

## The Goff Letters<sup>1</sup>

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**J**N 1759 Jacob Goff married Elizabeth Wilson, of Mount Wilson, Edenderry, Ireland, and took her to his home at Horetown, co. Wexford. The couple had twenty-two children, of whom fourteen lived to grow up, and from them many Irish Quaker families are descended.

There is in existence a collection of letters, written and received by Elizabeth Goff, and from them it is possible to follow her life from her marriage to within three years of her death at the age of seventy-eight. For the sake of continuity of interest the letters are not arranged strictly chronologically, but in groups relating to the different children mentioned.

The collection starts, very appropriately, with a love letter from Jacob Goff, which would be a model for any age:

My Dr Betty

I sit Down to write these few lines with Grate Regret, which is Occationed by a Letter of grate Moment from my Uncle, which Calls me home Directly,—I have the Confidence to think, thee will Pardon my fault, as it's the first, and I hope the Last,—I am sure thee think's it my Duty to Obeay his Orders, As I hope he will make thee and I amends for so Doeing; Dr Betty, I think every Day Absent from thee, Years, but I hope to see thee on fourth or fifth Day after the Meeting, which I wish was Come, for thou art with me Day and Night, tho' miles a sunder; Dr Betty, I Remain with Everlasting Love to thee—

I am Thy True & Afft Lover

JACOB GOFF.

<sup>1</sup> Some years ago a quantity of old letters were found packed away in boxes in the attics at Mount Wilson, Edenderry. From among them this collection was selected and arranged. It is the property of M. Kathleen Bell (*née* Richardson), of Belle Vue, Lurgan (herself a descendant of Elizabeth Goff), who has kindly lent it for the purpose of this article.

Dinah Goff, mentioned in these letters, was the writer of *Divine Protection*, an account of the trials and dangers through which her family passed at the time of the Rebellion in 1798.

These letters give an interesting picture of an Irish domestic interior.

There are not many letters from Jacob Goff in the collection, but those there are show him in a most pleasing light. He seems to have been a faithful friend, and a tender and devoted father, while to his wife he was, throughout their married life of nearly forty years, just what he subscribes himself in the above quoted letter,— a “ True & Aff<sup>t</sup> Lover.”

Now follow several letters to Elizabeth from her mother, Dinah Wilson. From these we learn that several of Elizabeth's children were put out to nurse in the cottages round Edenderry. The comparative neglect of these children, and the light manner in which even serious illnesses are treated, is a revelation to modern mothers who agonise over their children's health and well-being. No wonder when this source of anxiety was removed that the women of Elizabeth Goff's time lived to such a good old age, hale and hearty to the end.

Mary, Elizabeth's little girl of two-and-a-half, seems to have had smallpox. Her grandmother writes thus to her mother about her :

Mary is mended Brevly out of the pock and wont be marked oney thing to spake of Considering what abundonce she had, her right Eye has still a little skim on part of the sight which I hoap with Cair in a little time will wair of. I have Been sevral times with her the last of which was thirday Evning was then herty and lookd about peart and brevly I would not have it Covard for fear of a Cast neither is their oney youmor or Bloodshed about it so y<sup>t</sup> I am in great hoaps it will soon wair of.

The spelling in many of these letters is phonetic, and we may observe that educated people of the time evidently pronounced “ ea ” as “ ay,” a custom which still persists in the common speech of Ireland.

In 1777 there is a letter from Mary Watson, who had evidently been asked to enquire in England for a “ Tutoress ” for the Goff girls. Mary Watson was a niece of Dr. Fothergill and was a beautiful woman. The *Leadbeater Papers* mention the excitement and admiration

she aroused when she came to Ireland as a bride in 1770. Her husband was related to the Goffs through the Clibborns. The tutoress she selects for the Goffs is, she says,

quite the friend, & Religiously inclined, yet quite the gentlewoman. She would expect to be look'd upon & treated, as a friend & companion, rather than a servant, nor, I think, very much sewing, further than what she did, whilst instructing the girls might be expected from her, as the care of so many, if she discharged her Duty to them properly I believe she would think sufficient employment.

The Goff's eldest daughter, Elizabeth, was nearly seventeen at this time, and probably out of the school-room, but Mary, Dinah, Sarah, Hannah, Jane, Anne, Lydia, Charlotte and Lucy, ranging in age from thirteen to three, had all to be taught, so it is likely that the tutoress found she had quite sufficient employment.

Now follows a rather pathetic group of letters about Elizabeth's third daughter, the first Dinah. Dinah was probably a delicate girl, as we find from these letters that she was sent to live in Waterford with Mary Watson, and we may surmise that this was on account of her health, in the hope that the air there would make her stronger. She was at this time fifteen. In a letter dated 11th mo. 15th, 1780, Mary Watson writes of her pleasure in having Dinah with her, and comments on her obliging courteous manners. She continues :

I got Dinah the cloak and Bonnett according to thy desire, & her satisfaction, I do not observe she wants anything but what thou mention'd, unless thou thought proper to allow her a Dark Cotton, or stuff Coat to wear within doors, or to week day Meetings, but this does not appear absolutely necessary, & phaps her light poplin will answer the end.

The proposal of a cotton coat for wear in mid winter seems curious, and why particularly to week day Meetings ?

Next there is an affectionate little letter from Dinah herself. She writes to her " Dear Mamma " (she seems

to have been the only one of Elizabeth's daughters who addressed her in this way), and signs herself "My Dear Fathers and Mothers' dutiful daughter, Dinah Goff."

A few weeks after writing this letter Dinah became so ill that she was taken home again. She was probably far gone in consumption and an attack of measles brought her life to an end. The doctor who attended her treated her by letting of blood and a blister applied between her shoulders, which, as her father writes: "did not remove the Complaint, but rather heasten'd her Disalution." Elizabeth was away staying with her eldest daughter, Elizabeth, who had married John Lecky and lived at Ballykealy, co. Carlow. Jacob writes to her:

My Dearest

In my last I informed thee that I had but little hopes of my Dr Dinah, my fear was not without foundation, she Departed this Life about 4 o'clock yesterday, she was senceable to the last, seemed to be in a sweet frame of mind, quite resigned, rather wished for Death than Life, often wished she might be like her namesake, her Dr Grandmother, calld for all the servants kisd them & bid them farewell, had her sisters calld & bid them farewell, but would not kiss them for fear of the Measles, prayed to God to bless them, lookd up at me & said my Dr Father am I worth kissing, I kissd her.

Then he recounts many other little messages of love she gave, and concludes:

We intend her Interment on seventh morning with a few fr<sup>ds</sup>. My Dr Love sallute thee & Remain Thy Loving & Aff<sup>t</sup> Husb<sup>d</sup>

JACOB GOFF.

Hor[town], 4th mo. 19th 1781

Poor little Dinah! Even after all these years one can hardly read of her early death without a feeling of sadness, but, as Mary Watson says in her letter of condolence,—“we should be thankful that her innocent spirit is admitted into peace and rest.”

Incidentally we may again notice the curious calmness—one might almost say callousness—displayed in cases of serious illness. Here was Elizabeth staying

away from home while her daughter lay dying, not even returning for the funeral. This is even more extraordinary when we find in another letter that at the same time her six younger children all had severe attacks of measles and whooping cough, or, as their father calls it, "chincough."

Three years after this, Elizabeth's youngest daughter was born. She was named Dinah after the sister who had died. Dinah's eldest niece, little Elizabeth Lecky, was three years older than herself. We are told in a letter of 1784, that "Elizabeth often talks of her Aunt Dinah that cannot spake one word."

In reading these letters one is struck by the dread which all the writers had of gout. This is accounted for by the fact that, in those days, if a doctor did not understand a disease he called it gout. Before Laënnec invented the stethoscope very little was known of internal diseases, especially those connected with the heart, so they were all put down to gout, and it was proportionately dreaded. Jacob Goff, for instance, writes in 1783: "Poor Cousin John Watson, he is as bad as man could be with the Gout in his Lungs. He has been blistered on both his Legs, but no Apparant benifit Perceived." Many of the writers seem to have adopted what was probably the wisest course, considering the medical profession of the time, and doctored themselves. In that case they generally took "James's Powders," then regarded as a sovereign preventative for almost all diseases, so much so, that Sir Horace Mann said he had such faith in them that he would take them if the house were on fire!

Mary Goff was married to James Forbes in Forest Meeting House on the 9th of September, 1784, when she was twenty years of age. The young couple settled down in Dublin, at Arran Quay. Now follow several letters about Mary, the first of which is from Hannah Wilson, who was Elizabeth's sister-in-law, and aunt to Mary. James Forbes was Hannah's own nephew, so that she was doubly interested in the young people. Hannah Wilson has certainly lost no time in staying with them, and when she returns to her own home, Mount Prospect, near

Rathangan, co. Kildare, she writes to tell Elizabeth about her visit.

M Prospect 10 mo. 1st 1784

I embrace the earliest leisure time since I parted My Dear Nephew & Niece—to tell their Parents I saw them safe in their own Habitation—which is a comfortable one for young beginners. a pleasant situation it is & good Air for Dublin which is a pleasing circumstance as believe a close Place would not agree with Cousin Mary. . . . I believe few has gone together who had more unanimous consent of each party's than this dear young Couple—which makes the prospect more pleasing when look'd at—James is very good Natur'd but a little too volatal—which I hope in time will subside sufficiently to make him more stedy—also his being Join'd to so gentle a help meet (who will not laid him astray) as most assuredly we are sent together to help each other—as too heads is better than one.

This letter gives us the first hint as to Mary's delicacy of constitution. Elizabeth's younger sister, Jane, had married Joseph Sandwith soon after Elizabeth's own marriage. The Sandwiths seem to have had no children and to have paid a great deal of attention to the Goff girls. They are frequently mentioned in letters. Their Dublin address was Anglesea Street, which was probably over Joseph Sandwith's place of business, and they had also a country place called Barn Hill at Dunleary, the name by which Kingstown was called before George IV. landed there in 1821. Mary writes to her mother on the 14th of April in the following year. She has two of her sisters with her, and she says :

The Girls are just gone out to see if they can see any of the quality going to the Castle as this is the Night of the fancy Ball. . . . Aunt Sandwith told me what thou sayd respecting Hannah's gown, sure Aunt has made her a present of a very handsome tea coulard Poplin, I often wondered what was the reason that Hannah never shewd thee her best, while at Horetown, but believe the cause proceeded from a dislike she tooke to it.

It seems rather mean of Mary to have informed her mother of Hannah's "very handsom tea coulard Poplin," which the poor girl disliked so much.

In the next few letters Mary frequently mentions her cough. Once she says: "I found there was not anything so good as to indulge it for a few days and by so doeing I got shut of it sooner." To "get shut of" a thing is not now an expression used by cultured people, though it exists in common speech. Mary had a daughter on the 1st of August of this same year. The little girl was called Elizabeth after her grandmother. Mary grew very ill after the birth of the child and Hannah Wilson took them both to Mount Prospect for change of air. In reading the letters one can see clearly that Mary was dying of consumption, but this was not recognised at first by those around her, and she herself thinks she is getting better. In October she writes:

I may inform thee, and that in truth, that I find myself growing stronger. My cough is better I am taken the grand Elexer every Night which I think has been of service. I am to get Asses Milk to drink the Doctor orderd goats whey but there is no such thing about here my little Betsy pretty well she still has her cough but the snuffles is I think better.

The next letter is from Hannah Wilson. She is dosing Mary with the inevitable James's Powders and thinks that she was getting decidedly better when one night her "Beadgound had slipt of the Bead," and as she was unable to wake her sister Hannah, who slept in a "Cradle" bed beside her, she caught fresh cold. Hannah must have been an extremely heavy sleeper and was perhaps of a lethargic disposition, as her aunt says later on in the letter: "Cousin H G very agreeable but would have her stur about more than she does, not as active as I wish her for a youth in good helth."

Early in December poor Mary's brief life ended. Neither of her parents was with her, but in her aunt Hannah Wilson she had a true friend. After Mary's death Hannah writes:

The final close was sudan solom and aughful but so quiet and seemingly easy. I think if I was to

have gained more than I could mention I could not have done more than I did for to help the dear desased, but alas all was in vain. . . . She had her Senses to the last and I am convinst when her Lamp was out here it was lit in the Mantions of eternal Rest where no trouble or sorrow can ever reach her or disturb her Repose. . . .

Considering the un mistakeable character of the disease, it is rather a surprise to find that a post mortem was held, but it is still more astonishing that the doctor apparently allowed Hannah Wilson to be present on the occasion, even though, as she writes : " He performed the operation in as quiet modest manner as I believe it could have been done in."

James Forbes broke up the house in Arran Quay where his brief married life of fifteen months had been spent, and went to live with his mother in Bride Street. In 1792 he married Elizabeth Watson of Clonmel. He moved to London where he died in 1819, leaving ten children. Betsy was a delicate child, but she lived to grow up. The last mention of her is when she was about twenty-four, and we do not know if she ever married. Joshua and Hannah Wilson are not mentioned again in the letters, but we know from other sources that at the time of the Rebellion they were forced to leave Mount Prospect at a moment's notice. They went to London and settled at Taplow Hill.

The next daughter with whom the letters deal is Anne, born 1771. Anne must have been an attractive young woman, for we find that she had at least three proposals in two years. Her suitors seem to have approached her parents, with the approbation of their own relations, and details as to allowance to the wife, etc., are gone into before Anne was applied to for her consent. Eventually William Penrose was allowed to pay his addresses to her. He was a widower with six children and was at this time thirty years of age. Anne was married in Forest Meeting House on January 14th, 1790. Elizabeth wrote a full account of the affair to her sister Jane Sandwith. They had several outsiders present, among them Lady Anne Hore, her daughter and three



sons, "who were much pleased & expressed their satisfaction & kind wishess for us, Dear Joseph Pool was favoured in a good degree on the occation." The next day the Penroses set out for Waterford. In March Elizabeth went to stay with them. She brought with her her children Jane and Joseph, aged respectively twenty-three and ten, and as her other daughters Sally and Hannah were already staying with the Penroses, they formed a large party. The amount of visiting that these people did is really astonishing. "Company to dinner," "Company to tea," are mentioned in almost every letter, and besides that there were always large parties of people in the house. It shows that provisions and labour were both cheap, and the servant difficulty not acute.

Elizabeth found Anne looking thin, and with a cough and cold, but "nobely settled." Early in 1796 Anne Penrose seems to have got into a very bad state of health, and Elizabeth took her to Mallow, then highly celebrated for its waters. From here she never had strength to return but died on July 29th. William Penrose only survived his wife about two years. He always maintained very friendly relations with the Goff family, and was of great assistance to them in many ways. He was a tender and affectionate father, and took good care of Anne's two little boys. His views on their upbringing sound curiously modern. Writing in December, 1795, he says: "My 2 Dear little Boys stout & hearty They are both out every day that is at all favourable which I believe the best preventative against delicacy and cold."

We now come to Elizabeth's tenth daughter, Lucy. She and her sister Jane had a double wedding on January 8th, 1795. Lucy was twenty at the time. She married Joseph Pike and went to live at Hore's Lane, Cork. Her letters to her mother and sisters are pleasant and affectionate, and give the idea of a very lovable personality. One to Dinah starts:

Having a frank am unwilling to let it go without acknowledging the receipt of My dear Sister Dinah's acceptable Letter and to assure her I shall always feel pleasure in a correspondance with her, as it is a

gratification to find we are remembered by our absent friends.

Like so many of the other Goffs Lucy was consumptive, and after the birth of her daughter at the end of this year she rapidly became worse. We are told that "she had not been free of what they thought a cold, since the end of the summer." Early in the spring of 1796, Joseph Pike took Lucy, and her sister Lydia, to England in the hope of benefiting Lucy's health. She died at Bristol on the 9th of June after a married life of just eighteen months. Her little girl, Elizabeth, grew up and married into the Bewley family. In 1803 Joseph Pike married Lydia Fennel, of Cahir, and had three children.

In 1782 Sally Goff was staying in Cork and writes to her mother from there. She was Elizabeth's fourth daughter, and was at that time sixteen years of age. In experience she was, however, many years older than sixteen would be now, and the unformed, schoolgirl writing contrasts oddly with the facts of life and death of which she discourses so glibly. Some of her remarks, too, are more prudent than one would expect from her age. For instance :

Cousin L. Newsom intends laving S Wilson to keep House till her return and wants me to go and keep her company, but I think it would be much more to my Advantage to stay here with Friend Church for I know Cousin S W is very fond of Company and dont like to be alone.

At twenty-one Sally married Richard Sparrow, and went to live at Clonmel. Jacob Goff, going to see them soon after the wedding, professes himself as "much pleased at Sally's situation." The Goffs seem to have got on less well with Richard Sparrow than their other sons-in-law. There are hints that he was difficult to do with, and prone to take offence. From his letters one would say that he was rather a pompous, sentimental man—one with a great flow of words and perhaps not much behind them.

Sally Sparrow lived longer than Elizabeth's other daughters who died of consumption. She does not seem

to have developed the disease until she was nearly thirty-three, after twelve years of married life. She had five daughters, Elizabeth, Anne, Jane, Sarah and Lucy. Lucy died at two years old. In a letter from Elizabeth Goff who was staying at the Sparrows we read :

I doubt that thou hast heard of this family being by death deprived of their young child the remains of the Dr Lamb was interred the day We got here, taken of by a short illness of, the docter thought Water on its Brain happy Child just two years old, Sally is thank Providance breavly & has still four fine Girls.

At the end of 1800 the Sparrows seem to have gone to Clifton on account of Sally's failing health. Lydia, who was always the one chosen to be with her sisters in illness, went with them. In a letter written from Clifton, 11th of 12th month, 1800, Richard Sparrow says :

My dear Mother Goff

The Scene is changed, the Curtain of the evening seems drawing fast.—My Dearest Creature has had a very material Change within a few Days. . . . 'Tis comfortable to feel the resignation, the fitness, the readiness to embrace the Summons, nothing to do but to die,—Her happy Declaration to me a few days since was—" Thank Goodness I have neither pain of Body or Mind."

A subsequent letter announces that Sally passed away on the 2nd of February, and was buried in the Friends' Burial Ground at Bristol. We have another letter from Richard Sparrow, written after his return home about two months after Sally's death. It gives a full and detailed account of the death, contains many protestations of his own " poignant pain " ; and after mentioning her peaceful departure continues : " Oh, saith my Soul at this moment, that it may ever be the case with me, that My remembrance of her may be sweet continually, & returning as the morning." However, in a letter of Lydia Newsom's, written in the May of this year, we find : " Richard Sparrow appears as cheerful as ever and as if poor Sally was nearly forgot,"—but let us hope that this was scandal.

After Sally's death Lydia lived a great deal with the Sparrows, and was largely instrumental in bringing up her motherless children. Richard Sparrow says of her: "Her affectionate & sympathetic attention I shall only cease to remember with my Life (I hope)."

S. HILDA BELL

*Solitude, Lurgan*

*To be continued*

## At the Monthly Mens Meeting at Knockgraffon

23<sup>rd</sup> of 6mo., 1696.

James Russell of Coalbawn belonging to this meeting being through the late troubles reduced to a low condition it was recommended to our meeting that some way might be considered to help him that thereby he might be the more enabled to pay his rent and maintain his family which accordingly being done, friends were willing to lend him some cows and he to take the benefit of the milk and calves and the said cows to be marked with a particular mark of some one of the meeting, the names of the friends and the number that each friend lent is as followeth

George Collet 3 cows

Peter Cooke 2 cows

John Fennell 2 do

Joshua Fennell 2 do

Samuel Cooke 1 do

which is in all 10 cows to be branded in the horn with S.C. and made over to Joshua Fennell and Samuel Cooke by bill of sale & board &c. George Baker has given him thirty shillings for ever.

Extract from the proceedings of the monthly meeting of the County of Tipperary.

Copied from a manuscript in the possession of J. Ernest Grubb of Carrick-on-Suir, 1917.

"It is neither a sin nor a fault to do what good one can in any government."

Saying traditionally ascribed to William Penn, and quoted in *Life of Samuel J. Levick*, 1896, p. 360.

"It is said that the slave ships were in those days anchored in the harbor at West River [Md.], and Friends, after attending Y.M. would sometimes go on board to select slaves for their plantations."

*Memoirs of Samuel M. Janney*, 1881, p. 182.

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