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SOME PARTICULARS
OF THE
LIFE AND ADVENTURES
OF
JAMES GUIDNEY,
A
WELL KNOWN CHARACTER
IN
BIRMINGHAM.

WRITTEN FROM HIS OWN ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF.

THIRD AND ENLARGED EDITION.

BIRMINGHAM:
PRINTED BY JAMES UPTON, GREAT CHARLES STREET,
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LIFE OF JAMES GUIDNEY.

THE individual whose memoir is contained in the following pages, is well known in Birmingham, as the seller of a kind of sweetmeat. As he walks along he constantly cries, "Composition."—"Good for cough or cold."—"Cough or cold." He will be immediately recognised by those who have once seen him, from his singular costume, and his long flowing beard.

He was born at Norwich, September 1st., 1782; his father, JEREMIAH GUIDNEY, was a poor, but hard-working man, who, though unable to give his son a liberal education, sent him on alternate days to a charity school, to learn reading and arithmetic; and to a spinning school, where about five hundred boys were employed in spinning wool into skeins. JAMES was the best spinner of the

school, but made little progress in his other studies.

When he had been five years at these schools, he was honourably discharged, with sixpence and a Bible, the usual presents made to those who had done their duty in these charity schools upon their leaving. He was then thirteen years of age, and continued with his father a year, sometimes employed as an errand boy, at others in selling milk or apples.

In June, 1797, he enlisted with a party of soldiers recruiting at Norwich, as a drummer, into the Forty-eighth Northamptonshire Regiment, then lying at Huntingdon. He joined the Regiment, and shortly afterwards returned with it to Norwich, where it remained four months. It then proceeded to Chelmsford, in Essex, where it lay twenty-eight days. They afterwards marched to Worcester, and were completed to the war establishment, after a delay of six months.

A squadron, consisting of a thousand men, including the Forty-eighth Regiment, then embarked on board the "Calcutta" man of war, a sixty-four gun ship, and sailed for Gibraltar. On the voyage they fell in with a French convoy, on its way to Ireland, and cleared out for action, but the French declined an engagement, and continued

their course. The "Calcutta" reached Gibraltar in safety; and the troops after remaining there about eighteen months, proceeded from thence, on board transports, to Minorca, a very fertile and pleasant island. The Forty-eighth Regiment then joined the expedition under General Fox, which consisted of twenty-four thousand men, intended for Geneva; but finding that the French garrison there had been reinforced, they sailed on to Leghorn. After remaining eleven days at Leghorn, they proceeded to Malta, which they reached in September, 1799.

Having disembarked, the troops commenced throwing up sand-bank batteries against the citadel of Valetta, which the French occupied. After a four months' siege they surrendered, and were allowed to return to France. The English then took possession of the citadel.

JAMES GUIDNEY having had a good opportunity of viewing the island, during a stay of nearly three years, thinks that a short description will not be out of place here. Malta is an island in the Mediterranean, lying between Africa and Sicily; it is twenty miles long, twelve broad, and contains about eighty thousand inhabitants. Grapes, figs, oranges, lemons, and cotton are the principal objects of cultivation. In Valetta, the

capital, there are many fine churches, of which the best is St. John's, celebrated for its stained windows and beautiful paintings.

While the Forty-eighth Regiment was stationed at Malta, General ABERCROMBIE landed on the island, with an army of sixty thousand men, on his way to Egypt. Having reviewed the troops then lying in Malta, he chose the Forty-eighth Regiment to accompany him on his expedition; but altering his mind after they had embarked, he left them on the other side Malta, at Fort Angelo, and proceeded without them. Here JAMES GUIDNEY lost an eye from ophthalmia.

While here a curious circumstance happened to JAMES GUIDNEY. He was on his way to the Catholic Church, one morning in May, 1802, when a lamb suddenly appeared before him on the high road, and began to play with him. After walking beside him for some distance, he declares that it turned round and stood in his way, and, assuming the form of a man, addressed him by name, commanding him for the future to wear a beard! He then put his hand on its head and face, to satisfy himself that he was not deceived, and distinctly feeling the flesh of a man, a cold perspiration came over him. It afterwards re-assumed the shape of a lamb. He immediately went back

to tell his comrades of this singular circumstance, and the lamb accompanied him as far as the place where he first saw it, and then disappeared.

A few months previous to the Forty-eighth leaving Malta, an earthquake took place in the night, accompanied by torrents of rain. The shock was so violent that it threw down a great part of the fortifications that lay about half a mile from the barracks. It was plainly felt at the barracks, and some of the soldiers went the next morning to see the ruins of the fortifications, and found that they were sunk many feet into the earth for the space of about one hundred yards.

The Forty-eighth Regiment embarked at Malta, on the 3rd of May, 1803, for England, and reached Portsmouth on the 7th of August, in the same year, but did not land till the 9th. General WHITELOCK, who commanded the Portsmouth district, reviewed the Regiment the day after its landing, after which it proceeded to Manchester. A few days after their arrival they were joined by two thousand three hundred of the Lancashire army of reserve, and marched with them to Hors-ham, in Sussex, where the whole were formed into the First and Second Battalions of Infantry.

In June, 1804, they marched to Eastbourne, and

lay there in temporary barracks three months, in expectation of Buonaparte's threatened expedition against England. They then encamped on the Downs, near Southbourne, under the command of General MAITLAND; and after a short stay removed to the Isle of Wight, where they lay in temporary barracks at Freshwater, to prevent smuggling.

In February, 1805, the Battalion moved to Winchester, and from that place to Portsmouth, where it embarked on board transports for Lisbon. When it arrived there, the Portuguese authorities resolved in a council of war to prevent its landing; they therefore sailed on to Gibraltar, and remained there in garrison about five years, which gave JAMES GUIDNEY a good opportunity of seeing every thing connected with that place.

Gibraltar is a town situated at the extreme south of Andalusia, in Spain, on a narrow neck of land running into the sea. It is built at the foot of a rock of the same name, and is strongly fortified both by nature and art. It can be approached only by a narrow passage between the mountain and the sea, across which the Spaniards have drawn a line and fortified it, to prevent the garrison from having any communication with the country. It was taken from the Spaniards by the English in

1704, and has remained in their possession ever since. The number and strength of the military works, and the vast galleries opened in the rock, excite general admiration; and the fortress is considered by most engineers absolutely impregnable. The rock, at the foot of which the town is built, forms a promontory about three miles in length, and one in breadth. At certain distances, stations, called guards, have been erected, where sentries are placed for the security of the fortress. The first guard is called the Convent, where the Governor of Gibraltar resides; the next is called Landport; the third Waterport, and so on all round the promontory. The English garrison generally consists of from nine to ten thousand men, of whom nearly one thousand mount guard every day, and about five hundred are employed in what are called the Queen's works, viz., keeping the batteries, fortifications, &c., in order. The population of the town is about twelve thousand, who carry on a very extensive commerce. Men from almost every nation on the globe go there for the purposes of trade, Englishmen, French, Portuguese, Spaniards, Jews, &c. This Promontory is so admirably situated that ten thousand men in the fortress, it is said, could defend it against all the world. There are two signal stations in Gibraltar;

the one is placed on the top of the rock, and the other in the Governor's yard, at the back of the Convent. Whenever any ships appear in the offing, a gun, called the rock-gun, is fired from the signal station on the rock, and the signal-master having descried the number and character of the ships, by a powerful telescope, reports them to the Governor, by means of signals understood only by himself and the Governor. At day break every morning this gun is fired, and then the drummer of each guard beats the *réveille*, which is the signal for the guards to turn out. At the close of the *réveille*, which lasts a quarter of an hour, all the guards turn in again, except the sentries, who remain on sentry till relieved by others, which is done every two hours. Provisions for the supply of the garrison are brought over from England in such abundance, that they could stand a seven years' seige, without having any provisions supplied to them, besides those kept in stock in the garrison. Portuguese fishermen have licenses granted them by the Governor of Gibraltar to sell their fish to the garrison; which consists principally of turbot, and sedanies, a kind of anchovy, found in great abundance in the Mediterranean.

In the year 1807, some of these Portuguese fishermen caught a very curious fish, which they

brought to the garrison, for the Governor's inspection. After he had looked at it he had it placed in a yard, and allowed the soldiers to see it. It was about five feet in length from the crown of the head to the navel; and from ten to twelve feet in length from the navel to the tip of the tail. Its head was somewhat similar to that of a human being, but had no hair. In place of arms it had fins, and its skin as far as the navel, was smooth and of a brown complexion, but from that point resembled that of the dog-fish, having scales and fins. It seems to have been an amphibious animal, for it lived twelve days in the yard without water; and then the Governor ordered it to be thrown into the sea. It did not utter any sort of cry, and its motion was a jump. Its body, as far as the smooth skin extended, stood erect, but the scaly parts lay along the ground. This creature was no doubt one of those animals that have been called Mermaids, several of whom have unquestionably been found.

In the month of July, 1807, about two hundred of the Forty-eighth Regiment and First Veteran Battalion, were ordered to sail, under the command of Captain COFIELD, to an uninhabited island, off the African coast, called Paraxil, in order to prevent the Spanish market boats from supplying

the Spanish army, then laying at Ceuta, with provisions. While on the island, the troops experienced a scarcity of water, and the Captain asked who would volunteer to fetch some from the African shore. JAMES GUIDNEY offered himself, and was requested to choose eleven others to accompany him. These twelve men reached the coast in safety, in a man-of-war's launch, and having filled a dozen casks with water from a mountain torrent, towards evening, were rowing back to the island, when suddenly a white squall arose. Very large hailstones poured down, and the waves rising mountains high, swamped the boat. The men then pulled off their clothes and jumping into the sea, made for the shore they had just left, which was a mile distant. Ten Africans, armed with loaded muskets, passing the spot at the time, seized these naked men as they arrived one after the other, and each took one man prisoner. JAMES GUIDNEY and another being left behind, immediately ran towards the sea, and jumping in, swam to Paraxil, which was only a quarter of a mile from the African coast, in a direct line. They reported the loss of the men to the Captain, but they were never sent after, and nothing more was heard of them.

In 1809, JAMES GUIDNEY was transferred to the

First Royal Veteran Battalion, and remained at Gibraltar with it until the latter part of April, 1810, when it embarked on board transports for England. On the 11th of June, the Battalion landed at Languard Fort, with the exception of two invalid companies, who were left at Harwich. While here JAMES was promoted to be Sergeant and Drum Major to the Battalion, by the order of Colonel MAYORS, at that time Governor of Languard Fort.

The Battalion continued at Languard Fort till the 17th December, 1813, when it embarked under the command of General Sir THOMAS GRAHAM, for Holland, and landed at Williamstadt, on the 26th of the same month. It remained in garrison there six months, and then returned to Harwich, where it landed June 11th, 1814.

On the 11th of July, a General came down to disband the Battalion, who gave orders that they should march to London at their own discretion, only taking care to be at Hyde Park Corner, on the 21st of the month. After they had assembled there on the day appointed, they marched to Highgate, where they were billeted till the 29th. They then marched to Chelsea Hospital, and passed the board. JAMES GUIDNEY received a pension of one shilling per day for his services.

He returned to Norwich, and in the year 1815, entered into a gentleman's service at Thorpe, a village near Norwich, as footman and butler. He remained here six months, but the quiet life of service not being congenial to his roving habits, he then left in the hope of joining some family travelling to the Continent, but his wishes were never realised.

On the 6th of January, 1816, he married a woman named PHOEBE CROW, who lived at Norwich, and possessed a life annuity of sixty pounds per annum, and then began to travel through Norfolk, selling haberdashery. One evening he was stopped by a foot-pad, but as he made some resistance, the fellow ran off without robbing him. However, this circumstance induced him to abandon this occupation, and he then began to weave bombazines and crapes. In 1821, his wife died, after which he travelled on foot through most of the Counties of England, selling Turkey rhubarb, little books, &c.

In June, 1824, he went to London, and gave up his pension as he had no family and could support himself without it. While there, being desirous of visiting the Continent, he went to the office of the French Consul, and obtained a passport to Paris. When he had been booked, he paid ten shillings

for the passport, and left the office. On his way to his lodgings, thinking he might as well earn a few coppers, and not understanding the nature of the Vagrant Act, he began to sing the Freemason's Hymn, when he was seized by two policemen, and taken to Hatton Garden Police Station. The Magistrates then on the Bench having examined his passport and taken it from him, committed him to Cold Bath Fields' Prison for three months, as a vagrant. Here his beard was shaved, for the only time since his adventure with the lamb above-related. When he obtained his release, he asked for his passport, but was told that its time was expired, and he never received it. He therefore abandoned his intention of going to France, and continued to perambulate the country, selling his small wares till the 11th of June, 1825, when he went to Tong Castle, in Shropshire, the seat of J. DURANT, Esq., who offered him an hermitage on his estate for a month's residence. He accepted the offer, and left July 11th, and came to Birmingham, where he began to sell "Composition." After a short time he married a woman named ELIZABETH PITT, the eldest daughter of the late Mr. PITT, of Northwood Street, locksmith and bell-hanger.

He has remained in Birmingham ever since, selling his Composition in the streets and Public

Houses, from nine o'clock in the morning till eight or nine at night, by which he maintains himself and family.

Having had very considerable experience as a Drummer, JAMES GUIDNEY will be happy to attend any Public Parties of Pleasure, and may be found at his residence, 18, Communication Row, Birmingham.







