

**SKETCH OF THE ORIGIN AND  
RESULTS OF LADIES' PRISON  
ASSOCIATIONS: WITH HINTS FOR  
THE FORMATION OF LOCAL  
ASSOCIATION**

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Sketch of the Origin and Results of Ladies' Prison Associations: With Hints for the Formation of Local Association by Elizabeth Gurney

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**ELIZABETH GURNEY**

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SKETCH  
OF  
THE ORIGIN AND RESULTS  
OF  
**Ladies' Prison Associations,**  
WITH  
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LOCAL ASSOCIATIONS.

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1832.



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ETC.

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

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It having been suggested, that a short account of the commencement, progress, and success of the measures adopted for the Reformation of Female Prisoners would be useful, not only for the information of those who are disposed to aid and support, but also for the encouragement of those who are willing personally to labour in this deeply interesting and necessary work; the Committee of the Ladies' British Society, established for the reformation of Female Pri-

soners, deem it incumbent upon them to make public the following statement:—

In the year 1813, in consequence of the representations of several individuals of the Society of Friends, Mrs. Joseph Fry first visited the Prison of Newgate.

In two wards and two cells, comprising about 190 superficial square yards, 300 females were at that time confined—those who had not been tried, and who are, therefore, by our laws presumed innocent,—those who had been convicted, whatever might have been the magnitude of their offence (even though they had received sentence of death) were associated together without distinction or classification; and saw their friends, took charge of their children, cooked, washed, ate, drank, and slept within this limited space.

It is not possible, neither would it be desirable, accurately to represent the consequences which ensued; the atmosphere of the rooms, the ferocious manners and expressions of the women toward each other, and



her watch before she entered amongst these wretched beings, observing, that even his presence would not prevent its being violently torn from her.

In consequence of this visit, clothes were procured for some of the poor children by means of private benevolence, and the Bible was occasionally read to the prisoners; but it was not until Christmas, 1816, that Mrs. Fry's visits became regular; and in the mean time, the Gaol Committee made several arrangements to mitigate the horrors which had previously prevailed.

It was, however, with great pain that Mrs. Fry found many of the women playing at cards—others reading improper books; others again begging at the grating and fighting for the money; in short, that vice, and its attendant, misery, were still triumphant throughout the gaol.

The prisoners complained, and daily renewed their complaint, that they wanted employment; and it soon became evident that this was the most serious evil and predisposing cause of every vice; the habits of those individuals who were disposed to idleness,—

became confirmed, and the industrious were soon contaminated; there was nothing good appointed to be done, and the mind therefore turned naturally to that which was bad: many who entered Newgate comparatively innocent, left it depraved and profligate, and whilst society, in theory, appeared to be punishing individuals for past offences, they were in fact not only providing leisure and opportunity to learn, but even masters to teach, the mode of committing more extensive and injurious crimes.

As at that period there was not any hope of procuring proper employment for the women, the exertions were originally confined to about thirty children, who, surrounded by every thing that could contaminate the mind and destroy the morals, appeared at the same time to suffer greatly in bodily health from the pestilential state of the atmosphere, and the want of proper food, clothing, and exercise.

A few of these Children had been committed for offences, but the greater part were under seven years of age, and according to the rules of the prison admitted to be with

the convicts; abandoned as their parents were, it was still hoped they would be found alive to the feelings of natural affection. After one or two visits, Mrs. Fry was, at her own request, admitted alone in the wards, and on this occasion she made her proposal for the establishment of a School for the Children of the Prisoners—a proposal which was received even by the most hardened with gratitude and with tears of joy; they themselves selected a very fit prisoner to act as school-mistress: in a few days, through the kindness of the Sheriffs, a separate cell was obtained, and the school proceeded most rapidly, interrupted only by the anxious entreaties of young women, and even of aged prisoners, to be taught and employed.

Mrs. Fry, and a few of her friends, who had associated with her for this purpose, continued their attendance at the school daily, and it pleased God to bless their efforts with the happiest success; it was these daily visits which brought them more and more intimately acquainted with the state of the Female Prisoners in general, and excited in their minds the strongest wish to become in-