

from excitement or that she was tired? For the first time since he had known her he felt she was not quite at ease in his society. She asked him presently to take her to her aunt.

Beattie was not a person who could easily keep things to herself. When she was pleased or sorry, or interested, she was always disposed to tell someone about it. In the carriage under the cover of the darkness she told Mrs. Swannington what she had overheard.

"They oughtn't to say such things, Aunt Ella; I have never thought of marrying Mr. Musgrove."

Aunt Ella laughed.

"You are a silly child, Beattie. What is there to be so angry about? There is no doubt that Mr. Musgrove thinks a great deal of you. Anyone can see it and if you weren't such a baby you would understand. I believe myself he is in love with you! and," she added, "if you heard what he says to the Gilmans about you, you would see I have reason for my beliefs."

"Oh," said Beattie, "I hope he doesn't care for me."

"You hope he doesn't!" said Aunt Ella, amazed and angry. "Why, what nonsense! You ought to consider yourself a most fortunate girl."

Something in her aunt's voice silenced Beattie. She suddenly felt sorry she had followed the impulse which had prompted her to speak. She would not have done so if she had imagined Mr. Musgrove really loved her. If he did he ought to be the first to tell her so. Somehow Aunt Ella's attitude of mind towards the subject made her feel as if she had been unmaidenly to mention it. But as they drove on through the darkness, Mrs. Swannington humming the air of the song the peasants had sung, and Beattie busy with her thought, it flashed upon the girl's mind that if she had any feeling towards him, she would have been too shy to tell even her aunt that their names had been coupled together. And now not something of gladness have mingled with her confusion?

"I don't care for him," she said to

herself, "and so I am right in hoping he does not care for me. And yet, suppose he does? Could I learn to love him? Should I like to be with him always? Should I mind if I never saw him again?"

And then for a moment her thoughts reverted to the day when Michael Anstruther had gone away from Crabsley. She remembered the loneliness, the sense of void, the length of the days that followed his departure. She saw the dark, boyish, earnest face. She recalled the sense of companionship, of mutual comprehension they had in one another's society. She knew of nothing in which Michael was superior to Cecil; indeed it would seem as if the older man had the advantage. And yet, if at that moment she had had to choose between them she would have chosen Michael.

At that moment. But impressionable, easily influenced, and warm-hearted, what might not time and persuasion do? If he loved her?

(To be continued.)



GENTLEWOMEN WHO DEVOTE THEIR LIVES TO THE POOR.

PART III.

IN AND OUT OF PRISON.

"I was in prison and ye visited me."

Pioneer.

Mrs. Elizabeth Fry, passed to her rest.

A Few of the Present Workers.

Mrs. Meredith, Adeline Duchess of Bedford, Lady Battersea, Miss Bartlett, and Miss Cadbury.

OF all work undertaken by women in the present day for the sake of comforting and helping the sad, the afflicted, and despairing of their own sex none requires more tact, discretion, and self-control than that of visiting the prisons and helping discharged prisoners; and even these qualifications would avail but little unless the women-workers believed in humanity and loved it.

It is not a work handed down through the ages from women to women; it is an outcome of this nineteenth century, started and set going by one gentle, delicate woman in 1818, a period of our history when, if any woman moved perceptibly out of the ordinary ways of life, she laid herself open to misconception and even contempt, for the days of Woman's Mission had not then dawned.

One of the characteristics of Mrs. Elizabeth Fry, the pioneer prison-visitor, which so peculiarly fitted her for the work, was that in every human being, however degraded, she saw the spark of divinity, which, as she said, might be overlaid with sin, vice, and ignorance, but was never wholly extinct. She believed in all, and despaired of none, and such, I take it, should be the spirit of those who would be her successors.

When she first visited the wards of Newgate

she found them so demoralised that even the governor entered with reluctance. In fact, they were more like dens of wild beasts.

Clever woman that she was, she found her way to the hearts of the prisoners by caring for their children. But all this is matter of history, and I have to deal with the work of to-day, which is so quietly and effectually performed that outsiders have no idea of its extent and influence.

To begin with Mrs. Meredith—all the love of her heart, her means, her energies, her great organising talent, her fascinating manners, her strength of character, have been and are devoted to the service of the class of women known as criminals. She has immense power over them, and whatever their sins and shortcomings they know how to reverence and love her. I happened to mention to some of them that I was going to see Mrs. Meredith, and their quick response was, "Pray, lady, give her our love."

Her interest in female prisoners began as a child, and her earliest recollections are of visits to Irish prisons with her father, and Bible-readings in gloomy cells. As she grew older she yearned intensely to improve the condition of women undergoing long sentences of penal servitude, and she spared no efforts to gain permission from the Director-General of Convict Prisons to visit them in their cells. At length in 1866 she succeeded, and every morning for some years she journeyed from her home in Bayswater to visit the prisoners in the London prisons. In her own words, "I had personal dealings with every individual in Brixton Prison, then the chief convict prison for women; with some as they sat at work, with others in the infirmary as they lay in bed, and occasionally in the cells with those condemned to solitary confinement. I had perfect freedom to converse with them and to inform myself as to their condition."

The conclusion she arrived at was that help was even more needed at the time of their discharge than during the actual period of their imprisonment, for passing out of the prison gates they found themselves once again in the midst of their degraded associates, and necessarily fell into the old temptations unless love and sympathy were powerful enough to make them pause. It was the recognition of this fact that started the Prison Gate Mission, the members of which take their places among the criminal gangs waiting to receive the discharged prisoners, and take them past the public-houses to a good breakfast, which was provided over for many years by Lady Emily Pepys.

Nor was this the only outcome of Mrs. Meredith's knowledge of the needs of these poor people. She rented two houses next her own in Bayswater which she opened as a Refuge, where women needing help could get it, and a kind encouraging word besides.

But Bayswater was eminently respectable, and objected very strongly to the intrusion of this class of woman into their midst, therefore Mrs. Meredith removed her Refuge to Nine Elms, and under the sanction of the Home Office it became the "Discharged prisoners' a 1," in connection with H.M. prisons. She opened a laundry here in 1867 in order to give employment to those whom no one else would engage. In 1881 the laundry was removed to Clapham Road to what had formerly been the marble rink. It is still there, adjoining the headquarters of the various missions carried on by Mrs. Meredith and her many helpers.

So rapidly did her work increase, that help became necessary. The first to volunteer was her sister, Miss Lloyd, who has been her steady assistant from that day to this; gradually others volunteered, till now she has an army of three hundred and seventy-five devoted women-workers, seventy only of whom are paid, and