

after a period of silence, according to the custom of the Society of Friends, the monitors with their classes withdrew to their respective wards in the most orderly manner.

"During the first month the ladies were anxious that the attempt should be secret, that it might meet with no interruption; at the end of that time, as the experiment had been tried, and had exceeded even their expectation, it was deemed expedient to apply to the Corporation of London. It was considered that the school would be more permanent if it were made a part of the prison system of the City, than if it merely depended on individuals. In consequence a short letter descriptive of the progress already made was written to the sheriffs.

"The next day an answer was received proposing a meeting with the ladies at Newgate.

"In compliance with this appointment the Lord Mayor, the sheriffs, and several of the Aldermen attended. The prisoners were assembled together; and it being requested that no alteration in their usual practice might take place, one of the ladies read a chapter in the Bible, and then the females proceeded to their various avocations. Their attention during the time of reading, their orderly and sober deportment, their decent dress, the absence of every thing like tumult, noise or contention, the obedience and respect shown by them, and the cheerfulness visible in their countenance and manners, conspired to excite the astonishment and admiration of their visitors. Many of these knew Newgate, had visited it a few months before, and had not forgotten the painful impression made by a scene exhibiting perhaps the very utmost limits of misery and guilt.

"The magistrates, to evince their sense of the importance of the alterations which had been effected, immediately adopted the whole plan as a part of the system of Newgate, empowered the ladies to punish the refractory by short confinement, undertook part of the expense of the matron, and loaded the ladies with thanks and benedictions.

"About six months after the establishment of the school for the children, and the manufactory for the tried side, the committee received a most urgent petition from the untried, entreating that the same might be done for them, and promising strict obedience. In consequence the ladies made the same arrangements, proposed the same rules, and admitted in the same manner as on the other side, the prisoners to participate in their formations. The experiment here has answered, but not to the same extent. They have had difficulty in procuring a sufficiency of work; the prisoners are not so disposed to work, flattering themselves with the prospect of speedy release; besides they are necessarily engaged in some degree in preparation for their trial. The result of the observations of the ladies has been, that where the prisoners, from whatever cause, did no work, they derived little if any moral advantage; where they did some work they received some benefit, and where they were fully engaged they were really and essentially improved."

The reform prospered steadily and continued to attract public attention, until people came from all parts of the country to witness what soon became one of the greatest curiosities of London. But we must pause to get an inside view of the mind which was the leading instrument in this beneficent enterprise.

"*Mildred's Court, Twelfth Month, 17th.*—A remarkable blessing still appears to accompany my prison concerns,—perhaps the greatest apparent blessing on my deeds that ever attended me. How have the spirits both of those in power and the poor afflicted prisoners appeared to be subjected, and how has the work gone on! Most assuredly the power and the glory are alone due to the Author and Finisher of every good work.

"*Mildred's Court, 1818.*—Lord be pleased to grant the

blessing of preservation which is above every blessing. It is very striking and wonderful to me to observe how some things have been verified that, in times of great lowness and unutterable distress, I have been led to believe would happen; in reading the 142nd Psalm these words particularly—'The righteous shall compass me about, for Thou shalt deal bountifully with me.' Has not this been, and is it not now, remarkably verified, by those filling almost the highest stations to the lowest; by persons of almost all denominations have I not been compassed about? My prison concerns have thus brought me, a poor and very unworthy creature, into public notice, and I may most humbly adopt this language of the 71st Psalm, 'I am as a wonder unto many, but Thou art my strong Refuge. Oh! let my mouth be filled with Thy praise, and with Thy honor all the day:' but, O Lord! merciful and gracious, Thou who knowest the heart and its wanderings, and also its pantings after Thyself, be pleased yet to manifest Thyself to be a God hearing and answering prayer. Thou hast, in times of deep adversity and great affliction, when the heart of Thy handmaid was ready to say Refuge failed her, Thou hast then been her Stronghold, her Rock and her Fortress; so that she has not been greatly moved nor overcome by her soul's enemy. Be pleased, most merciful and gracious Lord God Almighty, now to keep her in the day of prosperity, when the righteous compass her about, that she may be for a time even as a wonder to many. Keep her, O Lord, even as in Thine own Almighty hand, that no evil befall her, nor any plague come nigh her dwelling; and as Thou hast, so far in Thine abundant mercy and loving kindness delivered her soul from death, oh be pleased to keep her feet from falling! hold up her goings in Thy paths, that her footsteps slip not; and increasingly enable her, at all times, under all circumstances, in heights and in depths, in life and in death, to show forth Thy praise, to walk faithfully and circumspectly before Thee, obeying Thee in all things, in Thy fear

and in Thy love; abounding in the truth as it is in Jesus; ever giving Thee, O Lord God on High, with Christ Jesus our Lord, and Thy Holy Spirit our Comforter, one God, blessed forever, the glory due unto Thee, now in time, and in an endless eternity. Amen, amen."

Let us observe, as we go along, how well this prayer was answered; with what perfect grace she was enabled to keep her heart to its first love, and her feet in the path of Divine appointment, while princes and nobles of the earth were paying her the most flattering honors.

"During this winter she received many letters of inquiry from different parts of the country in relation to the system pursued in Newgate; ladies wished to form similar associations; magistrates wished to improve the state of prisoners under their control, &c., &c., and all these required minute and carefully considered replies. Some of the most distinguished and influential persons in the kingdom were anxious to witness for themselves what had been done in the prisons, and a part of almost every day was spent in accompanying such parties thither. Many were asking for counsel, others for employment which they supposed Elizabeth Fry could obtain for them; and almost constant applications from the poor who thought her purse as inexhaustible as her good will, 'humbly praying' for assistance. Her benevolent feelings would hardly suffer any of these to pass unheeded; and her daughters, the oldest of whom was in her seventeenth year proved efficient helpers in answering the demands.

"During the former period it had been the practice for convicts on the night preceding their departure for Botany Bay, (where they were transported for certain crimes,) to pull down and break or burn everything within their reach; and to go off shouting with the most hardened effrontery.

But when the last went out they took an affectionate leave of their companions, and expressed the utmost gratitude to their benefactors, and the next day entered their conveyances peaceably; and their departure, in the tears that were shed and the mournful decorum that was observed, resembled a funeral procession; and so orderly was their behavior that it was deemed unnecessary to send more than half the usual escort. As a proof that moral and religious instruction had produced some effect upon their minds, when these poor creatures were going, those who remained entreated that their share of the profits (a little fund they were allowed to collect for themselves, kept in a box under the care of the Ladies Committee) might all be given to those who were about to leave them.

"In ten months after the working system had been introduced the women had made nearly twenty thousand articles of clothing, and their knitting produced from sixty to a hundred pairs of socks and stockings every month. Their earnings averaged about eighteen pence per week for each one."

"Elizabeth Fry was informed that some were still gaming in the prison. She went alone, assembled the prisoners and told them what she had heard,—that she feared it was true, dwelt upon the sin of gaming, its evil effects upon their minds, the interruption it caused, and the distaste it excited for labor, told them how much the report had grieved her and said 'She would consider it a proof of their regard if they would have the candor and kindness to bring the cards to her.' She did not expect that they would do it, as it would be betraying themselves. But soon after she had retired to the ladies' room there was a gentle tap at the door, and in came a trembling girl who, in a manner that indicated real feeling, expressed her sorrow for having broken the rules of so kind a friend, and presented her pack of cards. She was soon followed by another and another, until Elizabeth Fry had received five packs which she burnt in their

presence; assuring them that so far from its being remembered against them she should 'remember it in another way.' A few days after this she took with her some presents of clothes, and calling the first one gave her a neat muslin handkerchief. To her surprise the girl said she hoped Elizabeth Fry would excuse her being so forward, but if she might say it she felt exceedingly disappointed. She had hoped that Elizabeth Fry would have given her a Bible with her own name written in it, which she would value beyond anything else and would always keep it and read it. This was irresistible. The treasure so much desired was brought, and Elizabeth Fry assured a friend that she never gave a Bible which was received with so much interest and satisfaction, nor one that she thought more likely to do good. This had been one of the worst of girls, and had behaved very badly upon her trial; but she conducted herself afterwards in so amiable a manner that she appeared 'almost without a flaw,' and it was hoped 'would become a valuable member of society.'"^{*}

On the 27th of Feb. 1818, Mrs. Fry was called upon to give evidence before a Committee of the House of Commons, in the course of which she said, "Our habit is constantly to read the Scriptures to them twice a day—many of them are taught, some can read a little themselves. It has an astonishing effect; I never saw the Scriptures received in the same way. When I have sometimes gone and said it was my intention to read, they would flock up stairs after me, as if it were a great pleasure I had to offer them."

When asked by the Committee if the ladies confined themselves to the reading of the Scriptures without inculcating any peculiar doctrines Mrs. Fry replied,—“We con-

^{*}Life by S. Corder.

sider from the situation we fill, as it respects the public, as well as the poor creatures themselves, that it would be highly indecorous to press any peculiar doctrine of any kind,—anything beyond the fundamental doctrines of Scripture.”

It was mentioned to her that one of the prisoners had said it was “more terrible to be brought up before Mrs. Fry, than before the judge;” on which she remarked:—“I think I may say we have full power among them, though we use nothing but kindness. I have never proposed a punishment, and yet I think it is impossible, in a well regulated house, to have rules more strictly attended to than they are.”

When asked if she thought any reformation could be effected without employment, she replied, “I should believe it impossible. We may instruct as we will, but if we allow them their time, and they have nothing to do, they naturally must return to their evil passions.”

The report of the Parliamentary Committee contains the following sentence:—“The benevolent exertions of Mrs. Fry and her friends, in the female department of the prison, have indeed, by the establishment of a school, by providing work and encouraging industrious habits, produced a most gratifying change. But much must be ascribed to unremitting personal attention and influence.”

The duties of this position, however, were by no means all of an agreeable kind. The severity of English law at this time, which made every degree of forgery, as well as many other secondary offenses punishable with death, rendered executions terribly frequent. It is estimated that had the

laws been carried fully into effect, they would have required an average of more than four executions per day in Great Britain and Ireland. Almost every device was resorted to by the humane among the officers and courts to evade these sanguinary enactments.

Elizabeth Fry was among the earliest to express effectively her disapproval of these unchristian statutes. She felt the wrong with great keenness when unfortunate women, often misled by worse companions were compelled to answer for some not unpardonable act of dishonesty with their lives, and the more especially after her labors with them had brought repentance. A sad case of this kind occurred about the time we are speaking of, February, 1818, when two women were executed for forgery. At six o'clock in the morning, one of them addressed the following letter to Elizabeth Fry:

“HONORED MADAM:—

As the only way of expressing my gratitude to you for your very great attention to the care of my poor soul,—I feel I may have appeared more silent than perhaps some would have been on so melancholy an event; but believe me, my dear madam, I have felt most acutely the awful situation I have been in. The mercies of God are boundless, and I trust, through His grace this affliction is sanctified to me, and through the Saviour's blood my sins will be washed away. I have much to be thankful for; I feel such serenity of mind and fortitude. God of His infinite mercy grant I may feel as I do now in the last moments! Pray, madam, present my most grateful thanks to the worthy Dr. Cotton and Mr. Baker, and all our kind friends, the ladies, and Mrs. Guy. It was a feeling I had of my own unworthiness made me more diffident of speaking as was perhaps

looked for. I once more return you my most grateful thanks. It is now past six o'clock. I have not one moment to spare. I must devote the remainder to the service of my offended God.

With respect your humble servant,
CHARLOTTE NEWMAN."

On the same day she received the following letter from William Wilberforce:

"Kensington Gore, 17th. Feb., 1818.

"MY DEAR MADAM:—

I think I need not assure you that I have not forgotten you this morning. In truth, having been awake very early, and, lying in peace and comfort and safety, the different situation of the poor women impressed itself strongly on my mind.

"I shall be glad, and Mrs. Wilberforce also, I assure you, to hear that your bodily health has not suffered from your mental anxiety, and I will try to get a sight of you when I can, to hear your account and remarks on the effects of the last few days, both on the poor objects themselves and the prison companions.

"With real esteem and regard, I am, my dear Madam

"Yours very sincerely,

"W. WILBERFORCE."

A still sadder case than the above is thus recorded on page 275 of Mrs. Corder's biography, abbreviated from the original account.

"During the spring of this year executions had become so frequent that they were made subjects for investigation and for public as well as private discussion. The sanguinary provisions of the penal code were beheld with a senti-

ment of disapprobation, and even abhorrence, before unfelt. The wretched tenants of the 'condemned cells,' after having received the sentence of death at the Old Bailey, awaited, with mingled hope and fear, the decision of the Council, by whom some were selected for mercy, leaving the others to suffer the extreme penalty of the law. No reasons were assigned by the Council for this distinction; each one therefore hoped to escape the dreadful doom.

"Among those who were waiting in this state of terrible suspense was a young woman named Harriet Skelton. There was something peculiarly touching in the case of this poor creature. 'A child might have read her character in her countenance—open, confiding, affectionate, possessing strong feelings, but neither hardened in depravity nor capable of cunning.' Under the influence of the man whom she loved she had been induced to pass some forged notes: 'thus adding another to the dismal list of those who, with the finest impulses of our nature, uncontrolled by religion, have been lured to their own destruction.' Skelton was ordered for execution. The sentence was unlooked for: 'her deportment in prison had been good, amenable to regulations, quiet and orderly. Some of her companions in guilt were heard to say that they supposed she was chosen for death because she was better prepared than the rest of them.' Elizabeth Fry was vehemently urged to exert herself on behalf of this unhappy woman. She made various attempts, one through the Duke of Gloucester who with other dwellers in palaces and lordly halls, visited the poor convict in Newgate; and 'his former companion in the dance' led the Duke through the gloom and darkness of that most gloomy of prisons—a new scene indeed to him and to many others who through life had been 'nursed on the downy lap of ease,' in luxurious abodes that strangely contrasted with the 'dark vaulted passages, the clanking fetters, the offensive smell, the grating sound as the heavy key was turned, the massive bolt drawn back, and the iron-

sheathed door forced reluctantly open'—unaccustomed, and as if unwilling to admit such guests.

"The Duke of Gloucester made a noble effort to save Skelton by an application to Lord Sidmouth. He also accompanied Elizabeth Fry to the Bank Directors. But all entreaties were in vain. Lord Sidmouth was annoyed by Elizabeth Fry's earnest solicitations, and highly offended at some disclosures which involved a degree of censure on the Bank Directors. There were, in the case, circumstances of collusion, on the part of some who were concerned in bringing this unfortunate creature to the gallows, of which Elizabeth Fry might perhaps have spoken with a degree of freedom that exceeded the limits of strict prudence: but who can read the tale without a strong and sympathetic interest in her humane appeal for mercy? or without deep regret and surprise that this appeal could have been regarded in the light of an offence? And how does the emotion acquire intensity when we contemplate the dreadful severity of the enactment which, within a few years afterwards, was, through the aroused and resistless force of public opinion, expunged from the statute book!

"The claims of *mercy* had rendered it very important to Elizabeth Fry that she should have access to the Secretary of State. She had been wont to intercede with Lord Sidmouth on behalf of those whom his decision might either consign to an untimely and ignominious death, or award a further term of earthly probation. But now her influence with him was lost. She endeavored, by a personal interview, to remove the unfavorable impression which he had imbibed, and to convince him that, although she might have erred in judgment, her intentions had been upright, and her desire sincere not to oppose his wishes. But all was in vain: his heart was steeled against remonstrances and nothing but pain resulted from the interview.

"Elizabeth Fry had been accompanied in this unsatisfac-

tory visit by the excellent Countess Harcourt, one of the ladies of the court, and, under her special care and protection, had, on the same day, reluctantly, and with a heavy heart, to mingle in a very different scene, and to encounter objects of a remarkably opposite character. The aged Queen Charlotte, who, through a lengthened life, had appeared little moved by questions of a philanthropic character, her interest being much confined within the sphere of her court and its cold formalities and etiquette, had heard of the wonderful changes in Newgate and elsewhere, wrought through the instrumentality of Elizabeth Fry, and had become impressed by the evidences of an awakened and powerfully religious feeling, which had begun to operate on the minds of some persons of rank and influence who had witnessed the labors of this devoted woman; and on the occasion of a public examination of the children of some large metropolitan schools in the Egyptian Hall of the Mansion House, the Queen intimated her desire to be present, and requested that Elizabeth Fry would also attend on the occasion. This was an injunction that could not, with any degree of propriety, be disregarded; and accordingly, though as she says against her will, Elizabeth Fry, in company with the Countess Harcourt, repaired thither. It had been intended that she should be presented to the Queen in the drawing-room. This would have been much more select and agreeable. But, through some misunderstanding, Lady Harcourt and Elizabeth Fry were conducted to the Hall and placed on the side of the platform which was crowded with waving feathers, jewels, and order; several of the bishops standing near her, the great Hall lined with spectators, and in its center hundreds of poor children from the different schools. Elizabeth Fry was an object of general attraction. After a time the Queen perceived her, and advanced to address her. It was a striking scene, and painted by an artist—the diminutive stature of the Queen, covered with diamonds, but her coun-