

Joseph John Gurney in America

THE Gurney Loan Collection of MSS. contains about 120 of the Journal Letters written by Joseph John Gurney during his visit to America in the years 1837 to 1840. These were set up in type and a few copies were privately circulated on his return to England, but the more important details were published for general use in the two volumes, *A Winter in the West Indies, described in Familiar Letters addressed to Henry Clay of Kentucky*; London, 1840; and *A Journey in North America, described in Familiar Letters to Amelia Opie*; Norwich, 1841. Two letters written during this period are here printed. The contemporary copy of a letter from E. Warder, of Springfield, Ohio, describes the impression made by one of J. J. Gurney's family visits. The writer has not been identified, and Joseph J. Gurney does not mention the incident in his letters, but the Ohio Yearly Meeting, and other incidents of his ministry in that district are vividly described in the following letter.

ARTHUR J. EDDINGTON.

E. WARDER'S LETTER

Our dear Father and friends left an hour since and having arranged matters and things I gladly sit down to give my dear Mother an account of the delightful visit we have had whose only defect was her absence—How much would thee have enjoyed the *pure, holy, christian* spirit, the humility and unbounded love accompanied by polished manners and fine sense—He is one of the most beautiful exemplifications of the christian gentleman I have ever seen, and instead of this short stay we wished most earnestly he could have remained a week—how great a privilege to be enabled to enjoy the society of such, but this we could not do in Philadelphia—*there* we should only have met him in publick—*here* he was one of *us*—We had delayed dinner to a late hour when despairing of seeing them we had commenced and, they arrived—Joseph J. Gurney's salutation to Papa was beautiful—he seemed to feel it a pleasure to meet a brother Englishman, and though he said little, he *felt* the

comforts around him and the many little quiet arrangements which had been made to render his visit pleasant—I believe everything dear Mother was as thee would have desired had thee been here—The friends were all glad to lie down in the afternoon—we had an early tea and were at the meeting house by 7—J.J.G.'s manner is slow and impressive—he was particularly led to prove the divinity of our saviour, the *oneness* of the Father, son and holy spirit—our entire dependence on the saviour, inability to do any thing unless he aid us—and *particularly* his *indwelling* in the hearts of each individual, that we should depend upon his teachings and follow *him* only, as our guide.—We returned by 9 and having partaken of some fruit and cakes the 72nd Psalm was read and he addressed us in a few short sentences in the most sweet and tender manner—Sarah breakfasted with us after which he again addressed each individual separately and most acceptably—thee dearest Mother and thy absent ones were not forgotten but were prayed for fervently—It has never been my lot to be present at so highly favoured a season, at least so it felt to *me* and I most earnestly desire we may be enabled to follow the teachings of the spirit so clearly pointed out to us. There seems to be a constantly overflowing spirit of love to all around him and he so beautifully exemplifies his Master's words “A new commandment give I unto you that ye love one another.”—H.D. has been much struck with all that she has seen; it has made a great impression on her mind—*such* friends *must* do good and scatter the seed in their progress—M.P. called to see him but he was too late—He will be in Cincinnati and I hope dear Mother thee may meet him there—thee *must* see him—simply as a man, it is well worth the effort—he is by nature a *nobleman* and exhibits the polish of constantly mingling among his equals and feeling his own standing there.

(Gurney MSS. III, 157.)

Smithfield, Ohio, 9 mo 10th 1837.

My beloved children

. . . The Ohio Yearly Meeting has been large, & has certainly been one of the most memorable occasions, of divine favour mercifully bestowed in the needful time, that I have ever known. At the conclusion yesterday, the shutters

which separate the mens' from the womens' house were removed (a task of no noise or difficulty, so well are their large meeting houses contrived)—& the whole body united in the final solemnity. It was an inexpressibly weighty & solemn hour—the *pouring forth* of prayer by Stephen Grellet, occupied about half the time. Friends have given me a most satisfactory return Certificate, & with as full a tide of unity, as I ever witnessed on any occasion. I have felt thankful for this boon—& for the remarkable degree of easy brotherhood which it has been given me to enjoy with the Society in these parts. A great openness to the truth appears to prevail extensively, & the general characteristic of the Yearly Meeting & its exercises, has been the bold & simple upholding of the principles of Friends, in connexion with a remarkably clear recognition of the fundamental doctrines of the gospel. . . . I think it was a salutary check to the flowing tide, that I blundered on sixth day, in making a premature proposal for a joint assembling of the men & women. After it had been consented to by both meetings, I distinctly felt a check—& had to acknowledge myself mistaken & to withdraw the proposal—Friends were I believe well pleased at my so humbling myself, & yesterday, it all came right in a wonderful manner. . . . A vast number of aged men & women attended the Yearly Meeting—quite a new & cheering sight to me, & warmly did they give me the right hand of fellowship. The Young people are very affectionate & impressible—a fine field do they present for labour. By far the greatest deficiency which I see prevailing is a want of diligence & regularity in the family reading of Scripture—advice was freely given in the Y. Meetg. on the subject by several friends; & I hope the good practice is growing. There are some things in the habits of the people unfavourable to this practice—They breakfast at 7 o'clock in the morning, & when one party has finished, another sits down, & so on for a considerable time—The same at tea or supper—the 6 o'clock evening meal—& also at the $\frac{1}{2}$ past 1 dinner. I fall into their hours & modes of living with little difficulty; & am in excellent health—as to wine or beer, they are pretty nearly articles unknown—I have enjoyed a daily draught of Cider at my friend Dr. Parker's (my happy home at M. Pleasant) but expect but few such privileges—I think I shall learn to do without any stimulus—

the air is often so bracing—& in other respects, I have all & abound. . . . Everybody here seems to ride or drive, & the “creatures” as they call them are excellent—walking is an art much disused in America—I rode part of the way yesterday & hope to ride a good deal, but I am considered an anomaly for rising in my stirrups.

First day Evg. 9 mo 10. We have been spending a very interesting day—very full meetings in the morning & afternoon—the latter a public meeting—*many* of the Hicksites present—of which I was not aware; but the doctrine delivered was adapted to them—Since the meetings, some interesting family visits. I was longing for you to witness the *scene* at the morning meeting—the meeting house on the top of a beautiful wooded hill, with a delightful prospect—& fine trees all around it—numbers of horses tied to branches of trees by way of stowage during the meeting—& abundance of countrified vehicles stowed around. . . . I long to make a thorough good inroad on the Hicksite ranks—but it is difficult to know how to get at them—It certainly appears to me, that to *Friends*, the name of Jesus is abundantly precious, which very much cheers me on the way; & makes the more willing to submit to sundry privations & limitations which cannot be avoided. . . . Nothing can have been kinder to me than our beloved Friend Stephen Grellet—I could not have had a greater external advantage than his company & brotherhood—A more hearty friend & helper I have never met with—& I have the pleasant prospect of meeting him again in Indiana. . . . Stephen Grellet desired me to send his most affectionate love.

Most dearly farewell
Your tenderly loving father
J. J. Gurney.

(Gurney MSS. III, 625.)