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Discuss the contribution made to the welfare and progress of the British Empire and Commonwealth by any three women.

The three women whom I consider to have made the most outstanding contribution to the progress of the British Empire are Elizabeth Fry, Elizabeth Garrett-Anderson and the present Queen, Elizabeth II. The Christian name Elizabeth seems to have been fortunately chosen in each instance. Two out of the three women have already succeeded in their aims towards the improvement of the social standards of their times; and the present Queen, having dedicated herself to a life of service to her people, is constantly striving to carry out this, her great responsibility.

The first of these three women, Elizabeth Fry, lived in an age when social reforms were desperately needed, for the lives of the ordinary, working-class people, were made unbearable by heavy taxation and the tyranny of the wealthy aristocrats. They were, however, more fortunate if they had never committed so much as a petty crime, for the Criminal Code was still harsh, and the conditions of the prisons even worse. Many people cannot realise, in this enlightened age, how terrible was the life of a prisoner in those days; and, although the male prisoner might in time become hardened to his condition, accepting it as a mere trick of fate, no language can describe the sufferings of the more

impressionable women. For women however innocent, however guilty, those who had been tried and those who still awaited trial, were all herded into one prison, amongst desperate and evil criminals.

All this, impossible as it may seem, was changed through the efforts of one, noble-hearted woman.

Elizabeth Fry was a Quaker, deeply religious, who believed that even hardened criminals could make good, if only they had true Christian help. Elizabeth had herself been vain and inclined to frivolity, had known the difficulty of reforming her character, and it was with understanding in her heart that she set about her arduous task.

Hearing of the condition of the Newgate prisoners, she asked permission to visit them. This granted, Elizabeth went among them, the first time accompanied by the turn-key, but, on after occasions, in spite of the danger, she went alone. For the first time the women prisoners looked into the eyes of a virtuous person; for the first time they were given hope of a new and better life and they were sincerely happy. Elizabeth Fry set herself to start a school for these prisoners. Officials scoffed - "It was sure to be a failure." The school was a great success. Her first object attained, Elizabeth went on with her struggle. Again the officials said that her idea was impossible, but she obtained for the prisoners an interesting and useful employment, to encourage them in the belief that life was not completely over for them.

It was because Elizabeth Fry had the courage of her convictions and a deep and sincere faith

in God, that she had managed to struggle so bravely, without once looking back.

For this noble woman was daughter and wife of rich men, and might have lived a life of selfish idleness, merely sending money to help good works, while she herself remained in the comfort of her home. But she followed her true vocation. She spent many an hour playing on board convict ships, reading the Bible to god and comforting the condemned; for Elizabeth Fry sought the most hopeless, cared for the vilest of human beings.

Through the work of Elizabeth Fry, prisons all over the world have become kinder and better places, and there cannot be a woman prisoner who would not bless her very name.

In the nineteenth century, another young woman, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, was also struggling for her beliefs. To some, perhaps, her name will sound unfamiliar, but Elizabeth Garrett Anderson was one of the first women to prove that those of her sex could have successful careers, and still be normal human beings. She is generally recognised as being the first English woman doctor, and the hard work which had to be done in order to open the medical profession to women, was carried out by Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and her younger contemporary, Sophia Lee-Blake.

Elizabeth, born in 1836 at Aldeburgh in Suffolk, was the second daughter of Nevill Garrett, a merchant,

with a small fleet of trading vessels. Elizabeth had shown no particular sign of possessing a vocation for medicine until she was twenty-one. In that year, however, she became friendly with a certain Emily Davies, with whom she could discuss many topical questions, both social and political. It was due to this friendship that Elizabeth finally announced, to a rather surprised and alarmed family, her intention of becoming a doctor. The process would be long, disheartening and thoroughly unpleasant, and it was very doubtful whether she would ever succeed, but Elizabeth had made up her mind.

Her parents proceeded to do what they could to help her to get a training, for it was not a mere passing fancy. At that time medical schools and degrees were not open to women. It was not going to be easy for Elizabeth. She at last obtained a probationer's post at Middlesex Hospital, although rather under sufferance, when she was twenty-three. She worked hard and enthusiastically, learning what she could of the work, for other more detailed training was denied her until 1861. From her first small success, Elizabeth continued her struggle in diverse conditions.

She finally received her coveted M.D. in Paris in 1870, and, two years later, became a member of the British Medical Association.

The opposition had been terrific, as she became a clinical student and had then opened a dispensary in Marylebone Road, which is now named after her. But she had virtually won her fight, although some schools were very slow to avail themselves of the permission

for women to enter the medical profession.

Elizabeth was interested, however, in many other things beside her own job. She took part in the various efforts to improve girls' education; she was brought into the Women's Suffrage Movement; and she became a friend of John Stuart Mill's. In 1870 Elizabeth stood for the London School Board with great success for Liberals and Radicals favoured her and she was loyally supported by the recently franchised working men, for whose wives and children she had done so much.

By the end of 1870, Elizabeth became engaged to N. R. G. S. Anderson, one of her staunchest supporters. She had won through her early struggles, and had now only to go on from strength to strength, until, as the years passed, and she felt herself growing older, she retired more and more from active life in London to her family home at Aldeburgh. There she died in 1917, having seen both her daughter and her sons attain to positions of importance.

She was decidedly one of the first women to prove that a woman could have a successful career and be at the same time an ordinary human being. Her life had been full and varied; she was not a "dedicated" woman, but had a profession for which she had trained hard and had followed with success; she was as successful as Dean of the School of Medicine as she was a doctor; and at the same time was

a happily married woman with two children and ran a full and vigorous social life. She set an example for all women to follow, one which added considerably to the glory of Britain and her Commonwealth.

The last of these three women, our present Queen, has in only one short year on the throne of England, become the most well-loved of all our Queens.

When she made her entry in the lives of the people of the British Commonwealth and Empire, Queen Elizabeth, or Princess as she then was, dedicated herself to them, wherever they might be, of whatever race or tongue, when she made her twenty-first birthday broadcast in South Africa. Little did those people, whom she addressed so movingly, realise at the time that they were, in only five short years, to become her subjects.

Her early upbringing had been that of the daughter of a country gentleman, away from the spotlight of publicity, for it was then very doubtful whether she would ever become Queen of England. Those early years were happy, for the young Princess, for, as she herself once said, "In the days of my childhood, the sun seemed always to be shining."

But, as she grew older and her father became King, the Princess began to take a more important position, and was now gradually introduced to a fuller public life. Her education, as heiress presumptive, had a wide scope and included a detailed study of constitutional history and the evolution of monarchy, although she was only twelve.

During the 1939-45 war, the Princess served her

country in the A.T.S., but even this period of service had to be limited, for the heiress presumptive could no longer be spared from State duties. She returned to them conscious of a benefit and development, refreshed by a complete change of environment and occupation.

At eighteen, Princess Elizabeth was granted her own coat of arms and began to make public appearances without her parents; she made her first public speech, and later in 1944 launched H.M.S. Vanguard, in which she and her family were to sail to South Africa in 1947.

When she was twenty, people began to see that the Princess, and Prince Philip of Greece, whom she had known for many years, were in love with each other. They were engaged that same year, on the Royal Family's return from South Africa, and, on November 20th, Princess Elizabeth married the man of her choice.

Perhaps the happiest day of the Queen's life was November 14th, 1948, when her son, Prince Charles was born, the first child to be born in direct line of succession to the throne for fifty-four years. Her life was more active now, for the King, her father, was in ill health, and she was taking over many of his duties.

But her years as Princess were nearly over and, on February 5th, 1952, King George VI. passed peacefully away. The reign of Elizabeth II had begun. The Queen was in South Africa at the time and was forced to curtail her Tour, to return to England where she must take up her heavy responsibilities as a Queen.

a new era for Britain had opened when she came to the throne, for no more devoted or courageous person than the second Elizabeth could carry on the monarchy, the enduring strength of her country and the wonder and envy of a large part of the world.

The Throne is a tremendous strain upon one person alone, for, although the Queen is greatly strengthened by her husband's presence, there is much that she must do alone, always with an appearance of grace and charm. There is no doubt however, in anyone's mind, that she will uphold the traditional status of the Crown, by her confidence and firm resolution that are the result of years of difficult training.

Queen Elizabeth is the symbol of the unity and fraternal love of the Commonwealth and Empire, but she is beloved more than for this alone, for her vital personality and deep sense of duty, have endeared her to so many people all over the world.

Each one of these three women has surely made an outstanding contribution to the progress of the British Empire. They have fought against overwhelming odds and two have already risen victorious while there is one who even now, although burdened by duty, is maintaining the prestige of a country to whom she is giving a life of service. How great are these examples for the whole world to follow for it is through them that their native land has now attained her fame and greatness.