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Finley Letters

James B. Finley Letters

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12-25-1842

## Letter from John McDonald to James B. Finley

John McDonald

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Poplar Ridge, near Lattar, Ross county. 1. Dec<sup>r</sup> 25<sup>th</sup> 1842

My friend James.

I have been thinking of writing to you for some time, but could not think of any subjects which would <sup>be</sup> interesting to you; and did not like to write a dull prosing letter, about the weather, the crops, or the politics of the day; and I now begin writing without any particular object, only to let you know that I think of you and am as ever your friend.

Theology has been the study and labor of the principle part of your life, and of course I cannot say any thing on that subject which will be new to you, but still I will say something on that important subject. At the request of our mutual friend the Rev Mr. Marley, I have read with care, Mr. Watson's Theological Institutes. He writes in a strong and pleasing style, and supports his opinions in a masterly manner. But his theories are only his opinions. His theory on the three one god was entirely new to me. He contends that the Jehovah of <sup>the</sup> Hebrews, was not god the father, but a distinct independent god, possessed of the same nature with the father; and the holy ghost is a true and separate Jehovah - that these three Jehovahs acts in concert upon all occasions although they <sup>are</sup> separate and independent gods. These ideas were entirely new to me. My opinion of the creeds of those Christians who call themselves orthodox was something in this wise. That there was but one living and true god. ... that that god had a spirit which pervaded the whole universe, that this <sup>spirit was</sup> the holy ghost - that this spirit over shadowed the virgin Mary and <sup>she conceived</sup> ~~and this child was called the~~ son of god - the Christ - or god manifest in the flesh. This is <sup>the</sup> picture of the Trinity which Saint Matthew, the Apostle Paul, and Doctor Clark held forth, and if I am not mistaken, such is the doctrine which I heard my friend J.B. Jr. preach. Either of these creeds are sufficiently mysterious and incomprehensible to make sceptics; but Watson's creed of eternal sonship of the Hebrew Jehovah, appears perfectly absurd. Three eternal independent self-existent Jehovahs, would some differ, or else man was not created in the image, nor imbued with one partical of the spirit <sup>of</sup> his creators.

Scepticism I do not consider a sin, but a misfortune. The word sceptic is frequently used very improperly by Theologians, as synonymous with <sup>the</sup> term infidel. The sceptic doubts - the infidel disbelieves. A very material difference. Who are the sceptics? Evidently they are only found among the enquirers after truth. We are all interested in knowing and believing the truth. The Ignorant and unthinking are never sceptics. Enquiry presupposes that we have something to learn, which <sup>we</sup> do not yet know; but which by investigation we <sup>may</sup> get learn; for this reason we should investigate cautiously every subject which is presented to obtain our faith. God having created us free agents, we have power over our actions - that is we can cease from doing evil, and learn to do well.

Dear Mr. Marley

Single  
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Rev James B. Marley  
Near German Town  
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but our faith in all mysterious incomprehensible relations, must be feeble, weak, or sceptical. When I read the Bible its phrasology conveys to my mind very different meaning than it does to many of my friends. Feed the hungry - clothe the naked - visit the distressed orphan and the widow, relieve their necessities in kindness - to love our neighbor as our selves, (and Jesus told us who our neighbor <sup>is</sup> by his relation of the man who fell among thieves) - or in other words to do to all as you would they should do unto you. This appears to me to be the pulp and marrow of the duties of religion as taught by Jesus and his Apostles. All these things can be done without any miraculous or supernatural intervention of god. It is true that our creation, our lives and all our faculties are the gift of god, but being made free agents, we have only <sup>to</sup> will and the thing is done. We can cease from lying, stealing, drunkenness &c &c at our pleasure - We can do nothing for god he does not stand in need of our aid: and he only requires us to be kind and charitable - able to each other for <sup>the purpose</sup> ~~the~~ we were created, and for neglect of these charitable and social duties we are accountable.

Some who assume to themselves orthodox par excellence, contend that god is a spirit, invisible, without body shape or parts - that his center is every where and circumference no where; ~~and~~ <sup>that</sup> ~~all~~ <sup>who</sup> believe in a material god are Atheists. Such talk appears to me unmeaningargon. The material side of this mooted and inapplicable question appears to me the most rational. I believe that god has ~~some~~ in space a habitation and a home, more affluant and beautiful than we can imagine from whence he views and directs the whole machinery of creation. If this is not true Moses was mistaken when thought he saw his hinder parts. Perhaps ~~that~~ before you read this far you will <sup>be</sup> tired of my preaching, I will now leave off.

Mr Hill the gentleman who travels this circuit, so far, is the most popular preacher we have had for many years. His manners and preaching are so humble and sincere, that he receives the approbation of all hearers, whether they are members of the church or not. I am sorry that my want of faith prevents me, from being with him.

My daughters Henrietta, and Mary, are both afflicted with a breast complaint, and severe cough, and have been for about 18 months, <sup>and</sup> both I think on the mend. These breast complaints are deceitful diseases, their changes from better to worse are so frequent, that it is difficult to judge correctly of the true situation of patients. . . . The rest of my children ~~are~~ enjoy a reasonable state of health, they <sup>are</sup> all your particular friends.

The temperance cause continues to enlist prosolites, many hard cases have abandoned the bottle, and but few who joined the cold water army have become back sliders. The most bitter enemies <sup>the</sup> to cause in this region, are some old Methodists. This is strange. We would naturally suppose that as it is so obvious that so many evils follows in the train of intemperance, that every one, ~~he~~ <sup>they</sup>

who is a friend to morality and social order, be they infidel, sceptic, or religious, would lend a helping <sup>hand</sup> to the overthrow of king alcohol.

My <sup>wife</sup> desires to be remembered to you and your wife, and rest assured that I am <sup>in</sup> every sense your friend.

Except that I am occasionally troubled with a pain in the back, my ~~health~~ is otherwise good. I will be sixty eight years old, the 28<sup>th</sup> of next month.

John McDonald

Rev J B Finley.

Your old friend Mrs Gore is now lying at death door, she cannot <sup>survive</sup> a week longer - She is 76 years old. I suppose you heard that my niece Mary Warthun, wife of Doctor Gary Trimble is gone to the world of spirits, three weeks since. She died in full confidence of a blessed immortality.

My daughter Maria's son J B Finley grows finely, he is a smart little fellow, he joined the temperance society, and talks a good deal about you. All my children and grand children who are old enough to know good from evil, have joined the cold water army, and so have <sup>all</sup> my sons in law but one, and even that one <sup>grow wiser</sup> has ceased drinking. May we all as we grow older, and better is my most fervent prayer.

J. M. D.