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Letter from Robert D. Smith to James B. Finley

Robert D. Smith

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W Smith
Richolburg
1844

As the water has fallen but a few inches,
~~and~~ much of my field of labor will not be
accessible for the next 6 weeks, and the balance
of the time to Conference might be supplied, I
would prefer an appointment from your Com.
immediately, so that I might remove before cold
weather. Otherwise, Mr. Wilson will inform me
of your decision. A letter from yourself would be
highly gratifying. With sentiments, of much esteem, R. D. Smith

Dear bro. - In the days of my boy-hood I used to hear you make Methodist sermons about Urbana; when I thought they afforded more of fun for this life, than matter of serious consideration for the life to come. Since that time I have had knowledge of your character as one of the old order of itinerancy. Upon the whole I have concluded that you might be safely trusted with matters involving some of the highest interests, which should be in the keeping of those ^{who} may be relied upon.

And now to the matter, briefly - relying upon your
skill in the pursuit of suggestions.

I have written two letters - One to your Gen. and one to Mr. Wilson; both of which you will probably see.

My letter to the Com. contains two principal reasons for ^{my} determination to leave the South. And tho I have said but little on the subject of slavery, my wife thinks I have said too much for the public ear. As you know, the subject is one of exceeding delicacy; and the ^{slightest} manifestation of disapprobation creates suspicion, and ~~excites~~ excites more or less of ~~unpleasant~~ unpleasant feeling. And as we have many old and highly valued friends, that we would not unduly displease, it will no doubt be best to say but little on the subject of slavery, especially to ^{the} public. But at the same time there are some facts connected with my case which ought to be in the hearing of prudent members of your Conference, that their action may be according to a full understanding of the subject.

In regard to the case of Bishop Andrew, I formed this opinion; that, taking the fact of his getting married, in connection with the fact of his not resigning, constituted an ~~and~~ impudence. At first, I was almost afraid to express this opinion. But in the course of a few days I found that it was ~~the~~ ^{much the} most common opinion. This opinion I still maintain. But the country, of course, grows with the obligation, especially since the same have so much

principally on one side of the question. However, notwithstanding I adopt ~~the~~ the opinions of the non-slaveholding, or anti-slavery portion of our church; I might continue my labors without fear of interruption or hindrance, but for the disposition which now prevails to require of every ^{public} man an avowal of his sentiments. Not that this disposition has been expressed by public resolutions in this section of our Conference. No. I am happy to say, that so far as I have heard, there has been no exceptionable expression of opinion ~~has been~~ made under the sanction of our ministry. And indeed, with the members of our Con. I would anticipate no difficulty on this subject. As a body they are not in the practice of doing things secretly. But I refer to the character of the resolutions, passed in many parts of the South under the sanction of eminent, and highly influential men; and the consequent freedom with which the subject is discussed in the private circles; and the necessity of dissimulation, or the avowal of views on the ~~the~~ part of anti-slavery men, which would greatly hinder their usefulness. For, as you are no doubt aware, anti-slavery men, and abolitionists, are held ~~now~~ here, to be of the same genus, if not of the same species; and to call a man either, amounts to about the same thing as calling a dog mad. On other subjects - as, for instance politics, I have of often said, I am no politician, and not in the habit of expressing my opinions. But you can't give the question of slavery "the go by" now, and live above suspicion. But to the many bad practices of my life, I now add that of dissimulation. And of late, I have found myself under the necessity of hanging, most painfully, on one or other of the horns of the dilemma. - Either get into a hopeless argument in favor of denounced men and measures, or seem to give my sanction to unfair views, and an uncharitable spirit.

Now, having confidence that you are

a man of christian prudence, I place in
your hands, to be used according to your pleasure,
what constitutes a third prominent reason why
I think I should remove from the South.

Indeed I consider it the of the reasons which urge
me to this conclusion, sufficient for the conclusion.

Here I can hardly hope to give my children such education as I believe all children, rich or poor, ought to have. And here, if educated, I should not leave them.

In the 2^d place, under existing circumstances, the ministry must be, at least, half local & half secular. How much this is to be appreciated, you very well know.

Now, to conclude, the Methodist
action is, far the and works. The subject
of removal from the South has been one
of prayerful solicitude for years. Many ap-
plicants have presented themselves. The principal,
however, has been, "Go, not where you are needed,
but where you are needed most." But for the
last two months I have been driven from my
missionary field, and confined, partly much
to the house, by a lame foot, and I have given
myself to reading, reflection, prayer, and conver-
sation with my wife, but all without coming to
any conclusion, until the other day, after reading the
views of Hamlin on Sanctification, I came to
the hymn with which he concludes,

"Come out from all thy griefs,

And ways into His hands" &c. Here, thought
I, is my work, and I will do it. I will lay this
matter before my brethren of the Ohio Conference,
fixing on the work of God a steadfast eye,
and casting the full burden of my cares,
with humble confidence, on Him who has
been ^{my} ^{constant} help in times of trouble"