

**OBSERVATIONS ON THE
VISITING, SUPERINTENDENCE,
AND GOVERNMENT OF
FEMALE PRISONERS**

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Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government of Female Prisoners by
Elizabeth Fry

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ELIZABETH FRY

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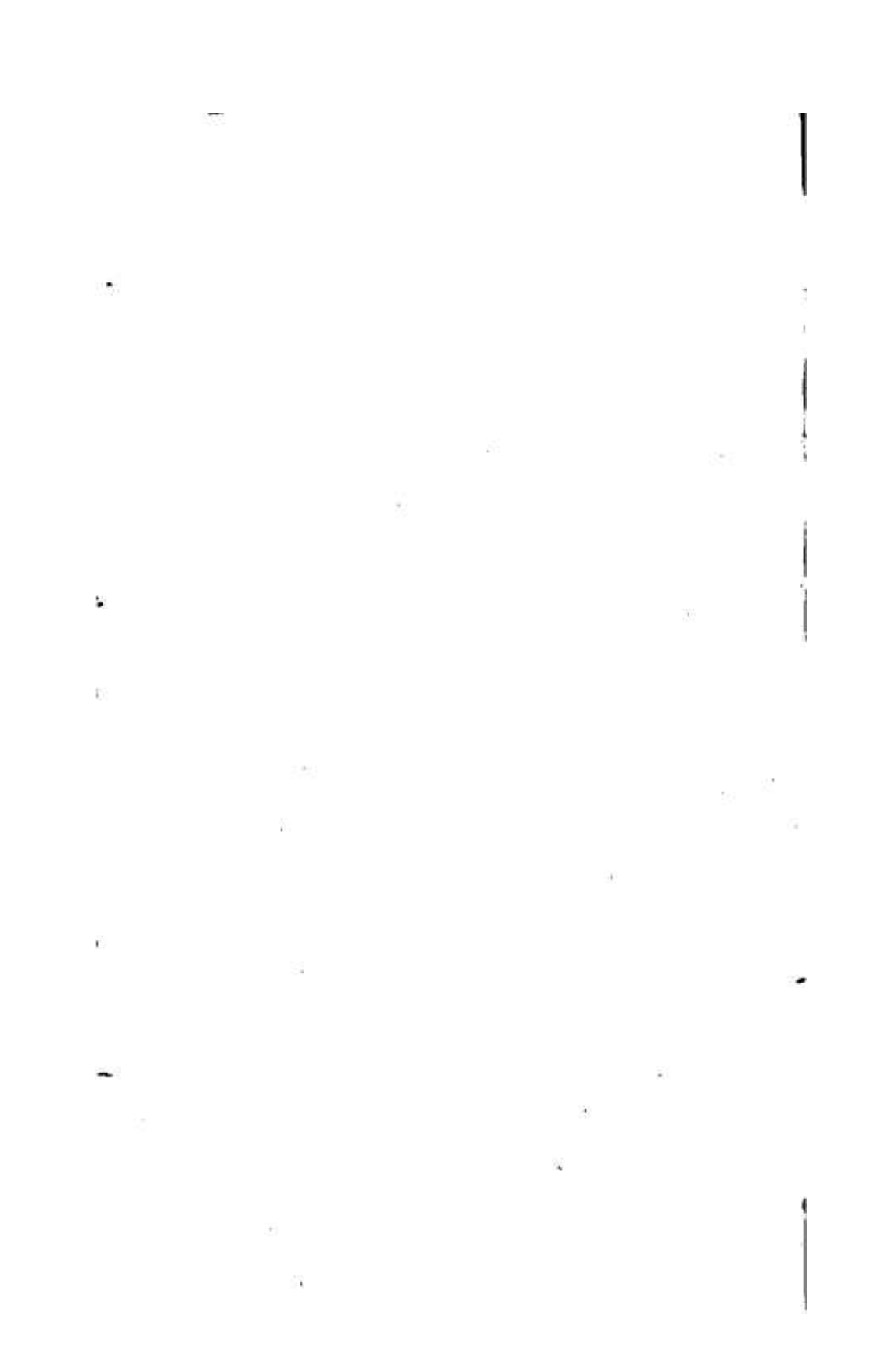
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OBSERVATIONS,

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

WELL knowing my incompetency for the task of writing for the public, I have felt considerable reluctance in sending to the press the following brief observations respecting the principles and plans adopted by the *British Ladies' Society for visiting prisons*: but, my long experience of the nature and effects of the system pursued by that Society, and the numerous applications made to me for farther explanation and information on this interesting subject, induce me to make an attempt, on which I should not otherwise have ventured.

Before, however, I endeavour to develop the system of the British Society, I wish to make a few general remarks, which have

long impressed me, respecting my own sex, and the place which I believe it to be their duty and privilege to fill in the scale of society. I rejoice to see the day in which so many women of every rank, instead of spending their time in trifling and unprofitable pursuits, are engaged in works of usefulness and charity. Earnestly is it to be desired that the number of these valuable labourers in the cause of virtue and humanity may be increased, and that all of us may be made sensible of the infinite importance of redeeming the time, of turning our talents to account, and of becoming the faithful, humble, devoted, followers of a crucified Lord, who went about DOING GOOD.

Far be it from me to attempt to persuade women to forsake their right province. My only desire is, that they should *fill that province well*; and, although their calling, in many respects, materially differs from that of the other sex, and may not perhaps be so exalted an one—yet a minute observation will prove that, if adequately fulfilled, it has nearly, if not quite, an equal influence on society at large.

No person will deny the importance attached to the character and conduct of a woman, in all her domestic and social relations, when she is filling the station of a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother, or a mistress of a family. But it is a dangerous error to suppose that the duties of females end here. Their gentleness, their natural sympathy with the afflicted, their quickness of discernment, their openness to religious impressions, are points of character (not unusually to be found in our sex) which evidently qualify them, within their own peculiar province, for a far more extensive field of usefulness.

In endeavouring to direct the attention of the female part of society to such objects of Christian charity as they are most calculated to benefit, I may now observe that no persons appear to me to possess so strong a claim on their compassion, and on their pious exertions, as the helpless, the ignorant, the afflicted, or the depraved, of *their own sex*. It is almost needless to remark, that a multitude of such persons may be found in many of our public institutions.

During the last ten years much attention has been successfully bestowed by women on the female inmates of our *prisons*; and many a poor prisoner, under their fostering care, has become completely changed,—rescued from a condition of depravity and wretchedness, and restored to happiness, as a useful and respectable member of the community. Most desirable is it that such efforts should be pursued with patient perseverance wherever they have been already made, and that they should be gradually extended to all the prisons in the kingdom.

But a similar care is evidently required for our hospitals, our lunatic asylums, and our workhouses. It is quite obvious, that there are departments in all such institutions which ought to be under the especial superintendence of females. Were ladies to make a practice of regularly visiting them, a most important check would be obtained on a variety of abuses, which are far too apt to creep into the management of these establishments. Such a practice would be the means, not only of essentially contributing to the welfare of the afflicted sufferers, but