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Finley Letters

James B. Finley Letters

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1846

## Letter from John McDonald to James B. Finley

John McDonald

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Although we are now perplexed to know <sup>truth</sup> from error, the time will  
shortly arrive when truth will <sup>be</sup> presented to us, and will <sup>be</sup> evident  
as a sunbeam. I have no prejudice against any religious denomination, and  
I am <sup>willing</sup> to grant every privilege to others, which I claim for my self. I do not  
write to provoke or court controversy, but I <sup>friend</sup> to say to my friend <sup>Finley</sup> whatever  
comes foremost in my mind.

My wife send her respects, wishes you to remember her. My health is as good  
as can be expected at my age. Give my <sup>best</sup> to my friend the Rev G Elliott. Having  
nothing more to say I subscribe my self your friend.

John McDonald.

Rev J B Finley.

Rev J B Finley

Columbus

Ohio.

Forwarded by  
Mr. McHenry

Lost of McDonald  
1846

I send these few lines by Mr. McHenry. He is a worthy young man  
He has been well received here, except by some frog brayers, he gave  
them some hard wraps, <sup>which</sup> <sup>threw</sup> some of them to kick his a—  
JMD

Poplar Ridge, near Lattas, Prop's county, Ohio August 1846

My old friend James Broadly Finley. When I last  
saw you, you denied me, by saying I was a letter in your debt. I will now  
endeavor to pay the debt in such coin I can command. I am sorry I am unable to  
furnish you with much amusement or instruction, but such as I have, I give unto thee.

Theology is a subject in which all are equally interested, and it <sup>is</sup> surprising, how  
few think alike about what constitutes the essence of Religion. All are interested in believing  
the truth, and nothing but the truth. If truth had ear marks, or could be demonstrated by  
figures, none would go astray. All believe in astronomy, because the astronomer tells us  
within a minute of the time of an eclipse, and <sup>the</sup> conjunction of <sup>the</sup> planets. The various systems  
of theology, all pretending divine originals, are full of superstitious, absurd dogmas, which  
bewilder, and makes sceptics, of the studious chameleons after truth. The followers of Moses, and  
of Mahomet, and <sup>the</sup> worshippers of the Grand Lama, believe they have the true faith. The  
Persians who worship and adore the sun as the supreme creator, and preserver of all the  
works hung in space, believe they have the true faith: if their worship is Idolatry, it would  
appear to be very excusable; as the sun furnishes light, heat, and animation to all creation.  
The worshippers of Jesus believe they have the truth in its essence. The precepts taught by  
Jesus carried into daily practice, constitutes the religion of God. Love your neighbor, do to  
others, as you would others should do to you; feed the hungry, clothe the naked, relieve the distresses  
of the widow, and the fatherless: by whomsoever these moral and humane precepts are daily prac-  
tised is a Christian let their faith be what it may. Religion according to my conception consists  
chiefly in moral virtuous and charitable actions; and he who governs his life by these rules is a  
child of God, without regard to his faith. <sup>(except some master spirits)</sup> Very few have any controul over their faith, they learn  
as they do this language, from their parents and instructors, and therefore are not accountable.

The doctrine of the total depravity of the human family, appears contrary to matter of fact. Some  
tell us that men in a natural state, can no more turn to God and do good in his <sup>own</sup> strength, than a dead corpse  
can turn in this coffin: this is a great mistake: it is evident that in all ages, in all countries where-  
ever man is found, he is found a religious being; a worshiper of the supreme creator: this univers-  
ality of the worship of a supreme being, in all ages, in all countries, by all people, goes far to prove



that a knowledge of the existence of a God is <sup>the</sup> innate in the human mind.

Many tell us that where the religion of <sup>the</sup> bible does not prevail, that <sup>there</sup> Ignorance and Superstition reigns triumphant. Let us turn our attention to the bible, and <sup>the</sup> character and opinions of the men who wrote the bible, and <sup>we</sup> will find as absurd superstitions believed by them, as is now believed in countries, where civilization nor the bible has never entered. For instance, Moses writes "thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." <sup>By</sup> <sup>this</sup> ancestor under this command under this command not long since, thousands of unfortunate beings, were tortured to death by slow fires for the glory of God. Astrology, charms, Magic, ~~charms~~, Ghosts and witchcraft were believed by the writers of the bible. All these ridiculous superstitions of the ancients have grown obsolete, in all countries where science and rational knowledge prevails. The progress of rational freedom, and a general toleration in religious <sup>matters</sup> was of slow growth; but happily for the world knowledge has taken a long leap, and our America has the honor of first proclaiming, by a fundamental law, that all men had a right to exercise their private judgement in all matters appertaining to man; in his social, religious, or political relations; and man was no longer accountable to any human being for opinions, if his acts were virtuous. What a glorious important Epoch was that; when our fathers sat in council in 1776. Their deliberations was big with the fate of the world. With what esteem <sup>and</sup> respect should we cherish the names of the prominent actors who first proclaimed to the world the inalienable rights of man? A new Epoch has approached in the history of the world. Superstition and bigotry have received a mortal stab. The fires of Smith field, and <sup>the</sup> more horrible inquisition have received this verdict. Magic, charms, Ghost, and witches, have retired to the world of fancy; and common sense is permitted to be exercised on all subjects connected with man; and whatever dogmas, in either theology or politics appears irrational is laid aside with the fabled gods of antiquity. Had you and me, been born two centuries sooner, with our <sup>have been</sup> present opinions about theology, you would <sup>have been</sup> roasted for an Heretic, and I for sceptic; <sup>this</sup> <sup>our</sup> escape we should be thankful to that being who gives <sup>us</sup> day and night, and seed time and harvest.

We have just commenced the political campaign, and old Prop will give the local as good a licking as they ever received, were every county in this as true to the general interest as Prop. no to tory could hold up their heads to preach Loco Fovism. We are a little afraid of Bebb, he appears strongly tainted <sup>with</sup> abolitionism.

I was one of the district assessors of this county - on the first Monday of this

of this month was convened the county board, for equalizing the tax on land, this was a difficult and responsible duty; but <sup>we</sup> went through with it in a few days and I believe to the satisfaction of nearly all concerned.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> Inst. I had the pleasure of <sup>hearing</sup> the Rev J H Wright preach two sermons. There <sup>were</sup> no flowers of Rhetoric about them, neither was there any Hellfire and damnation in them, they were just common sense discourses full of love towards God and man.

How my family esteem you, I need not tell you; they talk about you more than they do of any other preacher. Mr Marley occupies a high rank in the estimation of the people of this region. Since Mr Wright has been amongst us, every one I hear speak of him loves him, because he seems to love every <sup>body</sup> with a mother's fondness.

My wife, my children, and Grand children (except Effie bore) enjoy their usual health. Effie had a very narrow escape of her life. She fell from a Slay, at the close of winter, her head and body was much bruised, and she is now just able to walk a little about the house. Had she then been called to the spirit world, she would not have left one behind her better prepared to meet the Judge of Quick and dead.

Mr Webster has preached on this circuit the present year, and I think he has <sup>been</sup> well received by the people; the church has largely increased under his labors. If there is room for him, he should be provided with a circuit. I think him a zealous good man, with some eccentricities; <sup>but</sup> he is not without his faults. I would go to <sup>see</sup> some distance to see one of those faultless monsters the world never saw. I am looking forward to the October Jubilee, <sup>with some interest when</sup> but I reflect how few of the old familiar faces of Gb will meet at the appointed time, this absence pleases my mind into a state of gloomy loneliness, to reflect how few are now living who fifty years ago, frolicked <sup>and</sup> capered over the streets of Chilliworth. Your father and mine were then in prime of life, so were our mothers but <sup>with us</sup> there bodies now rest in the damp and silent grave, where <sup>we</sup> must shortly follow.