

The late Duke of Argyle's Estimate of Elizabeth Fry.

There is one other solitary figure which passes vividly across the stage of memory as I recall those days—the figure of one who left a deep impression on her time and a lasting blessing to the generations following. I refer to Mrs. Elizabeth Fry, the great Quaker philanthropic reformer. The story of her entering, alone and entirely undefended, into a prison reserved for abandoned and vicious women of whom even the keepers were so afraid that they never could go except in company, is a story which used to thrill me with admiration and astonishment. It was a great pleasure, therefore, to meet this illustrious woman. She was the only really very great human being I have ever met, with whom it was impossible to be disappointed. She was, in the fullest sense of the word, a majestic woman. She was already advanced in years, and had a very tall and stately figure. But it was her countenance that was so striking. Her features were handsome in the sense of being well-proportioned, but they were not in the usual sense beautiful. Her eyes were not large, or brilliant, or transparent. They were only calm, and wise, and steady. But over the whole countenance there was an ineffable expression of sweetness, dignity, and power. It was impossible not to feel some awe before her, as before some superior being. I understood in a moment the story of the prison. She needed no defence but that of her own noble and almost divine countenance. A few well-known words came to my mind the moment I saw her: “The peace of God that passeth all understanding.” They summarised the whole expression of her face. It is a rare thing indeed, in this poor world of ours, to see any man or any woman whose personality responds perfectly to the ideal conception formed of an heroic character and an heroic life.

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