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James B. Finley Letters

12-25-1839

Letter from John McDonald to James B. Finley

John McDonald

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Poplar Ridge, near Lattus, Ross county Ohio
December 25th 1839

My dear friend

When I look at the date of your last letter
Oct 24th 1839 for having delayed so long in answering it. It is not
from disrespect or indifference, but because I had no subject on which
to write, that would be interesting to you. I am still in the same dilemma
and now draw my pen and give a shot at a venture.

Your letter was read by me in the same friendly spirit in which
it was written. It is grateful to my feelings to be respectfully re-
-membered, and kindly advised by my early associates in life. It is
my constant aim to deserve their good opinion. What could be more
humiliating to a sensitive mind, than for us to see our long acquaint-
-ance shun our society, or treat our presence with cold neglect. -
On the contrary when we approach a long absent acquaintance, to receive
a warm and friendly greeting, produces sensations of fine & exquisite
feelings, unknown to vulgar and vicious minds.

Gandor when talking, or writing to a friend I consider a virtue.
There are some things presented in the theory of religion, that I cannot
comprehend, on such subjects my faith is weak and wavering: but
in a virtuous moral life all good men agree. The principle of know-
-ing right from wrong, in my opinion is implanted in our natures by the
Great spirit who created and governs our world. This idea I know is
controversied by most philosophers. If men are not free agents, and
have not the inherent innate capacity of knowing right from wrong, laws
of no description should bare upon them, as they cannot be responsible
for their actions. Again if miracles have to be wrought, and men to be
made new creatures before they are able to discern right from wrong;
then those upon whom this supernatural change has not ^{been} effected can-
-not be accountable for their ignorance. It appears to me, that that inher-
-ent innate knowledge of discerning right from wrong is a clue to
the meaning of that expression which said a light has shone "which
enlighteneth every ^{one} which cometh into the world".

Not long since I heard a preacher (a very good man I have no
doubt) say to his congregation - "Some of you my friends may depend
upon your morality and virtue taking you to Heaven - this is a great
mistake - you may feed the hungry, clothe the naked - abstain from
evil practices, you may do all this, yet your case is desperate
and hell your portion - there is more hope of a down right
wicked man than such an one". Such preaching I apprehend
is not qualified to do much good. Men who cease from doing evil
and learn to do good, and who endeavor to do to others as ^{they} wish to be done

John James D. Stinley
German town
Montgomery county
Ohio

Oct 26th

1839

done by, should be encouraged to persevere in a moral and virtuous life; even ^{up to the} their faith did not come to the standard of those who call themselves the orthodox. All are interested in believing right, and moral Good men wish to believe the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Wise Good men, see how kindly they treat each ^{other}, although they differ in faith. Enough of preaching.

now for politics. I think the political state of our country is ominous of mischief. From the signs of ^{the} times it does appear as if a ^{rev-} = cution for good or for evil is in train. None ^{whom} any party with I con- = verse on political subjects appears to be easy or satisfied with our public affairs. Neither Whig nor Locofoco can tell you what change they wish. Something appears to ^{be} wrong in our public march but no one knows what ^{is} the matter. One thing is evident there is a rest- = less uneasiness among the people, that may break out in some fearful calamity. Man is a curious animal, he cannot know how he would ^{act} under changes of circumstances. In times of excitements he might do acts, that in his cool dispassionate moments he would shudder at ^{the} thought. This shews the propriety and wisdom of that prayer which says "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Our country heretofore has passed through some fiery trials unscathed, and it is hoped our Good Genius will not forsake us now, but triumphantly direct ^{us} into the way of peace, union, and happiness. Amen.

On Sunday last Mr Marly preached old Mrs Reed's funeral in our meeting house. He preached a strong common sense sermon: the main drift of which was to prove the resurrection of the body: and ^{he} conducted his subject in a masterly manner. He dealt very little about hell fire. Christ came he said ^{to save} sinners. There was no stamping, no danging the pulpit with his fist: no theatrical gestures - His discourse was grave solemn and dignified.

A few days ago David and Hannah Reed and Mr Marly paid us a visit, they were all in good health and spirits, we were as merry and as full of innocent ^{mirth} as you ^{ever} seen a set of corn huskers in olden times. With Mr Marly I have had several social chats, I find him a man of good sense, a cultivated mind, and in every respect a liberal gentleman.

David Reed, so far as I have heard is acceptably received by the people. His easy good humored manners, with his strong fund of common sense, and the industry ^{himself} he exercises in cultivating his mind; if he perseveres, will enable to rank among the most popular preachers.

I received from David Reed on your account twenty five dollars, all right on that score.

The health of my wife and children is good - In health or

or sickness they ^{are} all your friends, and ^{if} their wishes could be carried into effect, you would always be a healthy happy man. Morgan and Maria with your little name sake were here this morning, and send their best respects to you, and yours. Give my best respects to your father your wife, and the brooks. . . . I hope the Great Spirit will yet permit us to meet on terra firma, but whether we meet or not on this ^{side} of the grave, you may rest assured that I am your friend.

John McDonald

Rev J B Hinley.

P S. I intend next week to commence writing a narrative of the captivity of Ruhama Bilelbrack with ^{the} Indians in the year 1789 - She is living near Lacartur in fair field county Ohio. week before last I went to see her to hear her story - She is a stout hearty woman of 72 years of age. As I will have a heroine for my principle subject, I will do my best to make my ^{story} interesting. If health continues and ^{no} unseen accidents intervenes, you ^{will} see my narrative in the advocate some time in the month of February.

J M D