

## CHAPTER IV.

### NEWGATE.

We now approach the work of Christian benevolence, which gave the name of Elizabeth Fry to fame. The first accounts of this enterprise take us back to the year 1813.

*"Mildred's Court, Second Month, 15th.*—My fear for myself the last few days is, lest I should be exalted by the evident unity of my dear friends whom I greatly value; and also my natural health and spirits being good; and being engaged in some laudable pursuits, more particularly seeing after the prisoners in Newgate. Oh how deeply, how very deeply, I fear the temptation of ever being exalted, or self-conceited! I cannot preserve myself from this temptation any more than being unduly cast down or crushed by others. Be pleased, O Lord! to preserve me; for the deep inward prayer of my heart is that I may ever walk humbly before Thee, and also before all mankind. Let me never, in any way, take that glory to myself which alone belongs unto Thee, if in Thy mercy Thou shouldst ever enable one so unworthy either to do good or to communicate.

*"16th.*—Yesterday we were some hours at Newgate with the poor female felons, attending to their outward necessities. We had been twice previously. Before we went away dear Anna Buxton offered a few words in supplication, and, very unexpectedly to myself, I did also. I heard weeping and I thought they appeared much tendered: a

very solemn quiet was observed: it was a striking scene, the poor people on their knees around, in their deplorable condition."

"Thus simply and incidentally," observe her daughters, from whose account I shall now make some extracts, "is recorded Elizabeth Fry's first entrance upon the scene of her future labors, evidently without any idea of the importance of its ultimate results.

[*"From early youth her spirit had often been attracted, in painful sympathy, toward those who, by yielding themselves to the bondage of sin, had become the victims of human justice. Before she was fifteen years of age, the House of Correction at Norwich excited her feelings of deep interest, and by repeated and earnest persuasion she induced her father to allow her to visit it. She referred, many years afterwards, to the impressions which had then been received, and mentioned to a dear and venerable father in the truth amongst us, that it had laid the foundation for her engagements in prison."*—*S. Corder.*]

"In January of this year, four members of the Society of Friends, all well known to Elizabeth Fry, had visited some persons in Newgate who were about to be executed. Although no mention is made of the circumstance in the journal, it has always been understood that the representations of these Friends, particularly those of William Foster, one of the number, first induced her personally to inspect the state of the women, with the view of alleviating their sufferings occasioned by the inclemency of the season.

"At that time all the female prisoners in Newgate were confined in that part now known as the untried side. The larger portion of the Quadrangle was then used as a state prison. The partition wall was not of sufficient height to prevent the state prisoners from overlooking the narrow

yard and the windows of the two wards and two cells of which the women's division consisted. These four rooms comprised about one hundred and ninety superficial yards, into which, at the time of these visits, nearly three hundred women, with their numerous children, were crowded: tried and untried, misdemeanants and felons, without classification, without employment, and with no other superintendence than that given by a man and his son who had charge of them by night and by day. In the same rooms, in rags and dirt, destitute of sufficient clothing, (for which there was no provision,) sleeping without bedding, on the floor, the boards of which were in part raised to supply a sort of pillow, they lived, cooked and washed.

"With the proceeds of their clamorous begging, when any stranger appeared amongst them, the prisoners purchased liquors from a regular tap in the prison. Spirits were openly drunk, and the ear was assailed by the most terrible language. Beyond that which was necessary for safe custody, there was little restraint over their communication with the world without.

"Although military sentinels were posted on the leads of the prison, such was the lawlessness prevailing, that Mr. Newman, the governor, entered this portion of it with reluctance. Fearful that their watches would be snatched from their sides, he advised the ladies (though with little avail) to leave them in his house.

"Into this scene Elizabeth Fry entered, accompanied only by Anna Buxton. The sorrowful and neglected condition of these depraved women and their miserable children, dwelling in such a vortex of corruption, deeply sank into her heart, although at this time nothing more was done than to supply the most destitute with clothes. She carried back to her home and into the midst of other avocation and interests a lively remembrance of all that she had witnessed at Newgate, which within four years induced that systematic effort for ameliorating the condition of these poor outcasts, so

signally blessed by Him who said 'That joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance.'

"Not only did a considerable space of time elapse, after Elizabeth Fry's first visits to Newgate, before she renewed them, but in the interim many events occurred of deep import to herself. He 'who sits as a Refiner and a Purifier of silver,' saw fit to exercise her in the school of affliction before raising her up for the remarkable work which she had to do. Long and distressing indisposition, the death of her brother John Gurney, that of her paternal friend Joseph Gurney Bevan, the loss of a most tenderly beloved child, considerable decrease of property, separation for a time from all her elder children, were among the means used by Him who cannot err to teach her the utter instability of every human possession, to draw her heart more entirely to Himself, and to prepare her for His service."

I again quote from Mrs. Corder's volume at a later date, —page 233.

"Three years had now elapsed since Elizabeth Fry had first visited Newgate; but her spirit had from time to time been led into deep and solemn feeling on account of the degraded inmates of that prison; and a conviction became gradually impressed on her mind that she was required by Him to whose service she had been enabled to dedicate herself as an unquenched coal on His sacred altar, to labor, as He might see meet to open the way and to direct her steps, for the moral reformation and above all for the spiritual conversion and help of the most depraved and miserable of her sex. Nothing but the constraining love of Christ could have induced this tender and delicate woman thus to surrender domestic comfort and personal ease, and even to risk her own reputation, to follow what she believed to be the call of her Divine Master, leading her into labors most ardu-

ous and painful, from which her nature recoiled with dread. Yet was the unction of holy love so abundantly poured out upon her spirit that she willingly yielded to the appointment of that compassionate Saviour who, through her instrumentality, was thus graciously extending His hand of mercy, in order to rescue from the pit of destruction those who were sunk in vice and wretchedness."

"*Mildred's Court, Second Month, 24th, (1817).*—I have lately been much occupied in forming a school in Newgate for the children of the poor prisoners, as well as the young criminals, which has brought much peace and satisfaction with it; but my mind has also been deeply effected in attending a poor woman who was executed this morning. I visited her twice. This event has brought me into much feeling, attended with some distressingly nervous sensations in the night, so that this has been a time of deep humiliation to me, thus witnessing the effect and consequences of sin. This poor creature murdered her baby; and how inexpressibly awful now to have her own life taken away! The whole affair has been truly afflicting to me; to see what poor mortals may be driven to through sin and transgression, and how hard the heart becomes even to the most tender affections. How should we watch and pray that we fall not by little and little, become hardened and commit greater sins. I had to pray for these poor sinners this morning, and also for the preservation of our household from the evil there is in the world."

Extract from a letter to her sister, Rachel Gurney:—

"*Mildred's Court, Third Month, 10th and 11th.*—My heart and mind and time are very much engaged in various ways. Newgate is the principal object, and I think until I make some attempt at amendment in the plans for the women, I shall not feel easy; but if such efforts should prove unsuccessful, I think that I should then have tried to

do my part and be easy. . . . The poor occupy me little more than at the door, as I cannot go after them, with my other engagements. The hanging at Newgate does not overcome me as it did at first, and I have only attended one woman since the first. I see and feel the necessity of caution in this respect, and mean to be on my guard about it, and run no undue risk with myself."

Mrs. Fry's method of reform seems to have been original with herself. In commencing her experiment, she requested to be left alone with the prisoners. After asking their attention she read the parable of the Lord of the vineyard, and made some remarks upon the subject which called forth expressions from a few of them. Some asked who Christ was, and others feared that their day of salvation was passed. She then "addressed herself to the mothers, and pointed out to them the grievous consequences to their children of living in such a scene of depravity, and proposed to establish a school for them, to which they acceded with tears of joy. She desired them to consider the plan, for without their steady co-operation she would not undertake it—leaving it to them to select a governess from among themselves."

"On her next visit they had chosen as school-mistress a young woman named Mary Conner, recently committed for stealing a watch. She proved eminently qualified for the task, and became one of the first fruits of Christian labor in that place; she was assiduous in her duties, and was never known to infringe one of the rules. A free pardon was granted her about fifteen months afterwards; but this proved an unavailing gift, for a cough which had attacked her a short time previously, ended in consumption."

Elizabeth Fry was soon surrounded by a company of earnest co-workers, and received liberal aid and encouragement from the authorities and officers of the prison, although they at first looked upon the experiment as hopeless and even visionary. An unoccupied cell was assigned for the school-room; and Mrs. Fry accompanied by Mary Sanderson and the teacher elect, opened the school for children and persons under twenty-five years of age. Many older ones earnestly entreated permission to share in the instructions, but the small size of the room forbade. Mary Sanderson, then visiting the prison for the first time, thus describes her impressions.

"The railing was crowded with half-naked women struggling together for the front situations, with the most boisterous violence, and begging with the utmost vociferation. I felt as if I were going into a den of wild beasts, and well recollect shuddering when the door closed upon me, and I was locked in with such a herd of novel and desperate companions."

In her evidence, subsequently given before the House of Commons, Mrs. Fry made this statement, "It was in our visits to the school, where some of us attended almost every day, that we were witnesses to the dreadful proceedings that went forward on the female side of the prison; the begging, swearing, gaming, fighting, singing, dancing, dressing-up in men's clothes,—scenes too bad to be described, so that we did not think it suitable to admit young persons with us."

One of the strong characteristics of Elizabeth Fry was now called into requisition. Her perseverance was equal to

the heavy demand made upon it. She encouraged her friends and continued to enlist others in the enterprise until in April, 1817, "An Association for the Improvement of the Female Prisoners in Newgate" was formed, consisting of eleven members of the Society of Friends and the wife of a clergyman. Their object was stated to be, "To provide for the clothing, the instruction and the employment of the women; to introduce them to a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and to form in them, as much as possible, those habits of order, sobriety and industry which may render them peaceable, whilst in prison, and respectable when they leave it."

An interview was had with the prisoners, in presence of the sheriff and other officers of the prison. Elizabeth Fry asked them if they were willing "to abide by the rules which it would be indispensable to establish among them for the accomplishment of the object so much desired by them all. The women fully and unanimously assured her of their determination to obey them strictly. The sheriffs also addressed them, giving the plan the countenance of their approbation; and then turning to Elizabeth Fry and her companions, one of them said, 'Well ladies, you see your material.'

"How they used these 'materials' and the blessing permitted to attend their exertions is demonstrated by a letter received in 1820 from one of the prisoners then present."

To Mrs. Fry.

"*Paramatta, New South Wales, July 10th, 1820.*

"HONORED MADAM,—

"The duty I owe to you, likewise to the benevolent So-

ciety to which you have the honor to belong, compels me to take up my pen to return to you my most sincere thanks for the heavenly instruction I derived from you and the dear friends during my confinement in Newgate.

"In the month of April 1817 how did that blessed prayer of yours sink into my heart; and as you said so have I found it, that when no eyes see and no ears hear, God both sees and hears; and then it was that the arrow of conviction entered my hard heart; and in Newgate it was that poor Harriet S——, like the prodigal son, came to herself, and took with her words, and sought the Lord; and truly can I say with David, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I learned Thy ways O Lord!' And although affliction cometh not forth of the dust yet how prone have I been to forget God, my Maker, who can give songs in the night; and happy is that soul that when affliction comes can say with Eli, 'It is the Lord,' or with David, 'I was dumb and opened not my mouth because Thou didst it;' and Job, when stripped of every comfort, 'Blessed be the Lord who took away as well as gave,'—and may the Lord grant every one that is afflicted such an humble spirit as theirs. Believe me, my dear madam, I bless the day that brought me inside of Newgate walls, for then it was that the rays of Divine truth shone into my dark mind; and may the Holy Spirit shine more and more upon my dark understanding, that I may be enabled so to walk as one whose heart is set to seek a city whose builder and maker is God. Believe me, my dear madam, although I am a poor captive in a distant land, I would not give up having communion with God one single day for my liberty; for what is liberty of the body compared with liberty of the soul! and soon will that time come when death will release me from all the earthly fetters that hold me now, for I trust to be with Christ who bought me with His precious blood. And now my dear madam, these few sincere sentiments of mine I wish you to make known to the world, that the world may see that your

labor in Newgate has not been in vain in the Lord. Please give my love to all the dear friends, and Dr. Cotton, Mr. Baker, Simpson and all, the keeper of Newgate, and all the afflicted prisoners; and although we may never meet on earth again I hope we shall all meet in the realms of bliss never to part again. Please give my love to Mrs. Stennett and Mrs. Guy.

"And believe me to remain

"Your humble servant,

"HARRIET S——."

The next step was to provide employment. This part of the history may best be given in the words of Sir T. F. Buxton, "whose exertions to benefit these 'outcasts of the people' were only excelled by hers of whom he wrote."

"It struck one of the ladies that Botany Bay might be supplied with stockings, and indeed all articles of clothing, of the prisoners' manufacture. She therefore called upon Messrs. Richard Dixon & Co., of Fenchurch Street, and candidly told them that she was desirous of depriving them of this branch of their trade, and stating her views begged their advice. They said at once that they should not in any way obstruct such laudable designs, and that no further trouble need be taken to provide work, for they would engage to do it. Nothing now remained but to prepare the room; and this difficulty was obviated by the sheriff's sending their carpenters. The former laundry speedily underwent the necessary alterations, was cleansed and white-washed, and in a few days the Ladies' Committee assembled in it all the tried female prisoners. One of the ladies, Mrs. Fry, began by describing to them the comforts to be derived from industry and sobriety, the pleasure and profit of doing right, and contrasted the happiness and peace of those who are dedicated to a course of virtue and religion with that experienced in their former life, and its present

consequences; and describing their awful guilt in the sight of God appeared to themselves, whether its wages, even here, were not utter misery and ruin. She then dwelt upon the motives which had brought the ladies into Newgate: they had left their homes and their families to mingle amongst those from whom all others fled, animated by an ardent and affectionate desire to rescue their fellow-creatures from evil, and to impart to them that knowledge which they, from their education and circumstances had been so happy as to receive.

"She then told them that the ladies did not come with any absolute and authoritative pretensions; that it was not intended they should command and the prisoners obey; but that it was to be understood all were to act in concert; that not a rule should be made, or a monitor appointed without their full and unanimous concurrence; that for this purpose each of the rules should be read and put to the vote; and she invited those who might feel any disinclination to any particular, freely to state their opinion. The following were then read:

RULES.

"1. That a matron be appointed for the general superintendence of the women.

"2. That the women be engaged in needlework, knitting, or any other suitable employment.

"3. That there be no begging, swearing, gaming, card-playing, or immoral conversation. That all novels, plays and other improper books be excluded; and that all bad words be avoided; and any default in these particulars be reported to the matron.

"4. That there be a yard-keeper chosen from among the women, to inform them when their friends come, to see that they leave their work with a monitor when they go to the grating, and that they do not spend any time there, ex-

cept with their friends. If any woman be found disobedient in these respects, the yard-keeper is to report the case to the matron.

"5. That the women be divided into classes of not more than twelve, and that a monitor be appointed to each class.

"6. That monitors be chosen from among the most orderly of the women that can read, to superintend the work and conduct of the others.

"7. That the monitors not only overlook the women in their own classes, but if they observe any others disobeying the rules, that they inform the monitor of the class to which such persons belong, who is immediately to report to the matron, and the deviations to be set down on a slate.

"8. That any monitor breaking the rules shall be dismissed from her office and the most suitable in the class selected to take her place.

"9. That the monitors be particularly careful to see that the women come with clean hands and face to their work, and that they are quiet during their employment.

"10. That at the ringing of the bell, at nine o'clock in the morning, the women collect in the work-room to hear a portion of Scripture read by one of the visitors, or the matron; and that the monitors afterwards conduct the classes from thence to their respective wards in an orderly manner.

"11. That the women be again collected for reading at six o'clock in the evening, when the work shall be given in charge to the matron by the monitors.

"12. That the matron keep an exact account of the work done by the women, and of their conduct.

"As each was proposed every hand was held up in token of their approbation. In the same manner, and with the same formalities, each of the monitors was proposed, and all were unanimously approved. When this business was concluded one of the visitors read aloud the twenty-first chapter of St. Matthew, the parable of the barren fig-tree seeming applicable to the state of the audience;