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Our Quotation—6

“I must offer and tender my life and all, for my testimony if it be required of me.”

“I bless the Lord that I am here this day upon this account, to bear testimony to the Truth.”

“Although I am out of the King’s protection, yet I am not out of the protection of Almighty God.”

MARGARET FELL,
Trial at Lancaster Assizes, 1664.

The Remarkable Religious Experience
of Edmund Gurney, of Norwich
(1723—1796)

EDMUND GURNEY, the younger, of St. Augustine’s, Norwich, worsted weaver, was the only surviving son of Edmund Gurney (1697-1742), of the same parish, place and trade, by his wife, Mary Pearce, daughter of William Pearce, of St. Giles’s, Norwich.

Edmund Gurney, senior, who was clerk to London Yearly Meeting, in 1732 and 1735, was the youngest of the four surviving sons of John Gurney, of Norwich, the

founder of the Gurney family in that city, by his wife Elizabeth Swanton, and was a brother of Joseph Gurney, grandfather to John Gurney, of Earlham Hall.

Edmund Gurney had a family of seven sons and four daughters, all of whom died in infancy or childhood, save three, viz., Edmund Gurney, junior, and two daughters. Lucy (1722-1749), the eldest, married in 1746, as his first wife, her first cousin, John Gurney, of St. Augustine's, Norwich, worsted weaver, and later banker, brother to Henry Gurney, who was his partner in the establishment of the famous banking firm of Gurney of Norwich, in 1775. The second daughter was Mary, (1726-1788). She was a minister for about twenty-seven years; and there is an account of her in *Piety Promoted*, in which it is stated that Edmund and Mary Gurney were "Friends well-esteemed and religiously concerned to educate their children in the way of truth."

Edmund Gurney, junior, was born at St. Augustine's, Norwich, 6th October, 1723, apparently. He married firstly at the Friends' Meeting-house, Lynn, 12 August, 1747, Martha Kett, daughter of Richard Kett, late of Norwich, and half-sister to Elizabeth Kett, who married his (Edmund Gurney's) first-cousin, John Gurney, of St. Clement's, Norwich, son of Joseph Gurney by his handsome wife, Hannah Middleton, (whose published portraits are so well-known), and father of John Gurney, of Earlham. By Martha Kett, Edmund Gurney had a son Edmund, (1748-1764) and a son Jacob who died in infancy.

Edmund Gurney married secondly about 1753, Ann ———, who had two children who died in infancy; and he married thirdly, in 1757, Priscilla, daughter of Timothy Bevan, of London, who died at Norwich, 4 October, 1772, aged thirty-five.

Of Priscilla (Edmund) Gurney there is an account in *Piety Promoted*, in which references are made to the affectionate ministrations of her husband, and her affection for her father, who with her three brothers came from London to visit her.

There is also in *Piety Promoted* an account of Ann Gurney, daughter of the aforesaid John Gurney, of St. Augustine's (who married firstly Lucy Gurney, sister to Edmund Gurney, junior), by his second wife Ann Kendall.

There are in this account references to her uncle Edmund Gurney's spiritual ministrations in her last illness. She died in 1772, aged nearly fifteen.

Edmund Gurney appears to have adopted in early manhood infidel opinions, about which and his conversion we subjoin a remarkable narration, kindly communicated in 1893, by the late Richard Hanbury Joseph Gurney, of Northrepps Hall, Norwich, grandson of Joseph John Gurney, together with some particulars furnished by his father John Henry Gurney and cousin Hudson Gurney, F.S.A.

Later, Edmund Gurney became a well-known and much esteemed Quaker minister, although, unless a testimony was issued concerning him, we have no particulars, except that he travelled in the ministry with John Kendall, of Colchester, in 1766, upon a visit to Friends of Kent, Surrey and Sussex, which, John Kendall says, was performed "in a good degree to our comfort and satisfaction."

In our possession are three letters addressed by Edmund Gurney, to the writer's great-grand-uncle, Samuel Day, a Quaker minister of Stansted, Essex.

These letters, which are written in a very plain neat hand, are dated 1764 and 1772. They are inscribed to "Dear cousin Samuel Day," a "Quaker cousinship" truly, as S. Day was no relation to the writer whatever, though he had married, as his first wife, Kezia Lawrence, sister to Sarah, the wife respectively of Samuel Gurney, of Keswick, near Norwich, a first cousin of Edmund, and of Thomas Bland of Norwich, the two sisters both being ministers.

The letters are mainly of a religious character; the first, dated Norwich, 25—x.—1764, says:

My mind was, as I apprehend, nearly touched with sincere desire for thy growth and preservation in the unchangeable Truth [A post-script adds]—Thou was so kind as to offer to get me a double Gloucester Cheese, shall be obliged to thee to do it first opportunity and send me by Nassmith's waggon. I will pay cous[in] Sammy for it. Vale.

The next letter, dated 8—xi.—1764, acknowledges the receipt of the cheese costing 6/7 $\frac{3}{4}$. He names "my cousin Hannah Bevan being on her return to town . . . Thy loving Cousin Edmund Gurney." The third

letter is dated 16—i.—1772; the writer condoles with Samuel Day on the decease of his sister.¹

My Brother Gurney's Daughter we have for now near a week been expecting every day to be removed and I am frequently with Them that I cannot leave home in the present circumstance of the Family or had most likely been ere now in London: therefore Thou will see this pinching tryal on this family so confines me that I shall not be able to attend the funeral of Thy Sister, but my dear love attends Thy Brother, Self and Sisters. . . . P.S.—It has been a very exercising time to my Sister, who, poor woman, have been flattering herself with her Daughter's recovery and now this sudden alteration, in which no hopes are Left has fell very heavy upon her, but through devine mercy She seems greatly resigned within a day or two past.

This refers to the Ann Gurney aforesaid, of *Piety Promoted*, who died three days after the date of this letter, viz. 19—i.—1772, aged nearly fifteen years.

To conclude our account of Edmund Gurney, other than the particulars in the following narration, we may add the following. Hudson Gurney left a note to the effect that "Edmund Gurney was converted under the preaching of John Wesley" who was many times at Norwich, but in this he may have been mistaken. Edmund Gurney was a partner with his brother-in-law, John Gurney, as "Master Weaver" in Norwich, and a letter of a nephew, preserved at Keswick Hall, near Norwich, mentions that their windows were smashed in a great riot there in July, 1740. This happened upon July 7th. It arose through a rabble affixing "a Note on the Door of every Baker in the City. . . *Wheat at sixteen shillings a Comb.*"

The riot resulted in the prison being opened, the prisoners released, five adults and a boy being killed, and many others dangerously wounded.²

R. H. J. Gurney adds that Edmund Gurney married money with each of his three wives, yet he fell into financial difficulties and had to be, apparently, supported by his relations, and was not considered a strong character from a worldly standpoint.

Edmund Gurney died in St. Stephen's parish, Norwich, 6 October, 1796, aged seventy-three years, and was buried in Friends' Burial Ground there, 9 October.

¹ Mary Dimsdale, wife of Tayspill John Day, of Stansted, and sister-in-law of Thomas, first Baron Dimsdale.

² See *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1840.

Under date 20—iii.—1799, Susanna Crafton, (second wife of Thomas Day of Saffron Walden, brother to the aforesaid Samuel Day), records in her diary :

N.B.—Heard with Pleasure that the affairs of our dear deceased fr^d. Edmond Gurney are like to be fully made up.³

The name of Edmund was retained in the Gurney family in the persons of Edmund Gurney, who died at Sheffield in 1821, and in that of our late Friend Henry Edmund Gurney, of London and Reigate, who died in 1905, aged 84.

The following narrative was printed in *Musings and Memories*, being chiefly a collection of anecdotes and reflections of a religious character on various subjects, collected by Joseph Walton, Philadelphia, 1875, pp. 271-275. It also appeared about the same time in an English illustrated periodical principally for young people, called, we think, *The Family Friend*, or some such title, and we distinctly remember reading it at the time of publication with considerable interest, about forty years ago.

JOSEPH J. GREEN.

“ About the middle of the last century Sarah Taylor,⁴ of Manchester, England, a humble minded minister of the Society of Friends, engaged in a family visit to the members of her own religious Society in the city of

³ James Jenkins, in recording the death of Edmund Gurney, wrote :

“ He died, as it was supposed, of a broken heart, having discovered but a short time before that his commercial concerns were in a state of insolvency, owing to the improper management of a friend whose name was Ellington, in whom he had placed the management of his business. They were manufacturers of what are called Norwich stuffs, and in which I have heard they did largely in the export line.

“ The first time that I saw Edmund Gurney was (I think) at the marriage of my mistress, Hannah Jesup, in 1770, at Woodbridge, when I noticed his cheerfulness of disposition as a man, and the high estimation in which he was held as a Minister. . . . As a preacher he possessed great energy of manner, with a copious and constant flow of appropriate matter, and in diction elegant, but his voice was dissonantly harsh, that working it up (as it used to be) to a musical pitch, did not improve. His person was tall: he wore a brown wig and his clothes were uniformly of a drab colour (*Records and Recollections*, ms. in D.).

⁴ Sarah Taylor (1717-1791) was the daughter of John and Margaret Routh, of Wensleydale, N. Yorks. About 1737 she went to reside with her brother, John Routh, in Manchester. In 1749, she married William Taylor (-1750), who died a few months later. Something is known of her travels in the ministry—Richard Lindley records a visit to Darlington in 1767 of “ Sally Taylor (Manchester) ” (*THE JOURNAL*, xiv. 87), and in 1769 she was in Ireland (*ibid.* xv. 18). Several of her letters to Ann Fothergill are in D.

Norwich: she was generally kindly received; but Edmund Gurney, who had joined a club of infidels, refused to receive a visit from her.⁵

“ This honest hearted lover of the souls of men was much distressed at [his] conduct, and one night retired to bed not a little depressed about this matter, no doubt endeavouring, before giving herself to sleep, in humility to cast her burden upon her Lord and Saviour. At last she slept, and when the sound sleep of the early part of the night was past, she dreamed. In her dream, she thought that she awoke, and finding the day had broken, arose, dressed herself and went downstairs: she opened the front door and walked out into the street. The public lights were not all extinguished, and this, with the daylight which was increasing, enabled her to see the names of the residents of the different houses on their door plates. She thought she passed through several streets, making several turns, until at last she came to a house, on which she saw the name of Edmund Gurney. Stepping up and ringing the bell, a porter quickly opened the door. She asked if Edmund Gurney was in—the man replied that he was in the garden, but he had ordered him not to admit any of the Quakers into the house. Sarah dreamed that she passed right by the astonished man, and seeing a side-door, she opened it, and finding it was the way to the garden, she followed one of the walks until she came to a summer-house. A man was sitting therein, who, as she stepped within the door, said, ‘ I believe the devil could not keep the Quakers out.’ Sarah dreamed she sat down on a bench, and he, who had risen on her entrance, sat down beside her, when she thought she was favoured so to speak to him, that the witness for the truth in him was reached, and he was much affected and tendered. When her service seemed over she left him and then she awoke and behold it was a dream.

“ Looking out of the window of her room, she saw that day was breaking and, solemnly affected by the Vision she had been favoured with, she arose and dressed herself for going out, just as she had done in her dream. On opening the door looking into the street, everything

⁵ The account as given in *Musings and Memories* has been, at this point, corrected to above by R. H. J. Gurney.

seemed so entirely as she had seen it, that without hesitation, or speaking to anyone in the house, she started onward, taking her dream for direction. As she passed along, the same houses with the same names on the door plates appeared as in her dream, and she followed, tracing them from street to street, until the house with Edmund Gurney's name on it, stood before her. She rang the bell: the porter opened the door, and, to her enquiries if Edmund Gurney was in, he said 'Yes,' but added, 'He has commanded me not to admit any of the Quakers.' This would probably have discouraged Sarah if it had not been for the dream: but as all things had as yet turned out as she had seen in her vision, she determined to trust it further, and so pushing by the man, she opened a side door and let herself into the yard. The garden appeared exactly as seen in her dream and she soon found the summer-house where Edmund Gurney was sitting with a book in his hand. As she entered, he arose, and, approaching her, said, 'I believe the Devil could not keep the Quakers out.' Sarah sat down, and he took a seat beside her: she soon found her heart tenderly concerned for him, and her mouth was opened to address him in the persuasive utterance of Gospel love; she told him he had professedly adopted sentiments which his heart refused to own and that he was reading infidel books to strengthen him in infidelity. Edmund was affected under her ministry and he knew her message to him was the truth. When she arose to leave him, he pressed her to stay and breakfast with him, but this she declined, saying, she had nothing further to do there. Bidding him farewell, she returned to her lodgings her heart warmed in grateful admiration of the Lord's wonderful leadings and marvellous loving-kindness.

"Edmund Gurney, through the Lord's renewed and strengthening grace, was thoroughly aroused from the slumber in which the evil one had sought to keep him to his utter ruin. He never again attended the Infidel Club and as in deep abasement and sorrow of heart he repented for the past and submitted to the baptisms of the Holy Spirit, and living in reverent obedience to the Lord's teaching, he grew in religious experience, and in time came forth in the ministry."