

Extracts from the Journal of Joseph Fry, 1833—1857

We have recently had before us, by kind permission of the owner, a volume in manuscript of about one hundred pages in folio, of which sixty-three are occupied with a journal, headed: "Private Journal, 1833."

There is not any name of writer but there is clear evidence that the Journal was written by Joseph Fry (1777-1861), husband of Elizabeth Fry of Newgate Prison fame.

As in the published memoirs of the wife there is comparatively little reference to the husband, this volume of personal history and self-revelation is especially valuable.

The Journal begins:

Under a humbling sense of manifold infirmities and of unworthiness past all utterance, but with a deep feeling of the goodness of the Lord to me as an individual, I venture to record some of his gracious dealings. Grant, Oh, Lord, I beseech thee, to *fix* my often wandering footsteps in thy way, and to make of me one more monument of thy faithfulness and of thy mercy.

The entries begin "Aug' 1833" and close early in 1857. At the opening the family was in temporary residence in the Island of Jersey.

So great was the interest aroused in this Island in the visit of Elizabeth Fry that she had to decline to hold public meetings on certain occasions, and the public had to be prevented from crowding the meeting house at times of worship. Of this exclusion E. Fry wrote:

"Without invitation the people flocked to me and were obliged not to sit in our meeting house. This I steadily resisted one first-day by not going out of it. I felt much peace in *not doing* as well as doing."

The journals of Elizabeth Fry reveal a considerable difference of outlook between husband and wife—a difference which appears to have lessened as time went on, by the approach of each to the other. In 1822 E. Fry wrote:

"My much-loved husband is, I fully believe, much less in the world—has given up many worldly pleasures and knows an establishment in a far greater degree in the ever-blessed Truth."

Apparently, a few months prior to the opening date of the Journal—on May 10, 1833—Joseph Fry had been the subject of some special Divine visitation; to this his Journal makes almost yearly reference on the anniversary dates.

I was favoured with the powerful visitation of Judgment, mingled with mercy, which led me to what I humbly trust was repentance not to be repented of. . . . I humbly pray that, during the remaining time allotted for us to pass together, I may be a true and spiritual helpmate, in addition to contributing to the best of my power to aid and support her bodily powers and to cheer her under her frequent cares and anxieties.

In 1842, E. Fry wrote: "I have much valued my dear husband's company and feel it sweet that in our declining days we can so thoroughly enjoy being together, and that we unite so much in our principles and tastes."

After his wife's death he wrote:

My soul mourns that it did not more value, more appreciate, the rare work and excellence of her who is gone for ever from my earthly view.

But it may be that the religious outlook of Joseph Fry was somewhat too intense at times. His wife wrote in 1843:

"I had a good deal to try me in my dear husband's reproving me for being so much afflicted and made poorly by our dear Hannah's state. He thought it was a want of resignation and trust."

There are references to business journeys—some on behalf of the business engaged in by his sons:

Wolverhampton. 29th Dec. 1833, 11. o'cl p.m. In coming along in the coach from Birmingham this evening, I was favoured to feel the precious and heart-tendering influence of Heavenly Goodness.

Nottingham. March 24, 1834. In my conversations with our customers on business I have felt a good deal of care to keep near to Truth and faithfulness in my promises and assurances.

An impression obtained by reading the journals of E. Fry that the principal care for the family rested upon the wife is in part removed when we read:

Worcester. 1st day March 30 1834. I have been enabled to breathe a prayer for my beloved children, more especially John and Gurney.

Oct. 19, 1847. I feel as one utterly desolate and nearly hopeless as to temporal things in my family, having let in a painful fear of being disabled from helping (even a little) those of my beloved Children who are fallen into comparative poverty. [Elizabeth Fry was then deceased.]

On account of his connection with the Fry bank-failure, Joseph Fry was disunited from the Society of Friends in 1829. His wife wrote in her journal :

“ Mildreds Court, 3mo. 18. 1829 :

“ Now it comes to near the point. I feel the prospect of my husband's disownment very much. It is so striking a *cut down* to our family in so many ways. I really have discouragements all around me in no common degree.”

“ To-day the case of my beloved husband will be brought before our monthly meeting, I believe. How earnestly I desire that my beloved friends may be enabled to do right in it, to act impartially and with that real christian kindness that neither my beloved husband nor family may be hurt with.”

Ten years later J. Fry wrote :

Our Monthly Meeting which had disowned me (not I think on sound or at all just grounds) at the time of our failure in 1828, my Honour or uprightness never having been called in question or ground given, has during the past year re-instated me in Membership. I had apprehended it my Duty to apply for it, although I have never yet believed myself required to conform in outward appearance or speech to the costume of the Society or its peculiarities.

But in all these changing things the most remarkable change I have experienced has been relative to my great love, joined to some taste, for music, with a correct ear and some Cultivation in singing, which love seems to have passed away like a summer Cloud or died off like the leaves in autumn.

J. Fry's wife wrote in her book :

“ My husband was re-instated in membership in the Society last M.M. I feel peace in it, and thankful for the humble state of mind that induced his asking for it.

“ I see some bondage attached to membership to any outward body, but there are also advantages.”

As regards the change of dress, E. Fry wrote from Upton in 1830 :

“ My dearest husband has been at home and his company I have enjoyed ; and if it were not that I deeply lament his intention of *entirely* casting off the appearance of a Friend, which he means to do, and, I fear, a good deal of his esteem for the Society and its principles, I should think in other respects I have cause to trust that he is in a happier and even more peaceful state than sometimes.”

In 1834 Joseph Fry wrote, under date of June 1 :

I have been for some time endeavouring, and in the face of many difficulties and discouragements, to get a Provident

District Society established for so much of our Parish as should embrace West Ham and Plaistow. Tomorrow I have at length the expectation of having a pretty considerable meeting in the National Schoolroom to give it consideration. I don't think my nature would lead me into any sort of Public service, but I have so strong an opinion of the very immoral and depraved state of our Parish and neighbourhood, and so high an opinion of the beneficial results of a good and well-arranged institution of the kind proposed, that I have thought it my duty to make the endeavour.

For some time Joseph Fry had been interested in the writings of George Monro, Vicar of Letterkenny, and in making extracts from these writings. These he offered for publication to William Darton & Son, of High Holborn; and in 1836 there appeared: "Extracts, Doctrinal, Practical and Devotional. From the writings of George Monro, M.A., Vicar of Letterkenny, in the Kingdom of Ireland, by Joseph Fry, from the second edition, published in London, in 1711."¹ In the Preface we read:

Having found the perusal of these works peculiarly blessed to my own mind, I am induced to publish the following selection, with a humble yet fervent desire to contribute, in however small a measure, to the eternal well-being of others, into whose hands they may fall; and although it has been with me, like the call renewed at the eleventh hour of a long and more than unprofitable day, yet I rejoice in being enabled thus to offer my sincere though unworthy testimony to the riches of the free grace and unmerited mercy of God in Christ Jesus, who came "to save that which was lost," and who "came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

J. Fry wrote:

Easter Sunday, April 3, 1836: O, may it please my heavenly father abundantly to bless the work to the good of many.

With the following record of an incursion into dreamland, we close these extracts, having received a revised and enhanced opinion of Joseph Fry.

July 29, 1855. I have many times thought of Committing to writing the following very remarkable occurrence which took place in my own house at Plashet, but knowing

¹ There are two copies in **D**—a small 8vo and a large paper issue, of 420 pages.

my own usual disregard of Dreams in general, I have put it off from Time to Time, being reluctant to be open to the Charge of being Imaginative or Enthusiastic.

Two years or rather more have passed away since I was favored in the night with a very remarkable Dream. I am aware of nothing that had previously occurred to turn my thoughts into that particular direction, and as my dear wife had been deceased about 8 years, during all which time I have no impression on my mind of having once dreamed of or *about* her in any way, it becomes the more remarkable from her not having been particularly in my mind or contemplation, and therefore the Dream more unlikely to have proceeded from any outward predisposing cause.

I appeared in my dream to be sitting quietly in a Room plainly fitted up, resembling a small meeting house, in which were gathered and gathering a pretty considerable number of persons, sitting solemnly, and apparently as if a meeting for worship was about commencing, but with no person recognisable by me or with distinct countenances, when, from what seemed the Entrance Door, I saw approaching me where I sat what *I felt conscious beyond all possibility of doubt* to be the spiritual presence of my late precious partner in life, who drew near me and spoke to me in her own Clear voice and accompanied by a penetrating power, and addressed to me these words: "This God is our God even unto Death," and immediately added: "This God is our God for Ever and Ever"—not a word more or less—when I awoke.

Although 2 years or more have Elapsed, never whilst memory lasts can I forget the powerful and precious savour of Life with which it was accompanied, and which up to the present day often accompanied the remembrance of it strong, fresh and lively.

NOTE.

At his marriage with Elizabeth Gurney in 1800, Joseph Fry was described as "Tea Dealer." Mrs. Fry wrote in 1829:

"Our tea business goes on very poorly, and it is now thought that our present income must be much limited. May we uprightly conform to our circumstances however humbling."

But the business improved under the care of one or more of the sons; and the old firm is still in existence at 38 Duke Street, St. James's, London, under the name of W. Fry & Co.