

CHAPTER ELEVENTH.

THE PEARL GATE.

We can see the ripening toward Heaven in many of the later entries of Elizabeth Fry's journal.

"*Sixth Month, 25th.*—A week of considerable occupation: Second-day the British Society Committee; an interesting meeting with those beloved ladies; so much oneness of heart and purpose, a delightful evidence of the sweetness of Christian unity, and how those who differ in secondary points may agree in the essential one, and be one in Christ. We have cause for thankfulness in the excellent arrangements made by Lord Stanley for our poor prisoners in Van Diemen's Land; he appears so carefully to have attended to the representations we made respecting the evils existing there and to have proposed good measures to remedy them."

During this week she attended the Quarterly Meeting of Friends at Hertford. This was the last time that she left home expressly on religious service. But wherever she went, she was the same wise counselor and loving comforter. In July she wrote:—

"Last First-day was one not to be forgotten; much of the morning without clouds. My dear brother and sister Buxton were at meeting. I felt it my duty to encourage the weary, and enlarged upon our foolishness, yet now the

Lord is made unto His people wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. There were some who appeared much impressed. Through the whole of that day, and into the next renewed peace rested upon my spirit.

"As the month passed on," says her biographer, "Elizabeth Fry showed increasing symptoms of illness, the consequence, doubtless, of bodily fatigue and mental exertion, the effects of which were severely aggravated by a chill from sitting one evening in the garden at Upton Lane."

This induced her to visit Landgate, in company with her sister-in-law, of the same name, also in declining health, to obtain the benefit of sea air. While here she wrote:

"I have at times passed through a good deal of conflict and humiliation in this indisposition, and it is a real exercise of faith to me—the way in which I am tried by my illness. I suppose it arises from my extremely susceptible nerves that are so affected when the body is out of order as to cast quite a veil over the mind. I am apt to query whether I am not deceiving myself in supposing I am a servant of the Lord, so ill to endure suffering, and to be so anxious to get rid of it; but it has been my earnest prayer that I might truly say, 'Not as I will, but as Thou wilt.' Lord, help me! I pray that I may be enabled to cast all my burthen and all my care upon Thee, that I may rest in the full assurance of faith in Thy love, pity, mercy and grace."

"After several distressing weeks she was moved to Tonbridge Wells, closely and faithfully nursed by her two youngest daughters." But the change was unavailing, and she returned to Upton near the end of September, and remained confined to her sick chamber during the winter of 1842 and '43. Her bodily sufferings were very great, but her soul had its hiding-place.

"Upton, Tenth Month, 10th.—My God hath not forgotten to be gracious, or shut up His tender mercies from me. It appears to me that all of nature is to be brought low, for what is of the Lord only can stand the day of humiliation. I may thankfully say, I am quiet and sustained in spirit, but do not often know peace to flow as a river, as at some former times. Still help is constantly near from the sanctuary, though I abide under a sense of deep unworthiness before the Lord; but what can I do but wait in faith until He be pleased fully to clothe me with the garments of His righteousness and His salvation? I feel I can do nothing for myself."

"One afternoon when some members of her family were reading with her, she was unable to attend to a very interesting religious biography, saying 'it is too touching to me,—too affecting.' She added, after a pause, 'How I feel for the poor when very ill; in a state like my own, for instance, when 'good' ladies go to see them.—Religious truths so strongly brought forward, often injudiciously.' She went on speaking on this subject and then dwelt on 'the exquisite tenderness of the Saviour's ministrations;' 'His tone and manner to sinners.'

"Soon afterwards she resumed, in the most impressive manner, saying that 'religious truth' was opened to her and supplied to her, 'inwardly, not by man's ministration but according to her need,' adding, 'if I may so say, it is my life.'

"She frequently spoke of not being called to active service now, and that she had no desire as to recovery; on the contrary she was 'able quite to leave it.' Frequently she repeated to those about her, '*I feel the foundation underneath me sure.*'

"One evening she opened her heart on her deep and earnest desires for the good of her children: of her 'great sufferings'—'greater than any one knows'—that if they were to last no one could wish for her life; but soon added

'there is one thing I would willingly live for—the good of my husband and children and my fellow-creatures.'

"On the night of October the 25th, her spirit was remarkably strengthened to declare her faith and hope in God. She quoted many passages of Scripture to prove that faith must work by love, and that faith, if true, must produce works. She said with the text, 'He that keepeth my saying shall never see death,' take this one also 'He that believeth on me shall never die.' She afterwards expressed, in a tone of deepest feeling, her 'perfect confidence,' her 'full assurance that neither life nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, should be able to separate her from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ, our Lord,' adding, 'my whole trust is in Him, my entire confidence.'—'I know in whom I have believed, and can commit all to Him who has loved me and given Himself for me; whether for life or death, sickness or health, time or eternity.'

"In the course of the same day she said very emphatically to one of her daughters, 'I can say one thing—since my heart was touched at seventeen years old I believe I never have awakened from sleep, in sickness or in health, by day, or by night, without my first waking thought being how best I might serve my Lord.'"

This prayer is among the few remaining entries in her Journal:

"Lord! undertake Thyself for me; Thy arm of power can alone heal, help, and deliver; and in Thee do I trust and hope, though at times deeply tried and cast down before Thee; yet, O Lord! Thou art my hope, and be therefore entreated of Thy poor, sorrowful, and often afflicted servant, and arise for my help. Leave not my poor soul destitute, but through the fulness of Thine own power, mercy

and love keep me alive unto Thyself unto the end! that nothing may separate me from Thy love, that I may endure unto the end; and when the end comes that I may be altogether Thine, and dwell with Thee, if it be but the lowest place within the gate, where I may behold Thy glory and Thy holiness, and forever rest in Thee. I do earnestly entreat Thee that to the very last I may never deny Thee, or in any way have my life or conversation inconsistent with my love to Thee, and most earnest desire to live for Thy glory; for I have loved Thee, O Lord, and desire to serve Thee without reserve. Be entreated that through Thy faithfulness and the power of Thy own Spirit I may serve Thee unto the end. Amen."

The following notes are from the Journal of her son William who, notwithstanding he was now anxiously caring for his mother, and watching for the "veiled ferryman," preceded her, by more than a year, in the final crossing.

"The evening of the 29th was one of the greatest suffering and distress; such as I never remember to have witnessed. But through all her faith was triumphant and her confidence unshaken. I endeavored to remember a few of her expressions and have succeeded in calling to mind the following:—

"I believe this is not death, but it is as passing through the valley of the shadow of death, and perhaps with more suffering, from more sensitiveness; but the Rock is here; the distress is awful, but He has been with me."

"I feel that He is with me, and will be with me, even to the end. David says 'why hast Thou forsaken me?' I do not feel that I am forsaken. In my judgment I believe this is not death, but it is *as* death: it is nigh unto death.' She frequently expressed fears of being impatient. 'May none of you be called to pass through such a furnace; but

still my sufferings have been mitigated through mercy and grace—fulness of grace! Now my dear William be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, and then Thy labor shall not be in vain in the Lord. Oh the blessedness of having desired to be on the Lord's side! (not that I have any merit of my own.) I cannot express even in my greatest trials and tribulations the blessedness of His service! My life has been a remarkable one; much have I had to go through—more than mortal knows, or even can know; my sorrows at times have been bitter, but my consolations sweet! In my lowest estates, through grace my love to my Master has never failed, nor to my family, nor to my fellow-mortals. This illness may be for death, or it may not, according to His will; but He will never forsake me even should He be pleased to take me this night."

To one of the "nursing sisters" who was attending her at one time she said, "I am of the same mind as Paul, 'for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.' What a grand thought it is! everlasting to everlasting, without trouble and without pain; to meet there and together be forever with Christ."

Reviewing her history she said to an intimate friend; "My life has been one of great vicissitudes; mine has been a hidden path, hidden from every *human* eye. I have had deep humiliations and sorrows to pass through. I can truly say I have "wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way, and found no city to dwell in;" and yet how wonderfully have I been sustained. I have passed through many and great dangers, many ways;—I have been tried with the applause of the world, and none know how great a trial *that* has been, and the deep *humiliations* of it; and yet I

fully believe that it is not nearly so *dangerous* as being made much of in religious society. There is a snare even in religious unity, if we are not on the watch. I have sometimes felt that it is not so dangerous to be made much of by the world, as by those whom we think highly of in our own Society. The more I have been made much of by the world the more I have been inwardly humbled. I could often adopt the words of Sir Francis Bacon, 'When I have ascended before men, I have descended in humiliation before God.'

In physical suffering it would seem that little could be added to what she was called to bear during this terrible winter, and though usually clear, the inward sky was occasionally darkened that, like her beloved Master she might be tried in all things, for the encouragement of those who seem to themselves forsaken. The friend last mentioned visiting her a month later and perceiving that she was much depressed, remarked: "I believe there is an open door set before thee, although thou mayst not always be able to *perceive* it open." "The precious invalid wept much, and after a time said, 'Oh yes: it *is* an open door.' Presently she continued, 'The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, I believe He will never leave me nor forsake me;' and after a solemn pause she added, 'I have passed through deep baptisms of spirit in this illness,—I may say, unworthy as I am to say it, that I have had to drink, in my small measure, of the Saviour's cup when He said, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' Some of my friends have thought there was a danger of my being exalted, but I believe the danger has been on the opposite side of my being too low.'

As the spring of 1844 advanced, the conflict became less severe so that she was able to be taken to Bath for a short time, and returned somewhat improved. But afflictions of still another kind now awaited her, and she for whose departure others had watched and for whom all had felt such intense solicitude, was to be herself sorely bereaved before her own place became vacant. First her beloved sister-in-law, fellow minister and frequent traveling companion, Elizabeth Fry, who had long sat beside her in the home Meeting at Plaistow, entered into rest on the second of July. This was but a beginning, and something of the approaching changes seemed to weigh on the invalid's spirit which now "dwelt much and often on the invisible world." She even dreamed that there were graves opened all around her. On the 18th of the same month, July, a favorite little grandson was taken; August 15th, a lovely grand-daughter followed, "one of the sweetest blossoms that could gladden the heart of a parent." This was by scarlet fever in the family of her beloved son William; and before the fearful malady finished its work the father and two of his daughters lay together in one grave.

This was a heavy blow for the great motherly heart of Elizabeth Fry. Some said "can she hear this and live?" But she met it as she had met the pains of the flesh, and the fear of man, by putting on the whole armor of God. "She wept abundantly, almost unceasingly, but she dwelt constantly on the unseen world, and on those passages in the Bible which speak of the happy state of the righteous." Her journal, written before the last grand-daughter's death, describes her feelings.

"*Walmar, Eighth Month, 29th.*—Sorrow upon sorrow! Since I last wrote we have lost by death first, my beloved sister, Elizabeth Fry; second, Gurney Reynolds, our sweet, good grandson; third, Juliana Fry, my dearest William and Julia's second daughter; and fourth, above all, our most beloved son, William Storrs Fry, who appeared to catch the infection from his little girl, and died on Third-day of scarlet fever, the 27th of this month. A loss inexpressible—such a son, husband, friend and brother! but I trust that he is forever at rest in Jesus, through the fulness of His love and grace. The trial is almost inexpressible. Oh! may the Lord sustain us in this time of deep distress. Oh, dear Lord! keep Thy unworthy, poor, sick servant, in this time of unutterable trial; keep me sound in faith and clear in mind, and be very near to us all—the poor widow and children in this time of deepest distress, and grant that this awful dispensation may be blessed to our souls. Amen.

"This tenderly beloved child attended me to meeting the last First-day I was home, and sat beside me on the women's side."

The event last spoken of is thus described by her daughters:—

"A change of scene and air seemed so important for her that her son William's success in obtaining a very suitable house in Walmar was a real matter of gratulation; but there was another office of love for that beloved one to perform for his mother singularly suited to the bond of love and sympathy which had so long united them, and eminently fitted to be his last.

"She had long and earnestly desired again to attend the meeting for worship at Plaistow. It was proposed, from Sunday to Sunday, but the difficult process of dressing was never accomplished till long after eleven o'clock, the hour

when the Meeting assembled. An attempt was made on the 28th of July, but totally failed. Her disappointment was extreme, and the hold it took of her spirits so grievous that it was resolved to make the effort at any cost the following Sunday. Her son William undertook to carry out her wishes. Drawn by himself and a younger son in her wheeled chair, she was taken up to the Meeting a few minutes after Friends had assembled, followed by her husband, her children, and attendants. Her son William seated himself close by her side, and the rest near her. The silence that prevailed was singularly solemn. After some time, in a clear voice, she addressed the Meeting. The prominent topic of her discourse was 'The death of the righteous.' She expressed the deepest thankfulness, alluding to her sister Elizabeth Fry, for the mercies vouchsafed to 'one who having labored long amongst them had been called from time to eternity.' She quoted that text, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for they cease from their labors and their works do follow them.' She dwelt on the purposes of affliction, on the utter weakness and infirmity of the flesh; she tenderly exhorted the young, 'The little children amongst us,' referring to the death of little Gurney Reynolds. She urged the need of devotedness of heart and steadiness of purpose; she raised a song of praise for the eternal hope offered to the Christian; and concluded with those words of Isaiah,—'Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty, they shall behold the Land that is very far off.' Prayer was soon afterwards offered by her in much the same strain. He joined her in that solemn act who never was to worship with her again, till before the Throne and the Lamb they should unite in that ineffable song of praise which stays not, night nor day, for ever.

"About six weeks after the decease of her son," says Mrs. Corder, "she was again favored with strength to attend the meeting at Plaistow. The occasion was a *memo-*

able one. She was led with great power and solemnity to address the different classes then assembled; and perhaps few could remember a Meeting in which her gift in the ministry had been exercised with greater weight and clearness, or with a more remarkable appropriateness to the varied conditions of those who were present: and she afterwards supplicated with a degree of heavenly power and unction that deeply affected many hearts. From this time she continued frequently to labor amongst her friends in the ministry of the word; and her bodily strength gradually increased, so that, though very feeble, she was able with some assistance, to walk a little."

On the first of November she addressed her last letter to the Committee of the Ladies British Society.

"MY MUCH-LOVED FRIENDS:

Amidst many sorrows that have been permitted for me to pass through and bodily suffering, I still feel a deep and lively interest in the cause of poor prisoners; and earnest is my prayer that the Lord of all grace may be very near to help you to be steadfast in the important Christian work of seeking to win the poor wanderers to return, repent and live; that they may know Christ to be their Saviour, Redeemer, and hope of glory. May the Holy Spirit of God direct your steps, strengthen your hearts, and enable you and me to glorify our Holy Head, in doing and suffering, even unto the end: and when the end comes, through a Saviour's love and merits, may we be received into glory and everlasting peace.

In Christian love and fellowship,

I am affectionately your friend,

ELIZABETH FRY."

The list of near and dear friends that were to pass on

before her and swell the company in waiting to welcome her spirit to its final rest, was not yet complete. On the first of December a niece, "daughter of her late beloved sister Louisa Hoare, died,—a few days after her infant son." On this occasion Elizabeth Fry wrote:—

"*Eleventh Month, 2nd.*—The accounts of to-day are deeply affecting—to have the grave once more (and so soon) opened amongst us. What can we say, but that 'it is the Lord;' for the flesh is very weak and these things are hard to our nature. I have felt the pain of this fresh sorrow, but desire that all most closely concerned may find Him very near to them who 'healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds.' My love and sympathy to all most nearly interested. We have our poor Julia and her children here, and very touching it is to be with them. I am, I think, just now very poorly, and much cast down, but I remember the Scriptural words, 'cast down, but not destroyed.'"

The increasing illness of her brother-in-law, Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, now enlisted her warm interest and sympathy. To his eldest daughter she wrote:

"*Twelfth Month, 1844.*

"MY DEAREST PRISCILLA:

Thanks for thy kindness in writing to me in this time of deep sorrow; but, strange to say, before thy note came I had been so much with you in spirit that I was ready to believe thy dearest father was sinking. I have felt such unity with him spiritually. My text for him, in my low state this morning was, 'The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an ever-