

A Visit to Indianapolis in 1877

. . . The Friends here are greatly interested and much engaged in philanthropic work, and all the public Institutions of the Town have Friends at their head. Sarah Smith,¹ an English Friend, is at the head of a wonderful Institution here for Female Convicts, and also a Home for Friendless (or Fallen) Women. She had often visited prisons with Elizabeth Comstock² and others, and represented to Congress the great need of the women prisoners being under different management from that in which she found them, and finally the Government provided this house at a cost of \$100,000 (£20,000), and at an expense annually of about \$25,000. S. S. has about 200 in all, 52 of these are convicts, and her system of dealing with them is wonderfully beautiful. It is all love and religion. She aims at their individual conversion, and succeeds marvellously, the women loving her as a mother, and the younger ones calling her "Auntie." Of those in for reformation, out of eighty who have gone out only five have at all backslidden; the rest are filling useful positions in society. She does not keep the doors locked in the day time, and lets them go out into the grounds. She lets them wear their hair long, and does not dress them in uniform, not even the prisoners, and the consequence is that they take great pleasure in looking nice and neat; they were even beautifully neat, many of them, when we saw them yesterday. At every meal they each say a text, that is three times a day, and we heard them at tea—so nicely selected and so reverently said.

The convicts and the girls for reformation are kept apart, but there are no other restrictions. They have each a little dormitory—so *pretty*—with flowers cultivated

¹ Sarah J. Smith was born in England, and married James Smith, of Sheffield. Husband and wife emigrated to America and settled in Wayne County, Ind. The work of Elizabeth Fry in England had much impressed her, and she became deeply interested in philanthropic work in her new home. She died at the home of her daughter, Mrs. William J. Hiatt, at Dublin, Ind., in December, 1885. See *Rhoda M. Coffin*, 1910; *Journal F.H.S.*, vol. viii.; *Elizabeth L. Comstock*, 1895, p. 361, etc.

² Elizabeth L. Comstock (1815-1891), *née* Rous, of England. See her life, by Caroline Hare, 1895.

by themselves in each window. They earn a good deal of money by laundry work, etc. They have morning and evening family worship, and Meeting on First-day, and twice a week prayer meetings among themselves.

Sarah Smith gave us many wonderful accounts of conversions. She says sometimes she literally "compels them to come in." One was this way:—A desperate character was getting tobacco surreptitiously from some workmen, and S. Smith knew it. One day she said to the woman, "Thee are very unhappy; what is the matter?"—"Nothing" (in a loud angry voice).—"Yes, there is something, and I will tell thee what it is—tobacco."—"Tobacco! Who told you that? Oh! Every chew sends me nearer to hell!"—"Well, thee must give it up."—"I can't!"—"Thee must."—"I won't. I am going to hell." The convicts' prayer meeting was going on, so S. S. told her to come with her, and took her in. All the women were on their knees; S. S. told them about her and asked their prayers. And then she bid the poor trembling sinner kneel down.—"I can't."—So S. S. took her by the shoulders and pressed her down, and *held* her down, and prayed for her. Then she told her to pray for herself "God be merciful to me a sinner." S. S. says she repeated this with a pause between, at least twenty times, and told the woman she *should* not rise till she had said it! At last she began, "God be . . ." no more—a great cry followed, loud and piercing, and the poor prodigal was rejoicing in the forgiving love of her reconciled Father in Heaven. "Oh! Why did I not come before? Why was my heart as cold and as hard as iron? And God was only waiting for me to ask Him to forgive me!"

S. S. says she never so forced a person into the Kingdom before, but she saw clearly she had to do it with this woman. That was four years ago, and ever since she has gone on rejoicing; not for one day has she looked back, and her example of faith and joy in believing is wonderful. I *think* she is in for life, but am not quite sure. It was strange that the disobedience to prison law in chewing tobacco should have lain so heavily on so hardened a sinner's conscience.

After I and others had spoken to them collectively yesterday afternoon (between morning and evening

meetings), S. S. took me to shake hands with the convicts. I had said something in my address to the effect that Christ was just as ready to forgive a murderer as a more respectable sinner, and that it needed the blood of the atonement to blot out my sins of selfishness and pride, etc., as much as those of others which were against the laws of the land. The women were *so loving*, and in the first row I shook hands with were four murderesses! There are seven here in all. One said, with a beautiful smile on her intelligent face, "This is the right hand of fellowship," and I felt it too. These murderesses (two of whom murdered their husbands, and one a whole family) are all earnest and consistent Christians, and helpful among the rest. Being forgiven much they love much.

How infinitely better this plan of life-confinement in such a home than hanging them! I never thought when I spoke that way that there would be one in the room convicted for murder, but only spoke of it as the greatest outward sin; but my having done so drew us closer together, and I felt, as I spoke to them and held their hands one after the other, the glorious reality of the truth that "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," and that in Him all are one, and I not one particle nearer Him or more loved than they. It did me a deal of good, this actual contact with forgiven murderers—may I never forget the lesson! . . .

HELEN B. HARRIS

On Monday Morning last about four o'Clock, the noted Tavern, commonly call'd the Quakers Tavern, in the Little Sanctuary, Westminster, was broke open and robb'd by three Persons . . .

Newscutting in *D.*, dated 1736.

A few Days since, as the Workmen were pulling down the Quakers Tavern in Thieving-Lane, Westminster, they found several Pieces of old Roman Coin in the Ruins.

Newscutting in *D.*, dated 1751.

Saturday died Mr. John Atkinson,¹ one of the people called Quakers, who many years kept the White Lion tavern, the upper-end of Cornhill.

Newscutting in *D.*, dated 1759.

¹ The London Registers record the death of John Atkinson, of the parish of St. Peters, Cornhill, on the 30th of 12mo., 1758, aged fifty-five years.