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Finley Letters

James B. Finley Letters

6-5-1838

Letter from John McDonald to James B. Finley

John McDonald

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Poplar Ridge June 5th 1838

Dear Sir

Your letter of the 20th of last ^{April} has been received, and its contents read ^{with} Greatful satisfaction. The interest which you express for my welfare in this world, and the world which is to come, is sincerely reciprocated.

Last Sunday I heard a preacher say in the pulpit, That there was ^{no} evidence of the existence of a God, except what ^{was} written in the bible; and all who ^{did} not believe the truth of the Revelations in that book were "atheists". That design appears in the formation of our earth, as well as in the ~~visible~~ ^{visible} stars and planets is most obvious, it thence follows as a rational consequence, that ^{their} must have ^{been} an artificer to form these shapes, and give them laws by which they should be governed: but does it follow from this, that because there is a great overruling spirit, that man is a fallen degenerate creature, and is not what his maker designed him to be? Was our maker deceived, or was he unable to prevent our first parents, as well as angels from falling? On this subject I know it is answered man was made a free agent, this does ^{not} ~~mean~~ ^{mean} the difficulty when God fore knew to ^{certainly} that man would ~~fall~~ ^{change} - Just as well as he knew that water would run down hill. yes but ^{God} could ^{change} the law and make the waters to run up hill, true but he would then have change the law of Gravitation, which ^{binds} ~~holds~~ our earth and all its load together. On this subject of ^{the} ~~the~~ man I have heard many sermons, and have read the arguments of wise and ingenious men on both sides of this interesting question, without being able to come to any definite conclusion: on the truth or falshood of this ^{question} depends the necessity of an atonement. What is called the historical facts related in the new testament, there truth appears to be as well authenticated, as the other histories of the age and countries where those scenes were laid. In all the histories, and biographies which comes down to us from those ages, a Great deal of hyperbole and fable is interwoven in their relations, which renders ^{it} difficult at this distance of time to sift the chaff from the wheat. . . In all the histories which I have read, (and I have more since I seen you ^{last} ~~then~~ I ever did before) I find that in all ages, and nations it was found necessary to establish some system of religion, and it does appear that mankind cannot get along with Good Government without adopting some form of religion to restrain the vicious, and encourage the virtuous: and for this purpose the spirit of christianity will answer for all nations, as its founder did not ^{and forms of government} ~~entertain~~ ^{interfere} with politics, or in any wise meddle with the forms of Government; but on the ^{contrary} ~~contrary~~ enjoined his followers to render obedience to the powers that be.

I think some important errors are committed by preachers by drawing a distinction betwix virtue morally and religion: there should be as little incomprehensible mystery held forth as possible. True they say a man must ^{be} ~~be~~ virtuous and moral, but at ^{the same time} they tell us that a man may be virtuous and moral without being religious. This kind of doctrine looks like a contradiction. It is written and "Jesus said depart from me ye workers of iniquity;" no fault was found about their faith.

from Lattas Bros. C. Ohio
3 June

Rev. James B. Finley
German town
Montgomery county
Ohio

single

June 1838

Col. J. M. Smith

545

It is every man's interest that he should believe the whole truth; yet it appears evident ^{and} that ^{men} cannot believe otherwise than he does. Suppose a woman to have four children at a birth - and suppose as soon as they live without the teeth, that one of them should be taken and trained in China, he would as a matter of course worship the Grand Lama - the 2^d trained on the banks of Ganges, would adore Gugenot - the 3^d trained in Mecca, would ~~would~~ worship Mahomet - the 4th trained by my old friend James B Finley would worship Jesus - could any of these children have any control over their faith; or be justly punished or rewarded for their faith? Suppose these four children to be equally moral, and sincere in their faith or belief, would it be just to send the three first to hell, and save I. B. Finley for heaven? No - we think I hear you exclaim with old John Fletcher, "the man who lives up to the light he has shall be saved." Every man has a control over his actions, but no control over his faith. Every man can be sober - he can cease from lying - from adultery - from stealing - from slandering &c; the truth is he can cease from doing evil, and learn to do well, and in my opinion this is religion: and upon this principle I purpose to act the remainder of my days, and trust the final event to god; who knows my wish to believe the whole truth. When I go home, I wish to leave ^{character} behind me, that no one who knows me, will ^{be} ashamed to say "I was his friend."

I am done preaching for the present, and I believe this ^{is the} first sermon I ever preached. I have no idea of entering into controversy, but only to speak the words of candor to my friend. I have ^{read} a few extracts in the Advocate from your manuscript book, and think from ^{these} samples, it will meet the approbation of the public when published.

From voice of the public press it would appear that my little bantling will be nursed by the public. It has ^{been} said of old that a prophet is never honored in his own country. ^{But} in and around Chillicothe my book met a more rapid sale than I anticipated. Several hundred has been sold in this country. I expect by this time the binding of my book is completed. The Ellice and Marther families, knowing I was ^{not} accustomed to do, and to relieve me from the labor of selling have taken 1,000 copies at 80 cents ^{per} the volume, this will save ^{me} a great deal of trouble; and I hope ^{they} will not be losers. I sell my book at a dollar. I allow twenty five per cent on ^{the} ^{sale} the sale of books taken from the printing of at Cincinnati. Should your engagements permit, and you should think proper to engage in the sale of some of my books; you could place some in the towns in your district and others in the hands of the circuit preachers. on the other page is an unlimited order which ^{you} can use if you think proper.

I have as you requested given your respects to Mr Estel - Mr Capret and Morrow. Estel loves you as he does his own soul. The preachers who travel this circuit stand very fair Mr Capret if he lives will be a learned and useful man. Mr Estel is a good man, and very popular in and out of the Church, they ^{all} wish to be remembered to you. They call you the old Chief.

The presiding Elder Mr Quin was with ^{us} a night not long since I was very ^{much} pleased with him, he ^{has} no starch, and is very liberal in his sentiments, should the great and supreme Judge be of his opinion none will be condemned for a punctilious error in his faith, if ^{his} life is right.

Mr Reed's family are well, and wish you to think of them. ^{Ed} Mrs Reed contrary to expectation is able again to attend meeting.

Henry Gore was here a few days since, Effy and her family were then well. My fat niece ^{who lives in Washington} Nancy Crowan, has a son whom she named I. B. Finley. When you come this way you will ^{have} to bring a saddle bags full of seats for your children. your little namesake Maria Morgans son is rather in delicate health, but we hope will soon recover. My wife sends her kindest ^{respects} to you, to Hannah, to Mr and Mrs Brooks and their children, she says she is prepared to love them, let them be where they ^{will} ^{she} should even never see them. My friends all talk about ~~you~~ you and yours ~~well~~ and wish you well. Give my respects to David Reed and his girl when you see them. Remember to your father, and wish ^{you} to live as long and as happy as life may be desirable.

John McDonald

Rev I B Finley.
To

Topler Ridge, near Lattas, Pop. county Ohio June 5th 1838
Messrs E Morgan & Son

Please gave to the order of James B Finley as many of my books as he may direct.

John McDonald