnings of the Holy Hand upon us. Here I once more am, surrounded by outward blessings, and well in health; yet I hardly know how to return thanks, or to rejoice in Him who has helped me; being poor, low, stripped, the tears come into my eyes. Though cast down I love the Lord above all, and desire, through the saving, redeeming power of Him who came to save that which was lost, and has, I believe proved a Saviour to me, in part, that

*Men and women hold their meetings for discipline separately

I may draw nearer and nearer to the most high God, and become in all things more completely His."

"*Six Month, 16th.*—It now appears too late to give much account of the Yearly Meeting. The prospect of going into the Men's meeting, naturally was so awful, nay, almost dreadful, that as I sat at breakfast, fears arose lest my understanding should fail. However, though in great measure taken from me on first sitting down in meeting, yet after a time the concern arose with tranquillity, and with a powerful, though small voice—at least with power sufficient to enable me to cast my burden upon the meeting. This brought, I thought, great solemnity; I appeared to have the full unity of Friends: dear Rebecca Bevan went with me. I felt myself much helped when there: matter, tongue and utterance were all given, in testimony and supplication. I think the calm frame I enjoyed upon returning to the Women's Meeting must almost be a foretaste of that rest which the soul pants after.

"*Sixth Month.*—My press of engagements has been very great. . . . I think my temper requires great watchfulness; for the exercises of my mind, my very numerous interests, and the irritability excited by my bodily infirmities, cause me to be in so tender and touchy a state that the 'grass-hopper becomes a burden.' In this as in all my infirmities, I have but one hope; it is in the power of Him who has in mercy answered my prayers, and helped me in many of my difficulties, and I humbly trust yet will arise for my deliverance. As to the ministry, I have been raised up and at times cast down, but my heart and attention have been mostly turned to rigidly performing my practical duties in life, which is my object by night and by day. I have felt as if I could rest in nothing short of serving Him whom my soul loves; but I desire to watch, and am fully aware that with regard to myself I have nothing to trust to but mercy; but, leaving myself, I long, whilst permitted to remain in mortality, not to be a drone, but to do everything

to the glory of God. I think I desire to do all things well more for the cause's sake, than for the sake of my own soul; as my conviction of the mercy and loving kindness of Him who loveth us and who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities, is so great that whilst my heart is seeking to serve Him, (full as I am of defects), I am ready to trust that that mercy which has hitherto compassed me about will be with me to the end of time, and continue with me through eternity. The fear of punishment hardly ever arises, or has arisen in my mind; it is more the certain knowledge that I have of the blessedness of serving our Master, and the very strong excitement of love and gratitude, and desire for the promotion of the blessed cause upon earth. Through all my tried states I have one unspeakable blessing to acknowledge, and that is an increase of faith."

Elizabeth Fry was peculiarly fitted to minister at the bed of sickness, and where sickness had done its work, and the hearts of bereaved friends needed the voice of sympathy and wise counsel. She was often engaged in this most sacred service, frequently among her own very large circle of friends and relatives, and also among the poor. The following extracts, part taken from the Journal, and part from the biographical notes, illustrate this portion of her work, and show how careful she was to do nothing ceremoniously, or when it was uncalled for by her inward Guide.

"*Ninth Month, 2nd.*—This morning our poor servant who has for some weeks kept his bed very seriously ill, died. I feel that I have cause for humble gratitude in having been at the awful time strengthened by faith, and I believe I may say, having experienced the Divine presence near. I have often sat and watched by his bed-side, desiring to know

whether I had anything to do, or say, as to his soul's welfare. I found neither feeling, faith nor ability to say or do much more than endeavor to turn his mind to his Maker; but I think never more than once, in anything of the anointing power. Yesterday I found him much worse, a struggle upon him that appeared breaking the thread of life, and his sufferings great, mentally and bodily. The first thing I found in myself was that a willing mind was granted me, and in sitting by him the power and spirit of supplication and intercession for him arose, to which I gave way. It immediately appeared to bring a solemn tranquillity; his pains and restlessness were quieted; his understanding I believe was quite clear: he thanked me and said, 'God bless you ma'am,' as if he felt much comfort in what had passed. Faith, love, and calmness were the covering of my mind. He had I believe only one or two more slight struggles after I left him. After that I was sent for and found that the conflict appeared over, and he breathed his last in about a quarter of an hour. There was peculiar sweetness, and great silence and solemnity in the room. I had to acknowledge that I believed the mercy of our Heavenly Father was then extended towards him, and to express a desire that it might, in the same awful moment, be extended toward us, feeling how greatly we stood in need of mercy. The rest of the day passed off as well as I could expect. I feared lest the servants and others should attribute that praise to me with which I had nothing to do, for I could not have prayed or found an answer to prayer without an anointing from the Most High. It led me to feel it a blessing to be entrusted with this sacred and precious gift; for though ministers may have much to pass through and many crosses to take up for their own good and that of others, yet it is a marvelous gift when the pure life stirs, operates and brings down strongholds. My nerves were rather shaken, so as to make me naturally fearful at times the rest of the day. I have a great desire that this event may be blessed to the household,

more particularly the servants, that it may humble and bow their spirits; that they may live more in love, and grow in the knowledge of God and of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

"The funeral of the servant was fixed for the following Sunday; as the time approached Mrs. Fry felt an earnest desire arise in her heart that the occasion might be one of benefit to others, as several of his friends were to be present; some from the immediate neighborhood. She proposed that in the evening all the assembled guests should be invited to attend the family reading, with her own household; but before the hour arrived for the performance of a duty which was to her exceedingly weighty she was summoned to visit Eliza, the newly married wife of her cousin, James Sheppard, who was rapidly sinking into the grave. The afflicted husband and sister were deeply needing the skilful tenderness with which she could meet such exigencies. At Meeting in the morning her heart had been strengthened and apparently prepared for the duties of the day. By the bed of languishing we find her waiting for that unction without which she was sensible that her services could avail nothing; and on the same evening, in her own dwelling, when surrounded by about forty, besides her own children, she speaks in exhortation and prayer. Her address was closely suited to the state of some persons present, and unflinchingly did she impress upon them that 'the way of the transgressor is hard.' The occasion was long remembered by individuals who were there, and who attributed their permanent improvement to the solemn truths they then heard, and for the first time effectively received into their hearts. Her own Journal of the day, written the following morning, portrays the workings of her own mind."

"*Plasket, Ninth Month, Second-day.*—Yesterday was rather a remarkable day. I rose very low and fearful: my spirit appeared overwhelmed within me, partly I think from some serious outward matters, but principally from such an

extreme fear of my approaching confinement, feeling nothing in myself to meet it, and knowing that it must come unless death prevent. I went to Meeting, but was almost too low to know whether I should go or not; however being helped in testimony to show the blessedness of those who hope in the Lord and not in themselves appeared to do me good, as if I had to minister to myself as well as others. I had a trust that my help was in the Lord, and that therefore I should experience my heart to be strengthened. A message came requesting my immediate attendance on poor dear Eliza Sheppard, who appeared near her end. Of course I went. These visits are very awful; to sit by that which we believe to be a death-bed; to be looked to by the afflicted and others, as a minister from whom something is expected, and the fear, at such a time of the activity of the creature arising and doing that which it has no business to do. After sitting sometime quiet, part of which she appeared to sleep, and part to be awake, a solemn silence covered us; the words of supplication arose in due time, when I believed her to be engaged in the same manner by putting her hands together; I knelt down and felt greatly helped, but had not so much to pray for her alone as for all of us there present with her. I had a few words also to say in taking leave. The visit appeared sweet to her by her smiles, and her whispering to her sister expressing this. . . . I think I found myself strengthened rather than weakened by the day's work, mentally and bodily, though my own great weakness soon returned upon me, and it appeared striking that such an one should have been so engaged; but painful as these feelings of depression are to bear, I know 'it is well,' as it keeps me humble; at least I hope so,—lowly and abased. Oh, saith my soul, after thus ministering to others, may I not become a cast-away myself, and neither in trouble nor rejoicing bring discredit on the cause that I love, or on His name whom I desire to serve."

In 1814, she made a short visit to her native county, which is thus described:

"*Eleventh Month, 12th.*—I am likely to set off early tomorrow without my husband to go into Norfolk. This prospect I feel pleasant and painful; pleasant, the idea of being at Earlham; painful, leaving home and more particularly my husband. May I be enabled there faithfully to do my duty, in whatever way I may be led, in meeting or out of meeting; may the time spent there be to our mutual comfort and edification, and may those left be cared for and preserved, soul and body, by Him who careth for us; this I humbly trust will be the case. Amen.

"*Plashet, 25th.*—I returned safely home to my beloved family on Second-day evening, the 22nd, I trust I may say in thankfulness of heart, finding all well, and going on altogether very comfortably. I returned by Ipswich accompanied by my sister Priscilla and my brother Joseph, and spent all First-day there; but I was unusually low, almost distressed, on account of little Betsey, as I heard she was unwell, and knew not the extent of it; so that my natural impatience to get home was great; but I felt kept there, and as if I could not go away; and thus deeply tried in myself was greatly helped from one service to another, during the day, being variously and often engaged. It was a day of natural tribulations, as far as fears went; and may I not say almost of spiritual abounding? So it is: and so I often have found it, that I have to be brought to the dust of the earth before I am greatly helped. Out of the depths we are raised to the heights."

The death of her brother John Gurney, which occurred in 1814, and which first broke the circle of eleven affectionate brothers and sisters, proved a very tender occasion. Arriving just before his death, she was warmly greeted