

## REVIEW.

## ELIZABETH FRY'S JOURNEYS, 1840-1841.\*

A book recently published by John Lane, which may well be read side by side with the life of Florence Nightingale (reviewed in our August and September issues) is that of "Elizabeth Fry's Journeys on the Continent, 1840-1841," from a diary kept by her niece, Elizabeth Gurney (later Madame de Bunsen), edited, with an introduction, by R. Brimley Johnson, and a Foreword by the Right Hon. Sir Maurice de Bunsen, Bart., G.C.M.G. (son of the diarist), illustrated from her charming original sketches and from portraits.

While, as our readers know, the interests of Elizabeth Fry (née Gurney) were concentrated chiefly on prisoners and the insane, yet they extended also to nursing. She was a friend of Pastor and Friederike Fliedner, and she was instrumental in founding the Institution of Nursing Sisters in Devonshire Square, Bishopsgate.

Sir Maurice de Bunsen, in his Foreword, remarks: "Fortunately for us, it was the habit of the period which has come to be called Early Victorian, when letters still were letters and not mere notes dashed off in a hurry, to preserve and eventually bind up much of the correspondence in which the details of family life from day to day were recorded, and thus to enable a later age to refer to the faded sheets and to catch a breath of the actual atmosphere of the past."

Those were good days for the cultured and the wealthy, and Elizabeth Fry was both. She was, moreover, a "well-known minister of the Society of Friends who was devoting her life wholeheartedly to the relief of suffering wherever she found it, and to preaching, with an earnestness, dignity and conviction peculiarly her own, the simple but deeply felt faith of the Society." From 1817 onwards prison reform and work became her chief pre-occupation, "though forming

only one of the many objects she kept constantly in view, such as the anti-slave trade movement, convict ships, work among the coastguards, and other similar interests."

"Aunt Elizabeth" was a personage round whom her entourage of lesser lights centred, and when in 1840 and 1841 she visited the Continent and preached "a crusade among the prisons and institutions of Belgium, Holland, and Germany," she was accompanied by her brother Samuel Gurney and by Mr. Josiah Forster, Mr. Allen and his niece, Miss Lucy Bradshaw, while her niece, then Elizabeth Gurney, later Mme. de Bunsen, was deputed to keep the record of these tours in the form of a journal. They seem to have been a sort of Royal progress, and "all accounts agree that the impression she left in the various Courts as well as among the people generally was vivid and profound. Her influence flowed from the obvious sincerity with which she spoke, from the renown attaching to the work she had already accomplished, and from the impressive dignity of her demeanour." The journals leave no room for doubt that she was an acceptable visitor in the Royal Palaces of Europe, though she did not hesitate

to deliver her soul to those with whom she came in contact, from Kings and Queens downwards.

The Diarist's story begins with the arrival of Elizabeth Fry and her party at Ostend after a rough passage of seven hours from Dover. "We were," she says, "a bright and happy party, and after some of our gentlemen had had a little brandy and water we all felt well and comfortable"—a vicarious method of producing a sense of well-being.

Even in those days travelling by rail was undertaken, for the party travelled by the "Great Belgian Railroad" to Bruges and Ghent. Elizabeth Gurney mentions that she climbed to the top of the Belfry at Bruges. "Underneath is a dreadful prison, happily now out of use; the room being filled up with wooden spikes; the floor and walls are entirely made of them so that the poor wretched inhabitant had no rest lying or standing or leaning against the wall from these sharp wooden edges."

At Antwerp, being Sunday, High Mass was going on in the Cathedral. The music and singing beautiful. "I could not persuade my good father to stay," and—a very human touch—"I think he was afraid that William Allen should find him there."

At Antwerp the party bade adieu to the railroad and pursued their way to Rotterdam, "William Allen and Lucy B. in a Britska that Papa had hired for them" and the rest "in our own old coach," of which there is a charming sketch with four horses and a postboy. At Rotterdam they were met by one John Mollet, "the only friend that Holland can boast of," who was to act as interpreter through Holland.

A good deal of the Diary is taken up with accounts of the hotels in which the party stayed, and the people they visited. Thus: "We had a useful evening on the third day. About fifty. Some very influential men. Slavery was to be the subject. Papa made them a capital speech. I never heard a better . . .

Both our Aunt and William

Allen gave them most powerful and plain sermons, John Mollet interpreting for them . . . We dined at the Van der Hoops. Some of the first people at Amsterdam. Rich and grand. These smart dinners would not suit thy fancy, I think, Mama . . . You never know when one course ends or another begins, as your plates are changed every few minutes, and perhaps after you have had soup and a little meat then you have a little interlude of fish and pudding and then return to meat and creams, etc. The Master of the House makes a move to go and each gentleman takes his lady as they entered and we all return to the drawing room where coffee and liqueurs are immediately brought. Half-past four is the fashionable dinner hour and you are expected to leave about seven, unless you are expressly asked to spend the evening. At seven o'clock we left and finished our evening at the Van Eckes. Some of the most agreeable people we knew at Amsterdam. She showed me with great glee the preparations for her first confinement and mourned over our departure. I say *our* for inasmuch as I am the Hem of Aunt's garment they are all kindness itself to me."

On another "really grand occasion" at Zwolle "all the fashion of the town assembled in full evening dress.



Mrs. ELIZABETH FRY.

\* John Lane : The Bodley Head, Ltd., London.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)