

**LETTERS ADDRESSED BY J. J.
GURNEY TO TWO YOUNG
PERSONS ON THE OCCASION OF
THEIR LEAVING THE SOCIETY OF
FRIENDS**

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Letters Addressed by J. J. Gurney to Two Young Persons on the Occasion of Their Leaving the Society of friends by J. J. Gurney

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LETTERS

ADDRESSED BY

J. J. GURNEY

TO

TWO YOUNG PERSONS

ON THE OCCASION OF

THEIR LEAVING THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

PHILADELPHIA.

1859.



LETTER I.

EARLHAM, 12th mo. 11th, 1843.

To ——— & ———:

I AM inclined, without further delay, to offer you a few more of my thoughts on the interesting subject which has lately engaged our mutual attention.

In my last letter I mentioned what I think of the great practical importance of your not being deprived of the membership which you now hold with Friends, until you have made a deliberate choice of some other Christian body, with whom you can fully unite. And I endeavored to show that the negative character of our views is such as to allow of your taking full time for the purpose of further consideration, without the smallest compromise of principle.

In point of fact, you have every motive for cool

and quiet deliberation, and not one, that I can see, for haste.

I wish now to observe that this choice of a body with whom you can unite is the more critical, because you cannot take up any new system by *halves*. I am earnest to explain myself on this point, because I think it lies at the foundation of some very serious considerations. I can easily conceive that persons who have been educated in any particular profession of religion, may with propriety, and with no unquiet mind, continue in the same, on the general ground of their being suited by the administration, although they may not fully unite with the whole system with which they are thus connected. It is in the order of Providence that they are where they are, and they may well bear with some doubtful points, for the sake of holding fast that which is good.

But I apprehend it to be an unsound and fallacious step on the part of any persons of mature age, to quit their Providential allotment and publicly to join any other Christian Society, unless they can conscientiously accede to the whole system of such Society—at least to all its main features. I am sure *that this is the universal understanding of thinking*

people on the subject. That any adult person who was known to have joined the Church of England, (for example,) by the rite of water baptism, as administered in that Church, would be considered by an observing and reflecting public to have conscientiously set his seal to its whole system, or at least to all its essential parts.

Such an one cannot fairly, as I think, just sip the cup. He must, if he publicly adopts it as his own, imbibe its contents, even to the dregs.

Now my beloved friends, if this view of the case is just, and just it certainly is, according to my apprehension, you must allow me, in true love and faithfulness, to put the question closely home to your consideration, whether you can conscientiously drink the whole draught which is offered to you by the Church of England? Whether you can with a truly satisfied mind publicly adopt her system as your own.

I begin with that Church because I am aware of your preference for it in some respects; and fully do I unite with you in acknowledging that many excellent and devoted characters who have their place in it, by birth, education, and Providential circumstances, are to be found within its borders. With

all such I rejoice to unite in the grand essentials of Christianity, and in promoting those essentials. Nevertheless I think there are many weighty reasons why you cannot safely unite yourselves with that Church — many large features in the system which are at variance with simple, spiritual, scriptural truth.

The first of these features is, its secularity. I observe that in your paper of resignation, you object to the withholding of those ecclesiastical payments, which are established by the law of this country, from the persons who are their owners. It appears to me that Friends, while they quietly suffer the law to take its course in the distraint of their goods to meet these demands, bear a noble testimony to the purity and freedom of true Gospel ministry in refusing to take any active part in the payment of them. Be that as it may, however, what can be more directly in opposition to some of the plainest principles of Christianity, than the acknowledged fact, that the provision made by law for the support of the ministers of the Gospel, has become matter of legal *ownership and property*, that the cure of souls (or at least the reversion of that cure) is an article which can be brought to market, put up to *auction and sold* to the highest bidder? Can the

sincere inquiring Christian venture to give his public sanction to a church in which, offices considered to be absolutely sacred and divine in their nature, are disposed of at pleasure, by worldly politicians who are invested with public authority, or by private patrons equally worldly? The head of this Church is a temporal monarch, who appoints its Bishops, its Deans, its Prebendaries. It is not the Holy Ghost who makes these persons "overseers" over the body of Christ. It is the King or his Ministers; and the latter, for the most part, in all such appointments, if they have one eye open to religion, have before the other eye, politics in view. The crown also in many instances distributes livings, and thus selects the pastors over particular flocks, while in general this selection devolves on country gentlemen, who consider their legal right of thus choosing the Shepherds of the Sheep of Christ to form an important part of their property. A convenient resource it may be for the future maintenance and respectability of their second and third sons. The fact that some virtuous Kings select good Bishops, and that some pious patrons choose good Pastors, is a Providential circumstance, an exception to the general rule, which has not even a tendency to justify the system. That system is directly opposed, in my apprehension, to the eternal prerogative