



Anne Eliza Gurney and Heman Stetson Gurney.

Photo of Anne courtesy of Ellen G. White Estate, Inc. Photo of Heman courtesy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Archives.

Gurney, Heman Stetson (1818–1896) and Anne “Eliza” Elizabeth (Randall) (1831–1921)

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Heman and Eliza Gurney were early Millerite believers and close friends of Joseph Bates. They were among the first to accept the seventh-day Sabbath and became stalwart supporters of James and Ellen White.

Early Life and Acceptance of Millerism

Heman Stetson Gurney was born on January 28, 1818, to Samuel (1784-1862) and Sarah Gurney (1793-1867). He initially encountered William Miller's writings in 1838. Two years later, Joseph Bates shared with him a copy of the Millerite periodical, *Signs of the Times*. Around 1841, he witnessed about fifty ministers covenant to share the Advent message.¹

In 1844, Gurney went with Bates to Maryland to share their faith in Christ's soon return. He went by steamer with Bates to Philadelphia to attend Millerite meetings. Leary that their abolitionist views could get them killed, they made their way to Annapolis. They crossed the Chesapeake to Kent Island. Slaveowners on Kent Island became worried that Bates and Gurney had come to free their slaves.²

Bates was warned that a group of ruffians at a rum store there intended to disrupt the meetings, but Bates did not let this distract him from preaching. One local church leader refused to let them speak at their church and told them that he would ride them out of town on a rail. Bates replied: "We are all ready for that, sir. If you will put a saddle on it we would rather ride than walk." This caused a "sensation," and the man sat down flustered.³ They then traveled to Centerville, on the eastern Maryland shore, and met a Mr. Harper at his store. Bates responded to locals who asked if they had come to preach to their slaves that the gospel must be "preached to every creature" referencing Col. 1:23.⁴ Bates informed Judge Hopper, who invited Bates and Gurney to his home for the night, that he was an abolitionist: "I have come here to get your slaves, and *you, too!* As to getting your slaves *from* you, we have no such intention; for if you should give us all you have (and I was informed he owned quite a number), we should not know what to do with them. We teach that Christ is coming, and we want you all saved."⁵

In spring 1845, Bates shared with Gurney a copy of T. M. Preble's tract on the Sabbath to an Advent meeting in Fairhaven. Gurney along with William (1798-1903) and Mary (1793-1867) Gifford became one of Bates' first converts to the seventh-day Sabbath. They adopted the Sabbath before James and Ellen White.⁶

Gurney was influential in the publication of Ellen Harmon's first broadside. He heard Ellen describe her first vision in the "Advent Hall" of New Bedford (likely in 1846). He "was slow to advocate her course" though he "could see no reason to find fault with her" and appeared to be "a humble, conscientious Christian." He afterward researched her story and traveled to Portland, Maine, to meet her father, Robert Harmon, and several people who knew her. After spending "a number of weeks" in the area, he was "convinced that the fountain was

good, and that God had called sister Harmon to an important work.⁸ He traveled with James and Ellen Harmon (now White) on a 50-mile circuit to visit Advent believers. He recounted the experience:

After riding some time, we heard Sister White (who had settled down in the bottom of the carriage to keep warm) talking with the Angels. Her voice would ring out in a clear voice, telling what the Angels were teaching her. She was in vision. So you see she did not have to wait for some exciting meeting to have a vision.⁹

He arranged with James White to print a total of 250 copies of the broadside, "To the Little Remnant Scattered Abroad" agreeing to pay for half of the cost.¹⁰ Gurney saw Ellen White in vision several more times. He was with her when she had a vision about a boat in a raging storm as they traveled to West Island to visit the Hall family. This confirmed, for him, that her visions were not the result of mesmerism.

Gurney's first article in the *Review and Herald* appeared on January 13, 1852. Titled "Remarks on the Law of God," he noted the eternal existence of God's law. Common sense, he argued, dictated that there cannot be justice without God's law. God's wisdom and perfection demonstrate the just government of God.¹¹ Gurney continued to share his faith with others. "The cause of truth lays near my heart," he wrote in 1852.¹² The next year he reported that church members in Fairhaven and Dartmouth, Massachusetts diligently searched the Bible, their "only rule of faith and practice" for light upon "Gospel order." The church noted the biblical precedent of deacons to provide local church leadership. The believers gathered appointed one deacon for the group in Dartmouth, and another for those in Fairhaven, and then Frederick Wheeler set apart these persons "by prayer and laying on of hands." They noted that this was imperative since ministers were "called to travel," someone in the local church must be set aside to conduct the Lord's Supper on a regular basis.¹³ They later would add that "Gospel order" required appointing a financial committee of three to oversee the finances of the local church and to hold in trust "all property belonging" to the local church.¹⁴ This was one of the first attempts to establish a basic ecclesiological system of organization at a local Sabbatarian Adventist congregation.

Gurney found biblical precedent for the Great Disappointment. If the disciples of Christ misunderstood his mission while simultaneously still fulfilling prophecy, couldn't God's people waiting for the Second Advent do the same? "Now if a mistake in the views and action of the church did fulfill prophecy in regard to Christ's mission on earth, why should it be considered impossible that a similar mistake in the movement of the church in relation to the second advent should fulfill prophecy."¹⁵ He viewed theological truth as progressive in which God's people grow in their understanding of truth.¹⁶ During the early 1850s, Gurney, presumably influenced by Bates, became involved in the Temperance movement.¹⁷

Gurney loved early Adventist singing and was sometimes referred to as the "singing blacksmith." He is known to have composed at least two hymns: "Lo! An Angel Loud Proclaiming," published in *Hymns and Tunes*,¹⁸ and "Something for Thee," published in 1864.¹⁹ He wrote the first hymn known to be written and published by a Sabbatarian Adventist.²⁰

Marriage and Move to Michigan

On May 15, 1853, Gurney married the widow Anne “Eliza” Elizabeth Randall (1831-1920). Eliza was born on June 13, 1831, in Rochester, Massachusetts, to William (1798-1903) and Mary (1804-1856) Gifford, the same early Advent believers in Fairhaven who had adopted the seventh-day Sabbath soon after Bates returned from Washington, New Hampshire. Eliza had accepted the Advent message after hearing William Miller preach. Eliza’s first husband, Jeremiah Randall, Jr.²¹ was also born in Rochester, and the two were wed on December 10, 1848. Less than two years later, on October 12, 1850, he was declared “lost at sea,” leaving Eliza an estate of \$273.²² They had a daughter, Louisa Bessie (b. October 6, 1849) who died of typhoid at age 15.²³ Gurney and Louisa would have three children together: Lydia (1854-1950), Charles Herbert (1856-1945), and Carrie L. (1864-1934).

In late 1856, the Gurneys moved to Jackson, Michigan.²⁴ Later this year, he reported in the *Review* his conviction that the Sabbatarian Adventist believers had become Laodicean. He added that “seven years” before he had adopted the view that the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 were “the consecutive order of the seven states of the church” culminating with God’s end-time, lukewarm church. God’s end-time people were called forth to “be *zealous* and *repent*.” This message of repentance was part of a wider movement of revival within Sabbatarian Adventism in the mid-1850s.²⁵

Gurney participated in the 1861 Battle Creek General Conference during which the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association was organized.²⁶ Gurney pressed the church for clarity on open versus closed communion. James White replied that “all of his children have a right” to the Lord’s table.²⁷

In the early 1860s, after Ellen White’s health reform vision, Gurney encouraged the denomination to embrace health reform.²⁸ An early adopter of “systematic order” he urged the church to adopt systematic benevolence and move toward church organization to spread more effectively the Advent message.²⁹ The American Civil War and the subsequent draft of military-aged men raised concerns about whether Adventists should serve in the military. Gurney encouraged fellow believers to be prepared by having non-combatant papers.³⁰

In early 1865, the Gurneys relocated to Memphis, Michigan.³¹ He reported that the church in Memphis “are well united and seem anxious to know their duty under the influence of the third angel’s message.”³² By 1868, he worried that believers were too slow at adopting the health and dress reforms.³³ He believed there was a close tie between health reform and the cleansing of the sanctuary in preparing a people with “moral cleanliness” for Christ’s return.³⁴ One must stay alert, he believed, holding on to “sound doctrines” and upholding “God’s word” in “a plain, literal sense.”³⁵ He testified that the health reform was “doing me much good.”³⁶ In 1869, he was elected for one term as president of the Michigan Conference.³⁷

By 1871, Gurney advertised for someone to take over his blacksmith business.³⁸ Eliza sent in her only published article to report that she enjoyed reading the *Review* and encouraged fellow believers to be faithful.³⁹ Gurney continued to share his faith in “a divine providence” that had led in their “second advent experience.”⁴⁰ During

most of 1871-1872, he traveled with J. B. Lamson through the state of Michigan holding meetings and encouraging believers.⁴¹ He visited the churches in Wright, Byron, and Holly.⁴² In his later years, he continued to hold ministerial credentials.⁴³ After 1873, Gurney appears to have largely confined his labors to his local church. In 1877, he began a family pumpkin flour business.⁴⁴ Intriguingly, the next year Gurney, who always warned about persecution, found himself, and his son, Charles Herbert Gurney (1856-1945), arrested for working in the fields on Sunday.⁴⁵ Gurney was released, but Charles had to ultimately appeal his case.

Gurney deeply imbibed and loved the truths he discovered. "My heart rejoices," he wrote in 1855, "while I review the precious truths of God's word relative to our position in the third angel's message."⁴⁶ He died on August 4, 1896, in Riley, Michigan. Ann Eliza died in Memphis, Michigan, on January 20, 1921.

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NOTES

1. H. S. Gurney, "From Bro. Gurney," *ARH*, February 19, 1861, 110.

2. Joseph Bates, "Incidents in My Past Life, No. 48," *The Youth's Instructor*, December 1862, 89, 90.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 90.

6. W. H. Littlejohn, "Another Nonagenerian Adventist," June 12, 1894, 372. In this article Littlejohn quotes a letter from H. S. Gurney dated May 21, 1894, where he specifies that his then future in-laws, became Adventists in 1841. They along with Gurney were Bates' first converts accepting the seventh-day Sabbath before even James and Ellen White started to see the light about the seventh-day Sabbath.

7. H. S. Gurney, "Early Day Experiences," manuscript, April 12, 1896, DF 193, EGWE-GC.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.
11. H. S. Gurney, "Remarks on the Law of God," *ARH*, January 13, 1852, 75.
12. H. S. Gurney, "From Bro. Gurney," *ARH*, December 23, 1852, 127-128.
13. H. S. Gurney, "From Bro. Gurney," *ARH*, December 27, 1853, 199.
14. Obadiah Davis, "From Massachusetts," *ARH*, December. 4, 1855, 75.
15. H. S. Gurney, "Communication from Bro. Gurney," *ARH*, February 28, 1854, 46.
16. Ibid., 47.
17. H. S. Gurney, "The Dietic Reform," *ARH*, November 8, 1864, 189-190.
18. https://hymnary.org/text/lo_an_angel_loud_proclaiming [accessed 9/24/22].
19. "Something for Thee," *ARH*, November 1, 1864, 183.
20. James R. Nix, *Early Advent Singing: A Collection of 52 Early Advent Hymns with Illustrating Stories* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 107-110.
21. <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/73757158:60525?ssrc=pt&tid=185218705&pid=432426356558> [accessed 9/24/22].
22. See Massachusetts Wills and Probates Records, 1635-1991, accessed from *Ancestry.com* on September 24, 2022. A family manuscript notes that he went to California and died on his return. See White Estate DF 193.
23. Obit., *ARH*, October 18, 1864, 167.
24. The change of their address was announced in *ARH*, November 13, 1856, 16.
25. H. S. Gurney, "From Bro. Gurney," *ARH*, December 11, 1856, 46.
26. "Doings of the Battle Creek Conference, Oct. 5 & 6, 1861," *ARH*, October 8, 1861, 148.
27. [James White], "Questions and Answers," *ARH*, December 30, 1862, 36.
28. H. S. Gurney, "The Dietic Reform," *ARH*, November 8, 1864, 189-190.
29. H. S. Gurney, "Our Urgent Need," *ARH*, June 14, 1864, 22.

30. H. S. Gurney, "Suggestions to the Drafted," *ARH*, February 7, 1865, 88.
31. Isaac Van Horn notes during a visit to Memphis, Michigan, in April 14-17, 1865, that H. S. Gurney "has lately removed to this place, from Jackson, Mich." See: I. D. Van Horn, "Meetings in Eastern Mich.," *ARH*, May 9, 1865, 181. His first article marked as from Memphis, Michigan, appears as: H. S. Gurney, "Prophecy Fulfilling," *ARH*, July 4, 1865, 40.
32. H. S. Gurney, "Communication from Bro. Gurney," *ARH*, January 9, 1866, 47.
33. H. S. Gurney, "From Bro. Gurney," *ARH*, February 4, 1868, 123.
34. H. S. Gurney, "From Bro. Gurney," *ARH*, March 17, 1868, 219.
35. H. S. Gurney, "Our Blessed Hope," *ARH*, September 1, 1868, 165.
36. H. S. Gurney, "From Bro. Gurney," *ARH*, November 24, 1868, 255.
37. "Michigan State Conference: Ninth Annual Session," *ARH*, May 25, 1869, 173.
38. See *ARH*, March 28, 1871, 120.
39. A. E. Gurney, "From Sr. Gurney," August 8, 1871, 62-63.
40. H. S. Gurney, "Second Advent Experience," *ARH*, October 31, 1871, 157.
41. H. S. Gurney, "Eastern Michigan," *ARH*, July 9, 1872, 30.
42. H. S. Gurney, "Michigan," *ARH*, July 30, 1872, 54.
43. "Michigan Conference of S. D. Adventists," *ARH*, September 10, 1872, 102.
44. *Northern Tribune*, Oct. 20, 1877, 3 [accessed from. Newspapers.com 9/26/22].
45. "The Dragon's Ire," *ARH*, August 22, 1878, 72.
46. H. S. Gurney, "The Promise," *ARH*, March 6, 1856, 178.

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