

**BRIEF MEMOIR OF
JOSEPH JOHN
GURNEY, ESQ**

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Brief memoir of Joseph John Gurney, esq by John Alexander

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JOHN ALEXANDER

**BRIEF MEMOIR OF
JOSEPH JOHN
GURNEY, ESQ**



G. RICHMOND

R. J. LAMB

Yours sincerely
J. T. Gurney

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BRIEF MEMOIR

OF

JOSEPH JOHN GURNEY, ESQ.,

BY

JOHN ALEXANDER,

MINISTER OF PRISON'S STREET CHAPEL, NORWICH.

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THE TENTH THOUSAND.  
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1847.

BRIEF MEMOIR.

FOR nearly two centuries, the house of Gurney has possessed such an influence in the city of Norwich, that none of its members could have passed away entirely unfelt and unnoticed. But no one has exercised that influence more powerfully and beneficially, than the honoured individual, whose recent death has occasioned such universal lamentation.

Joseph John Gurney, the third son of John and Catherine Gurney, the sister of Priscilla Wakefield, was born in Earlham hall, on the 2nd of August, 1788. A person of the same name as his father, one of his ancestors, and a member of the Society of Friends, appears from the record of "The sufferings of the People called Quakers," to have been a prisoner, with several others, in Norwich gaol, in the year 1683, for refusing to take an oath; and it is a remarkable fact, that the Waller Bacon, of

Earlham, who committed him, was at that time, resident in the very hall which the descendants of the persecuted prisoner now occupy. The father of our lamented friend, an extensive dealer in hand-spun yarn, became subsequently a partner in the banking business, which had been established in Pitt street, in 1775, and was afterwards brought to the present building. He was a man of peculiarly active mind and habits; public spirited and benevolent; and his house at Earlham, to which he removed from Brammerton, in 1786, was the scene of sumptuous hospitality. The superintendence and care of a family of eleven children devolved, however, almost entirely upon his wife, who was a woman of varied and superior excellencies; possessing an enlarged and well cultivated mind, with a refined taste, and high toned conscientiousness. As she died in 1792, her son Joseph was soon deprived of maternal care, and his yet infant years were committed to the intelligent and affectionate training of his three elder sisters; one of whom, who still survives, supplied, as far as a sister could supply, a mother's place; and another of whom, the late Mrs. Fry, had probably no small degree of influence in inspiring his mind with those prin-

principles, which she herself afterwards so nobly carried out into beneficent practice. During the earlier years of this interesting family, true religion had not the controlling and sanctifying power over their minds which it had subsequently. They had not yet perceived the "vanity," nor experienced the "vexations" of the world; their path was sunshine, and their atmosphere perfume; and their literary tastes, their elegant accomplishments, and the rich hospitality of "the good man of the house," rendered Earham hall the attractive centre, in the midst of an extensive circle, to which gentry and nobility repaired, and where the late Duke of Gloucester was a welcome and a delighted visitor.

When the education of our lamented friend ceased to be conducted at home, it was intrusted to the Rev. J. H. Browne, a clergyman in Hingham, about twelve miles from Earham; and it was subsequently matured at Oxford, where he had an excellent private tutor, in the Rev. John Rogers, a man of great and varied learning; and where he attended the lectures of the professors, and enjoyed many of the valuable privileges of the University, without becoming a member of it, and without subscri-

bing to the Thirty-nine Articles. He had always a strong desire for knowledge, and great promptness and facility both in its acquisition and impartation; and his classical, mathematical, and general attainments, if they did not entitle him to the rank of first-rate scholarship, were highly respectable. He had an extensive acquaintance with the Hebrew and Syriac languages, as well as with classics, mathematics, and general science. Attached, even in early life, to Biblical studies, he had critically read the Old and New Testaments in the original languages, in the Syriac Peschito, and in the Latin Vulgate, before he was twenty-two years of age; and he was well acquainted with Rabbinical and Patristic writings, which are often referred to in the learned and skilful criticisms, which abound in his "Biblical Notes and Dissertations." The acquisition of languages, especially of the Greek and Latin, though a laborious process, is among the essential branches of school education; and the intellectual tastes by which Mr. Gurney was distinguished in after life, as well as the perspicuity and elegant ease, which characterised his writings and his public speaking, were in no small degree the effect and the evidence of the atten-

tion which he had paid to classical studies. He also earnestly recommended them to others; and in his 'Thoughts on Habit and Discipline,' there is a chapter on Good Habits of Intellect, in which he says, "I cannot entirely agree in the opinions of those persons who complain of the hours in each passing day, which are devoted, in most of our schools, to Latin and Greek. True indeed it is, that a number of modern languages, and various branches of philosophy and science, appear at first sight to possess superior claims in point of utility; but I believe that no man, who has imbibed at school an accurate knowledge of Latin and Greek, will regret the hours which have been devoted to the pursuit. Not only will he find the polish of classical literature a real advantage, and its treasures worth enjoying; not only will his acquaintance with these languages facilitate the acquirement of others; but the habits of study which he has obtained in the pursuit, will have given him a *mastery* over learning, which he will afterwards find it easy to apply to any of its departments." But, what is best of all, his early studies were not only pursued and perfected in after life, but all the intellectual wealth and power which they