

**A BRIEF MEMOIR
OF ELIZABETH FRY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649424566

A Brief Memoir of Elizabeth Fry by Anonymous

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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ANONYMOUS

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PHILADELPHIA:
PUBLISHED BY THE
ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS FOR THE DIFFUSION OF RELIGIOUS
AND USEFUL KNOWLEDGE,
No. 109 North Tenth St.
1860.

289.6
i.c.4'0

NOTE.

This little volume is reprinted from one of the publications of the London Tract Association of Friends, with a few unimportant changes, and the addition of some passages taken from an Obituary in the "Annual Monitor."

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ON the page of divine inspiration is inscribed the sacred decree, "The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance." This has, doubtless, a special reference to that *witness* which is *in heaven* — that *record upon high* — by which the actions of the just are registered in the "Book of Life:" yet it also indicates that the bright course of those faithful servants of God and benefactors of mankind, who "rest from their labours," and whose "works do follow them," is designed to serve as an ensign throughout succeeding generations; exhibiting, by the force of a holy example, the blessedness and the duty of treading in that pathway of christian dedication, in which they sought to follow Him who "went about doing good," and who "came to seek and to save that which was lost." In reviewing the life and character of Elizabeth Fry, in reflecting on the self-sacrificing benevolence which actuated her spirit, and in tracing the deep current of christian piety from which it sprang, the reader may be animated to seek, like her, to pro-

mote the glory of God, and to spread the knowledge of Him and of His Son Jesus Christ.

This excellent person was the third daughter of John Gurney, of Earlham, in the county of Norfolk. She was born in the year 1781. Her mother died before she had attained her twelfth year. Deprived by this bereavement of the judicious care of a tenderly beloved parent, the youthful group of eleven children were subjected to little restraint. The mind of their indulgent father does not appear to have then yielded to the deep religious convictions that subsequently influenced him. His daughters were allowed to participate in the amusements of fashionable life, and also to associate with persons, who, whilst conspicuous for talent and literary research, were sceptical on the all-important truths of christian doctrine. But, whilst thus exposed to the seductions of vain delights and speculative opinions, a gracious Providence watched over the interesting band; and, through the renewed visitations of the "day-spring from on high," mingled with chastening dispensations of sorrow, it pleased their Heavenly Father to attract them from the paths of worldly pleasure, and gently to lead them in the way of safety and peace.

The first of the sisters who declined the pursuits of gaiety, was the subject of this sketch. She did not renounce them from any blind subservience to the christian views of the Society of Friends, of which she was, by birth, a nominal member. A gradually imbibed, but deeply-seated conviction of the value of time — of the responsibility of occupying it

usefully, and of the powerful influence of example, led her to resist the inclination, so inherent in our fallen nature, to indulge in self-gratification and worldly ease. She was, during her earlier years, remarkable for much originality of thought and quickness of comprehension; was timid, yet very decided in judgment and will; and, even whilst a child, evinced a disposition to promote the well-being, and to soothe the cares and sorrows, of those around her.

Before Elizabeth Gurney reached her seventeenth year, she commenced the practice of recording, in the form of a journal, her secret conflicts, and the convictions of religious truth, as they were impressed upon her youthful heart, animating it with love to her Almighty Parent, and to all His intelligent creatures.

In some of her first entries, she says, "I feel by experience how much entering into the world hurts me; worldly company, I think, materially injures; it excites a false stimulus, such as a love of pomp, pride, vanity, jealousy, and ambition; it leads to think about *dress* and such *trifles*; and, when out of it, we fly to novels and scandal, or something of that kind, for entertainment." "If I have long to live in this world, may I bear misfortunes with fortitude; do what I can to alleviate the sorrows of others, and exert what power I have to increase happiness." "Pride and vanity are too much the incentives to most of the actions of men; they produce a love of admiration, and, in thinking of the opinions of others, we are too apt to forget the monitor within." In

her next entry she remarks, "Trifles occupy me far too much, such as dress," &c., &c. Again, she describes the effect of frivolous pursuits, — "greatly dissipated by hearing the band — idle and relaxed in mind — music has a great effect on me." Such were some of the varied and continuous workings of the opposing influences of nature and grace, in a mind not yet subdued by the power of the Holy Spirit, nor strengthened by a living faith in Christ, who alone can give the victory over the world. Whilst thus perceiving her own frequent deviations from the path of duty, and conscious that without assistance from on high she could never attain any settled peace of soul, or fulfil the purpose designed by Him who had called her into being, it pleased Infinite Wisdom to direct the steps of one of his gospel messengers — a stranger from a foreign land — to the vicinity of her home. She listened to him as he preached the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, and, in a remarkable manner, did the heart-awakening appeal which he was led to utter, find a response in the convictions sealed on her mind by the Holy Spirit. The solemn truths which she heard were but very faintly perceived by her understanding, but she felt that they were blessed realities; and the baptizing power, that accompanied the declaration of them, penetrated the deepest recesses of her soul. The stability and the soundness of the impressions thus imbibed, may be tested by the influence which they exercised over her inclinations and conduct. She was, at this important

juncture, taken by her father to London, where she remained several weeks, exposed to a variety of temptations — introduced into the gayest circles of fashionable and polished life, frequenting theatres, the opera, and other places of diversion — all calculated to extinguish the feeble flame of devotion which had been kindled in her bosom; but, having tasted something of the peace and joy that result from yielding to the attractions of the love of God, the enticements of a vain world had lost much of their fascination; and her journal tells us, “I went to Drury Lane in the evening. I must own that I was extremely disappointed: to be sure the house was grand and dazzling, but I had no other feeling, whilst there, than that of wishing it over.” Some days later, she says, “I own I enter into the gay world reluctantly. I do not like plays; I think them so artificial that they are, to me, not interesting, and all seems so — so *very* far from pure virtue and nature.” But a few days afterwards she dwells on a *different* scene: “I went to meeting in the evening. I have not enough eloquence to describe it. William Savery’s sermon was, in the first part, very affecting; it was from the Revelations: he explained his text beautifully, and awfully; *most* awfully I felt it; he next described the sweets of religion and the spirit of prayer: how he *did* describe it — his prayer was beautiful; I think I felt to pray *with* him.” Thus this American visitor, who had been the instrument employed to sow in her heart the seeds of Divine Truth, was also enabled to water and nurture them.