

The Elizabeth Fry League.

(FOR THE TRAINING OF PRISON STAFFS.)

Professional Nurses have their supremely distinctive patron saint in Florence Nightingale, cherished with sacred affection, and it may be for this reason that so far we have not canonised Elizabeth Fry. It is well for the human heart that it should worship, and surely we may reverence with supreme respect and veneration the memory of so noble and altogether lovely a woman as Elizabeth Fry, and claim her for our own.

My suggestion is that we shall initiate an Elizabeth Fry League, to encourage the systematic training of men and women to qualify themselves to care for prisoners, and that we shall do this in recognition of the splendid services to the State of one of the most courageous and lovable women who has ever lived.

That the name of Elizabeth Fry is primarily associated with the demand for prison reform in the early nineteenth century is true, for it was in the year 1813 that she paid her first visit of mercy to the inferno at Newgate; but it was her nursing instinct which inspired that visit. Is not the very essence of her teaching cleansing and healing? Healing of body and spirit, the restoration of moral and physical health, by improved environment, and the realisation of duty to God and man.

A hundred years ago the severe penal systems of England had been on their trial, had broken down, and been found utterly wanting, in the gaols and dungeons felons were literally left to rot, and gaol fever swept away its tens of thousands. It was Elizabeth Fry who invoked the moral law—a law which recognised as human the most hardened criminal, and the aim of which was justice for wrong-doers, tempered with mercy. Torture had failed. It was this truth which illuminated the teaching of Elizabeth Fry. The great mother spirit in her pitied the prisoners, her practical knowledge when commiserating their terrible woes,

supplied food for the hungry, clothes for the naked, medicines for the sick, a roof for the homeless, and consolation for the spirit. Here we recognise her as a mother of nursing—we claim her as our own.

Then, if this is not sufficient, Elizabeth Fry proved herself a pioneer of nursing in a narrower sense, and rightly her fame finds a niche in "A History of Nursing," by M. Adelaide Nutting, R.N., and Lavinia L. Dock, R.N. Here we read that "her beautiful and gracious presence, typified mercy, benignity, and practical wisdom. She began her reform work coincidentally with her married life by following home a beggar woman, carrying a half-frozen child. The woman, wishing to beg, but

not to be visited, tried in vain to evade the brave young woman, who succeeded in tracing her, and unearthing a shocking trade in starved infants. In her home she laboured incessantly in the cottages of the poor. Her's was friendly visiting work in its most loving and intelligent form.

"Mrs. Fry's life-work, like that of Howard, was the amelioration of the lot of prisoners and the humanisation of prison conditions, and the change she effected is little short of miraculous.

"On his visits to England Pastor Fliedner, of Kaiserswerth, had learned of this work, and had met Mrs. Fry, of whom he wrote, 'Of all my

contemporaries none has exercised a like influence on my heart and life. . . . In 1824 I had the privilege of witnessing the effects of her wonder-working visits among the miserable prisoners at Newgate.'

"In 1840, Mrs. Fry visited Kaiserswerth, to the great joy of the pastor and his wife. He wrote, 'My happiness may be imagined when she came in person to see and rejoice over the growing establishment of Kaiserswerth. She saw the whole house, going into every room, and minutely examining every detail.'

"Mrs. Fry's habitual acquaintance with sickness among the poor, and her hours at their



ELIZABETH FRY,
One of us.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)