

The Gurney Manuscripts

A very important and interesting collection of manuscript letters has recently been deposited on permanent loan in the Friends Reference Library, Euston Road, London, through the kindness of Mr. Quintin Gurney, of Bawdeswell Hall, Norfolk, a great-grandson of Joseph John Gurney, of Earlham. The letters date from about 1750 to 1850, and they deal with that branch of the family that has been so well described by Augustus Hare in *The Gurneys of Earlham*.

It will be remembered how widespread were the relationships and the interests of this remarkable family, connecting, in the earlier period, with the Barclays, the Bells, and the Bevans, and in the later with the Frys, the Hoares, and the Buxtons, whilst other Gurney groups are represented in the homes of Samuel Gurney of Upton and Daniel Gurney of Runcton, with their further ramifications as the children married into other families including the Cresswells and the Leathams; all these, and many others, are represented in these letters, and they have much to tell us of life, inside and outside the Society and the home. Some of the writers, including Elizabeth Fry, and Priscilla and Joseph John Gurney, were gifted in the Ministry, and many are the Meetings and Friends visited and described by them.

A number of the letters and themes can be gathered into a more or less connected narrative, and it is hoped that these will be published at a future date, but the topics are so varied that some of the letters can hardly find a place in such a plan, and some of these it is hoped to publish from time to time in *The Journal*. The letters selected for inclusion in this issue deal with literature, politics and social reform.

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1. Literature

The *Essays on the Principles of Morality*, by Jonathan Dymond, are recognized as a Quaker classic. The scope, clarity of thought and incisiveness of argument displayed in this great work are impressive. It is, therefore, of especial interest to find among the MSS. a letter written by Jonathan Dymond whilst he was engaged on his great undertaking. It would appear that Joseph J. Gurney, in complete ignorance of the task upon which the author of the *Essays* was even then engaged, had urged him to make some use of his literary talent, and the letter was written in reply thereto.

Jonathan Dymond of Exeter was born in 1796 and died in 1828 leaving his essays unfinished. They were published in 1829 and there

have been twenty issues of the book, thirteen in England, six in America, and one in Dublin. Three of these issues were in Spanish. The latest edition in English was Philadelphia, 1896. The author applies uncompromising standards of Christian morality to a vast variety of types of human conduct, covering almost every public and private relationship. An article on the significance of Jonathan Dymond as a political philosopher appears in *Friends' Quarterly Examiner*, 1928. See also *D.N.B.*

JONATHAN DYMOND TO JOSEPH J. GURNEY. (Gurney MSS. i. 149.)

Exeter, 3 mo. 31, 1826.

Dear friend

Before thy little admonition this morning respecting the employment of my pen, I had conceived some intention of telling thee what employment of that sort I had already undertaken ; & I wished to do this (in part at least), because I feared the answer to thy direct question just after entering my father's door on fourth day evening, was no better than evasive. And I would prefer sending thee this at Plymouth to another mode of communication.

The simple truth is, that the greater part of my very limited opportunities during the last two years, has been employed in a work, which, if my present designs are ever executed, will one day appear before my friends and the public. I am really desirous of giving thee an outline of this task ; & hope thou wilt not think me officious in setting down the probable Title, and the general heads of discussion.—“ Illustrations of the *Principles of Morality*, and of the *Duties* which result from them to *Individuals*, & to *States*.”

Pt. 1. Principles of Morality.

Foundation of moral duty—The Will of God—The means of ascertaining the Will of God—Revelation ; through the medium of Scripture ; immediately to the mind—Subordinate foundations of Duty—The Law of Nature—The Law of the Land—Utility

Pt. 2. Duties of Individuals.

Religious duties—Right and Rights—Property—Wills—Promises—Lies—Oaths—Litigation, & the duties of the Legal Profession*—Suicide—Duelling—Diversions—&c., &c.

Pt. 3. Duties of States.

Political Truth & Political Virtue—Government—Legislation—Penal Law; the Punishment of Death—Religious Establishments—Slavery—War—&c.

I do not find myself capable of giving to this undertaking that fullness & completeness which I desire, without making rather a large book. I doubt whether I can satisfy my mind with a quantity of letter press much less than double that of thy "Observations."

I have, for a very long time (in proportion to my short life), been persuaded that an honest, consistent, and un-deviating application of the principles of *Christian* Morality to the various questions which arise respecting human duty, was greatly needed and would be productive of good. In what degree I may be enabled to supply this want I do not know; but I will acknowledge that, in the not undelightful task which is before me, I have often been more than merely pleased in finding the beautiful consistency of the *Simple* Truth as it respects the conduct of man; and the deplorable and gross inconsistencies of those systems of morality which adopt that Truth only in part, or which mix with it foreign & incompatible principles. I have proceeded in a half corrected copy about as far as the mark which I have made in Pt. 2; and I do not think it probable that four years more will enable me to get it ready for the press. Very few persons (if any), out of our own families know that I have such a matter in hand; but I have lately been less anxious than I once was to conceal it. I would adventure just to add, that although I am *far* from pretending to an affirmative call to this undertaking, yet I know not whether, if I left it unattempted, I should not share the guilt of those who know to do good yet do it not. Be pleased to accept my Anna's love, & that of

Thy affectionate friend

JONATHAN DYMOND.

I have been thinking that thou hast perhaps not seen the 3rd Edition of my War Essay. It is, I hope, less imperfect than the 1st of which my father sent thee a copy. I hope to put a copy of the 3rd in thy hands on thy return, & thou

must not think I have put it into its smart dress in order to give it thee ; for a bookseller, who thinks himself under some obligations, sent me a number of Cops. well bound.

11. Politics

The policy of Tariffs has again become a major political topic. The same question was under discussion nearly one hundred years ago, and a draft letter is here printed, written by Joseph J. Gurney, dealing with a reply received by him regarding some enquiries he had put to John Bright on the expenditure of the Anti-Corn Law League. (A note thereon states that it was "withheld for the present, 3 mo. 18, 1844," so it was probably never forwarded to John Bright.)

The letter is accompanied by a memorandum dealing more exclusively with the evils of the Corn Duties, which were not repealed until the year 1849.

DRAFT LETTER ("WITHHELD FOR THE PRESENT") FROM JOSEPH J. GURNEY TO JOHN BRIGHT. (Gurney MSS. iii. 855).

Earlham, Norwich, 2 mo. 24, 1844.

My dear Friend,

I must freely acknowledge that thy letter respecting the expenditure of the Anti-Corn Law Fund is satisfactory, evincing that there is nothing in that expenditure inconsistent with propriety & rectitude.

After such consideration as I have been able to give to the whole subject, I am no longer satisfied to refuse my Subscription, & now enclose a Bank Post Bill for £100.

I should certainly feel no sufficient inducement thus to support the League, were I not thoroughly convinced that the great principles which it advocates are, in their nature, truly Christian. I cannot deny the truth of the sentiment that financial arrangements, which have the effect of raising the price of any commodity produced by one class of the community, to the injury of other classes—or in other words the financial protection of particular classes, for which the whole population has to pay—are inconsistent with natural equity ; & therefore that a religion of perfect justice & purity demands the total abolishment of such provisions.

I am further of opinion that an enlightened view of the claims of Christianity, & of that charity, in which we ought to salute everyman, everywhere, as our neighbour & our brother,

would lead to an *absolute freedom*, among all the nations of the earth, in their interchange of the commodities whether natural or manufactured, which they respectively produce ; nor can I doubt that such free interchange is eminently calculated, under the blessing of Divine Providence, to undermine the occasions of war, & to promote universal prosperity, harmony, & peace.

Although this principle is grievously interfered with & impeded by many of the nations, with whom Great Britain now enjoys a friendly intercourse, yet I apprehend the Christian duty of our own nation & government, in this respect, continues unchanged, & that our steadily setting the example of free trade, on the ground of principle, would ultimately redound to our benefit, as well as to the welfare & happiness of the world at large. I have faith to believe that the blessing of the Almighty would rest on such a course of national policy.

I must still claim as an exception to these observations the prohibitory duties on the sugars of Cuba and the Brazils, which I look upon as an article stained with blood, as the result not merely of slavery, and slavery in a very cruel form, but of the continued horrors & abominations of the African Slave-trade. It is obvious also that my remarks can have no application to taxes raised for the mere purpose of revenue, & which are necessary to enable Great Britain to maintain her integrity in the punctual payment of the Interest on her national debt. Nevertheless I object, in point of principle, to any tax, even for the purpose of revenue, on man's necessary food, & especially on Bread, the staff of his life. Allow me in conclusion to express my earnest wish that the advocates of Free Trade may exercise a constant—may I not say, *increasing*—care to conduct their proceedings in a Christian spirit towards their opponents—not in the character of *political partizans*, but in that of the Friends of the poor, and the Friends of all mankind.

I am thy affectionate & hearty well wisher,
J. J. GURNEY.

To John Bright, M.P.

MEMORANDUM. (Gurney MSS. iii. 856.)

I have felt a considerable degree of interest in the discussions which have lately taken place on the subject of the protecting duty on Corn. In order to take a just view of the

question, it is to be remarked, *in limine*, that it is a duty which bears no other character. It is not raised for the purpose of revenue & forms no part of the regular resources of Government for the support of the state. It is imposed simply for the purpose of keeping up the price of corn in this country, & therefore through the medium of corn, the price of land & the rental of the Landowner. The subordinate question between the sliding scale & a fixed duty, although it has become the shibboleth of a party, is of no importance at all as affecting the nature, intent & principle of the tax—whether fixed or variable it is a tax to prevent the free importation of foreign corn, to limit & restrict the quantity which might be imported—& to render corn scarce & therefore dearer in Great Britain & Ireland than it would otherwise be. The corn law was imposed (as I understand) in 1815 on the settlement of the general peace of Europe—& was a kind of substitute for war so far as war had served the purpose of protecting the landed interest of this country by preventing the competition with our agriculturists, of foreign growers of corn. *Peace & plenty* are generally understood to go hand in hand, & this is for the most part the actual state of the case. But this association between two of the choicest blessings of Providence was severed by the Corn Law. *Plenty* was separated from peace by Act of parl., in order to favour the aristocracy of this country, by keeping up the price & profits of land, above their *true & natural level*. It was nothing more or less than an artificial embankment to prevent the flowing of waters, which would otherwise have found their own level—a *flowing* which would unquestionably have taken place not merely from other countries to this, but from this country to others, according to the nature of the productions, natural or manufactured, which all the countries of the world had severally to supply.

Had such an embankment never been raised there is no doubt with me, that abundance of corn would have quietly found its way into this country, just as & when it was actually needed to meet the wants of our thick & ever thickening population, and that on the other hand the manufactures of Great Britain would as quietly, and as beneficially to all parties, have flowed forth into the markets of Continental Europe & of America. If our neighbours of other lands had

assisted in feeding us, without any artificial obstruction on our parts, they would never have refused to allow us the opportunity of clothing them. They would on the contrary have accepted the warmth & comfort of our habiliments just as readily & just as gratefully as we should have accepted their cheap and wholesome sustenance.

By our determination to feed ourselves at any price, we have driven them to a determination equally stern to clothe themselves at any price, & thus both parties have been subjected to most painful & needless inconvenience & distress. The *Tariff System* has now become so fixed on all sides that doubts are naturally entertained in every country concerned in it, whether it would be *expedient* boldly to renounce it. But my belief is that the country which shall have the courage so to act, will, after a little time, derive corresponding advantages, which will far outbalance any temporary difficulty.

J. J. GURNEY.

III. The Liquor Traffic

It should be remembered that the question of abstention from alcoholic beverages, or taking any part in their manufacture or sale, did not become a concern of the Society of Friends as a body until about the middle of the nineteenth century. Before that period, "Temperance," in the sense of temperate drinking, was the general attitude of Friends, and in many of the Gurney MSS. wine is looked upon as the usual beverage, whilst in others a moderate use of alcohol is exalted above the "teetotalism" that was even then making its voice heard in some quarters. At the same time, many individual Friends were beginning to realise the direful consequences arising from an unrestricted sale of, at least, the stronger forms of alcoholic liquors. It was not until the year 1842 that Joseph J. Gurney, probably influenced by his American experiences, and possibly by his American wife, formerly Eliza P. Kirkbride of Philadelphia, had become a convert to the "teetotal" point of view, and had banished from the Earham home, including the servants' hall, all forms of alcoholic drinks. Three years later Theobald Mathew writes a letter, telling of the progress of "the Cause" in Ireland, which contains many features of interest.

JAMES BACKHOUSE TO JOHN CAPPER. (Gurney MSS. i. 7.)

Tottenham, 25th of 7th Mo. 1831

My Dear Friend

I have been brought into much thoughtfulness respecting the proper line of conduct of our Religious Society toward such of its Members as open shops for the retailing of Ardent

Spirits ; and the following are the views I take of the subject ; which thou art at liberty to make use of as thou mayest see occasion.

In the first place, as regards the immoral Character of the business of retailing Spirits, there can scarcely be a doubt in the mind of any person not blinded by their influence, either through intemperance, or the love of gain ; and I much doubt whether the witness for God in the minds of those who are thus blinded, does not often convict them of the sinfulness of such a source of profit, in spite of their unwillingness to see it. Let any one consider for a moment, whether a person can, without sin, deal out to others, for his own pecuniary interest, that which by degrees destroys the Body, spreads misery around it, in its shortened period of existence, disqualifies the mind for Communion with God, opens the avenues of all kinds of vice, and is in itself the excitement of such deadly sin as excludes from Eternal Life.

A Dram Shop has been emphatically styled the Devil's Slaughter House, and certainly those who hope that they are in the way to Heaven whilst keeping Dram Shops, are under the delusion of the Devil themselves ; and are enticing those around them into his snares. It is much to be questioned whether the keeper of a Brothel commits greater sin against God and Man, by his occupation, than the keeper of a Dram Shop.

Considering the immoral character of the business of retailing spirits to be fully established, no doubt exists in my mind, as to the necessity of Monthly Meetings taking up the cases of persons who persist in following it, and after duly labouring with them, to convince them of the immorality of their conduct, disowning them if they continue their sinful occupation. It would appear as reasonable to me to say, if we found Satan himself in the Character of a member of our Society, spreading his snares around him, we can only admonish him, we cannot disown him, he is only leading people to Hell, by means which they consent to, and there are so many shades of iniquity, that if we begin by disowning him, where shall we stop ? as to say we cannot proceed to disown a retailer of Spirits, because there are persons, who we are not certain do wrong in doing so.

The retailing of Spirits is palpably immoral, the effects are constantly before our eyes, and the supplying of Gin

Shops is likewise evidently so ; but there are instances of wholesale dealing in them, in which the sin of doing so may appear in some degree problematical ; and whilst it is the duty of a Christian Church to testify against the palpable sins of its members, it is its duty to extend counsel to the problematical ones, and to leave the judgment to God. But blessed is the man that abstaineth from all appearance of evil.

It is my judgment that the statement of the views of our Society with regard to Discipline, in the fourth section of the Preface to the Extracts from the Yearly Meeting Minutes, and the advice No. 6 under the head Monthly Meetings, are sufficient authorities for Monthly Meetings to proceed to disownment upon, in cases of unavailing labour with retailers in Spirits, and with those who furnish such retailers. And Monthly Meetings which neglect their duty in this respect, intail upon the Society a degree of unhealthiness, which if not removed appears to me to endanger the very existence of the Society itself as at present constituted, for as light can have no fellowship with darkness, and as Christ can have no concord with Belial, so if a Church neglect to separate from itself its corrupt members, the time must come when its spiritual members will find it necessary to withdraw themselves from such a Church on account of its corruption.

I remain

Thy sincere Friend

JAMES BACKHOUSE.

THEOBALD MATHEW TO JOSEPH J. GURNEY. (Gurney MSS. iii. 866.)

Cork, March 28th, 1845.

My dear and Honoured Sir,

I consider the kind letter of Mr. Samuel Leggatt a fortunate occurrence, it having procured for me the highly prized favour of a communication from one I so highly respect, and to whom I am so deeply indebted.

Your condescension and Patronage during my stay in Norwich has made an impression on my feelings, which no time shall efface. I know your generous, highminded disposition too well, to allude to your munificent subscription to extricate me from the painful position in which I was unhappily placed. But I shall endeavour to do, what I am aware

is the only thing you desire, to redouble my exertions in the Sacred Cause, to which I have devoted all my energies.

I am happy to have it in my power to assure you that Teetotalism continues to progress in Ireland, and that taking into consideration, the agitated, troublesome times, upon which our lot is now cast, the Violations of the Pledge are very few. The whole of the rising generation is being trained to habits of Total Abstinence, and I have no fears, with the Divine Assistance, for the Stability of this great moral movement.

I am now making a tour through the Kingdom, and from the beneficial results that have followed in the localities to which I have paid second visits, I have every reason to hope that it may be permitted to me without danger to the cause to leave Ireland for a season. I feel a yearning to avail myself of the Invitations I have received, to visit the States and British America, and if I shall find it consistent with prudence, it will afford me much consolation to spend a few months beyond the Atlantic. . . .

To your amiable Lady, and the Misses Gurney, and your excellent son, tho' I had not the pleasure of being introduced to him, I present my most respectful compliments, Fervently Praying that the Lord may bestow on you all every spiritual and temporal Blessing. I am

With profound esteem

Dearest Mr. Gurney

Yours gratefully and devotedly

THEOBALD MATHEW.

J. J. Gurney, Esq.
Earlham.

Father Theobald Mathew (1790-1856) was a Franciscan, and a parish priest in Cork. Yielding to the repeated appeals of William Martin, a Friend of that city, he became the most successful of advocates of total abstinence. He is known as the "Apostle of Temperance."

Stephen Grellet MSS.

Several enquiries respecting these have reached Friends House and it is a pleasure to be able to give the following reference :

"At the Ridgway Branch of the Philadelphia Library exists (1) a MS. journal of S. G's. travels in 1811-13 and 1812-20, (2) four large vols. of letters and memoranda, largely original letters in French and in English addressed to S. G. and others of his family. HENRY J. CADBURY."