

# Elizabeth Fry and Convict Ships

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6 mo. 23d, 1832.

My dear Friend,  
James Backhouse,

I received thy useful and valuable communication from Hobert Town, and, provided another cargo of women should be sent to Van Diemens Land, I mean to endeavour to have every point well attended to as far as my influence extends with government and I feel no doubt that those in authority will gladly do their part.

The ship already gone I exceedingly regretted not having by any means such regulations on board as I believed needful to maintain order, and I had fixed to visit the ship and as much as possible establish such plans as I knew answered with the female convicts, but by some mistake as to time and place I did not get there, but I believe that my brother William Fry did take very great pains to have such arrangements made as a short time on board would allow him, but I fear as there was no regular employment provided, there would for want of proper occupation be frequent disturbances amongst the women.

I think some of thy hints may prove very useful on board our female convict ships and we hope that thy companion and thyself will endeavour to obtain all the information you can for us as to the *real* state in which the female convicts arrive and we think that very great good would result from an exact report of these things being taken upon the arrival of every ship and a copy of that report *always* forwarded to us because the women would feel it a very strong stimulus to good conduct during the voyage. I would have it in the form of answers to the following queries :

1st. How many times has any woman broken the rules laid down by the ladies ?

2nd. How have the school mistresses and monitors performed their office and do they deserve the money sent for them by the ladies ? Did they keep the books in order according to the list ?

3d. How have the women made their counterpains as to the neatness of the work and the taste displayed in them ?

4th. Have the women taken proper care of the things given to them and kept them during the voyage except those they were obliged to use ?

5th. How many women have learned to read since they left England and have they generally been regular and attentive at their hours for instruction ?

6ly. How many have received their Psalters and Testaments and do they appear to value them and read in them ?

7th. It is supposed that keeping the rules will include all moral conduct as to chastity, sobriety, kindness to each other, &c. &c. Therefore no particular questions are put to these points.

8th. Are they attentive at times of religious service, reading the Scriptures, &c. and do they attend to keeping the Sabbath holy ?

I think something of this kind being done would be valuable for the Officers as well as the women and prove a check upon the voyage to that which is evil and an encouragement to that which is good. I believe much has been accomplished by our regulations but I think that much more may yet be done. I have also no doubt that much depends upon the way in which they are put into execution by the Surgeon and other Officers because we find a very great variety amongst them and some appear unsuitable for so difficult and important a task.

We much wish that the Ladies Association in New South Wales would more regularly correspond with us as we believe that much good would result from it, and that they would inform us particulars of the women of every ship that arrives as I am quite convinced it would be a very great encouragement to these poor creatures to endeavour to do their best as I think they much wish to please us. I also think by this sort of communication we should be more likely to know of any existing remaining evils and might endeavour to remedy them.

I wish particularly to know from thee what was the general opinion of the state of the women who arrived in the *Mary* at Van Diemens Land because we received an excellent account of them from the Surgeon, Dr. Sinclair.

It should be known in the Colonies that a very small proportion of the women have been under the care of ladies in the prisons therefore so much must not be expected of them but I hope that the day is not very far distant when they will be much more generally visited for I feel very confident were this the case they would arrive on the other side the water in a much better state and more valuable members of Society.

I hope by this time that there is a committee of ladies in Van Diemens Land as I have from time to time endeavoured to encourage it.

I cannot help hoping that thy companion and thyself may in many ways be of use where your lot is at present likely to be cast and my dear friend may you be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves." I think you will find it difficult in a place where there is so much party spirit to keep clear of it. You must not listen at what one person says of another or only those who you find that you can *indeed* trust. May a blessing rest upon you and your labours in every way and above all the choice blessing of preservation.

My love to thy companion though I believe unknown to me, and believe me

Thy affectionately interested friend,

ELIZTH. FRY.

Excuse my letter being rather a scrawl but I have so much writing and other engagements that I have not time to *revise*.

*From the original among Joseph Crosfield MSS. in the possession of Albert J. Crosfield, of Cambridge, 1929.*

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These are to certify all friends whom it may concern, that my friend Edward Green, of Southwark, Glasier, having desired of me liberty, to lay before the Monthly Meeting of friends, to which he belongs, his intention to take me to be his wife, in order to obtain, from the said Meeting, a Certificate of his Clearness and Conversation, I give consent that he may so do. Witness my hand this 5<sup>th</sup> day of the first mo. 1788.

Witnesses hereunto

ELIZABETH WIGHTWICK

Tho: Ellwood

Serv<sup>t</sup> to Tho: Ellwood

Mary Ellwood.

[Endorsement]

A Certificate from Elizabeth Wightwick for Edw. Greene to propose his Intentions of marriage to this Meeting with hur.

(Southwark M.M. Manuscripts I., in D.)