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Letter from Elizabeth Gilpin to George Sibley, June 29, 1853

Elizabeth Gilpin

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(Geo. C. Sibley)

E. Gilpin

York 29th June 1853

My dear Brother-

The afflicting news which reached me a short time before we left home, of my very dear Brothers departure from this life, had almost determined me to relinquish our long anticipated visit to Europe but my friends with more judgement & consideration for me than I myself had, urged it upon me & more particularly as my dear Husband would not think of it without me- It made my departure from home a most sad one- & I often thought there must be great enjoyment from the travel abroad to repay me for what I suffered mentally at this trying moment- I feel assured that my dear Brother from the shortness of his illness was spared much pain, for which I feel very grateful, & I devoutly trust he was prepared to meet his God- which is all that can be desired, for those whom we dearly love on Earth- I have had several letters, in answer to my good & thoughtful Husband, saying that his family were well & they were in easy circumstances- as he left no debt, a very unusual thing in Lou^a.- There are few indeed of us left now- a sad thought- which should be with us very often, to enable us to be the better prepared, when God wills it that we too should be taken- your last letter, my dear Brother filled me with anxiety for your health- but I trust the warm season may have greatly benefitted you, & that you are now well- I hope you, or your dear wife will write- our direction is always the same, to the care of Messrs. Basing & Brothers, London, who will forward all letters, to us wherever we may be- but for the sadness of my heart I should greatly have enjoyed many things which we saw in London & I would not selfishly deprive my dear Husband of society / as he was not

inclined to go out without me- & I have sometimes joined him-
Our stay in London was about four weeks- & we saw nearly all
the objects of interest to strangers- the Grand Cathedrals-
Monuments- Tower, with all its sad associations- the little room
where the two young princes were smothered- the axe with which
Mary of Scotts- & Lady Jane Grey were beheaded- the dark hole
without light or air, where Sir Walter Raleigh was so long con-
fined- with a thousand things of historical association of the
highest interest- We were asked to visit the old Duke of
Wellington's house, Apsley house, which remains just as it was
at his death- & told the tale that the most revered & proudest
General must too, walk thro' the dark valley of death- every-
thing indicated the feeling of almost idolatry which he inspired-
The richest gifts from all parts of the world- massive sets of
silver- China with paintings to illustrate all the acts of his
life richly adorned with heavy gilding- Paintings from almost all
the crowned heads of Europe- Furniture too costly for use now all
left behind- the objects of greatest interest to me were his Study-
& notes nicely done up by himself- We saw there the Paintings &
Busts of his great rival Napoleon, taken by various masters, & at
different times- & a fine painting of one of the Queens children
called for the Duke & presented by the Queen to him- the Boy was
born on the Duke's birthday- We thought it best from a proper
consideration of Mr. Van Buren to take a hotel separate from his,
as we did not wish to interfere with his social arrangements, altho
we saw each other daily, & shall meet in Switzerland next month-
he having gone with his son & Mr. Governier Kemple to Scotland-
where we shall go next summer- as we wish to see England well-

I think Oxford with its splendid Colleges, & beautifully ornamented grounds has interested me more than anything we have met with in England- They are really grand in structure, & all varied- but each with its fine Chapel- Library- Dining Halls, & grounds seperated, altho' near to each other- we were four days in Oxford- & felt that we could have remained a month if we had the time to spare- but there are particular seasons for each country, which we are bound to observe- We have visited Newstead Abbey- the home of Lord Byron where there are many interesting remembrances of that highly gifted but misguided Poet- his last resting place is in a very humble little church near the Abbey, with a simple monument erected by his sister Mrs. Leigh- The famed skull cup was shown to us- it was a monk's skull taken from a marble coffin, which was found in one of the cloisters- & this wayward & wicked man had it made into a drinking cup for his boon companions to take their last drink from after dinner- Poor humanity to be so abused- The place which brought him most agreeably to us was Annesley Hall, where his innocent days were passed, with his first, & perhaps only true love, Mary Chaworth- This old Hall is now occupied by a Son in Law of Mary's - we were politely received by him, & the Hall & grounds all shown to us, but the Lady her Daughter was not at home- the little oratory which is beautifully mentioned by Byron, as the place where he last parted & forever from Mary is a pretty little room, adjoining a fine large drawing room, filled with family pictures- The Terrace where his young Lordship used to amuse himself shooting at a mark, was shown to us- & the sword with which his uncle, known as the wicked Lord Byron, killed one of Mary Chaworth's ancestors- There was much to

make us reflect, upon the many faults, that accompanied this gifted man, we heard anecdotes of him in the neighborhood where he was best known- Old Fountains Abbey in the vicinity of Ripon was a place of particular interest to us- it is one of the most perfect & largest of the old monkish retreats, always as we have found them both in Wales & England, beautifully situated in some such valley well watered- This of Fountains is said from the various walls & portions of the Abbey recently discovered to have at one time covered 8 acres & now covers 4 as we saw it. The lofty tower of the Grand Chapel is still perfect- as are all the cloisters,- the dining-hall- Kitchen- chapterhouse- parts of the Abbots house & various other portions- all of great antiquity as the dates were distinct over the great portal, & on the chapel, 1130,- the old Cathedral of Ripon is a very large & fine one- in its noble proportions & external architecture- it is dated 1154, there is a most remarkable chamber, called the Bone Room in its vault, which we saw- The whole room sixteen or more feet square, is entirely filled with human bones, placed in regular order & six feet deep from the walls- The skulls & other bones regularly fitted in perfect regularity, what is most singular is that there is no record of when or how they came there, but that they were there in the time of the monks seems certain- Cromwell's soldiery, the despoilers of so much that was beautiful- had respect for this sad spectacle of poor humanity, & left it untouched- We have visited with particular interest the various scenes of my Husband's great & good ancestor Bernard Gilpin called the Apostle of the North- his memory is revered by the good & wise of the present day- he as one of the earliest reformers, & his life was near being taken by bloody Mary, at the same time that Cranmer &

Latimer suffered- but he was saved as by a miracle- when under condemnation by Mary- we visited his birthplace, Kentmore Hall- & Scaleby Castle near Carlisle, in the north of England, now in fine keeping & occupied by one of the family, a very ancient & large Castle, where we have promised to return to visit again next Summer, if we are spared- & our last visit alas to the particular seat of his usefulness, where his church and his schools are- Floughton le Spring- & there in the venerable walls of his church his remains repose- he was a man of rare virtue- piety, & usefulness- he refused a Bishopric in his later days, feeling that he was rightly placed where he was- his schools received their charter from Queen Elizabeth- the present rector of his church is Mr. Gray, brother of Lord Gray, & has such respect for the memory of this good & great man that he has recently had a very handsome painted Gothic window put in the church in memory of Bernard Gilpin- All these things have greatly interested & gratified my good Husband. I truly enter into his feelings- The Town of York from which place I write this letter is famed for the Largest & finest Cathedral in all England York Minster & a great Edifice it is- with its lofty towers & beautiful proportions- & the fineness & delicacy of its carvings,--- all in good proportions & in fine old Gothic style- it is a most superb structure, & deserves all its celebrity. We shall visit Cambridge, & then return to London to make our arrangements to go at once to Paris. God bless you & your dear wife, my brother is my constant prayer- repeated not the less often for being far away from you- Mr. Gilpin sends his kindest regards & best wishes for you both,

Adieu

Your sister E. Gilpin.
Sibley Mss. V. I
Missouri Historical Society