



The Excellent Mrs Fry: Unlikely Heroine

Anne Isba

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Elizabeth Fry, the great Quaker prison reformer of the nineteenth century, was just thirty two years old when she first entered the notorious women's gaol at Newgate. She was the mother of eight children and would go on to have three more. Yet, despite the demands of family, she would devote the rest of her life - over three more decades - to the welfare of female prisoners and convicts bound for Australia.

When her efforts at last helped achieve changes to British law, Fry turned her attention to winning the hearts and minds of the great and good on continental Europe. She treated all people as equals, prisoners and princes alike. But her quiet dignity and magical voice hid a steely determination to do good wherever she perceived need. Her philanthropy extended to hospitals, schools, workhouses, asylums, orphanages and refuges; and she pioneered nursing training in Britain.

Fry was the first woman in the country to bring private good works into the public domain, but at considerable to cost to her family and her own health.

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