

The following "letter" was given to me by my uncle and aunt, John and Bessie Jarvis Macdonald of Hemet, California. They gave it to me in the form of a photocopy of Caroline Butler Macdonald's handwritten copy of the original. The person who wrote the letter was James Butler, a son of John Lowe Butler I and Caroline Farozine Skeen. He lived from 1847 to 1900. He married Charlotte Elizabeth Topham and was the father of six children, all of whom are mentioned in his letter.

Caroline B. Macdonald was my grandmother, and she told me some circumstances surrounding the writing of this letter, as follows:

James Butler had been bitten by an insect in Mexico which caused him to run very high fevers. When this letter was being written, he was very ill and had become somewhat delirious while traveling back to the colonies. He mistakenly got off the train somewhere between El Paso and Nuevo Casas Grandes and wandered in the desert most of the day, eventually making his way back to the train and to his home. He died very shortly afterwards. *(in Utah)*

Caroline said that her father was dying even as he wrote the letter. He knew his wife's health was poor (she, in fact, died very soon after her husband), and the prospect of his six children being left orphans caused him great concern. He apparently made crude stone monuments in the desert so searchers could find him if he did not return. To me, the little stone monuments are also symbols of James's intense desire to be remembered by his posterity and to leave a "trail" or a "footprint" for them to follow if they are "desirous."

I feel that James's thoughts in this letter, much like a dream, reveal the objects of his deepest desires and concerns: God and his family. Though his mind was muddled by fever, James clearly had his priorities in order.

Taylor O. Macdonald

Taylor O. Macdonald, son of
Oden Alexander Macdonald, son of
Caroline Melinda Butler Macdonald, daughter of
James Butler.

MY FATHER'S LAST LETTER

Written by Caroline Butler Macdonald in her own handwriting

James Butler's last letter, a copy of the original which was found in Lizzie Butler Wilson's book *Beautiful Gems* - on Sept. 28, 1953 after John W. Wilson's death at 1307 E. Nevada, El Paso, Texas.

James Butler had gone to Ciudad Juarez & El Paso from Colonia Juarez in order to sell some horses.

He was returning to Colonia Juarez by train and became ill. He got off from the train on the desert somewhere and was left. He became very ill with typhus fever and was wandering around trying to find some place to go while he wrote this letter at different intervals, the first page of which is missing. It starts

---so a little later and I asked Bro. Pierce if he would loan me a couple of dollars. He said "yes" but he did not get it for me so I started out of his house and he got up as I started to open the door. Then he asked if I wanted it now. I told him yes. He gave it to me hesitatingly. I went down and had a shave, came to my room and started to write to Lizzie a card, but I felt so worn out that I did not. It makes me feel bad that my credit was not good for \$2.00. What has brought this on me? I feel to acknowledge the hand of the Lord to bring me to a sense of my duty to him.

God works in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.

I read in the hymnbook once that had a good impression on me, it ran something like this. "Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take. The clouds ye so much dread are big in mercy and will break in blessings on your head." I feel to acknowledge the hand of God in these things and know it will prove a blessing to me. When, when I got up this morning I went out. Thought I would attend [to] my secret prayers, started east, but I traveled through the field, could find no suitable place so I turned to the right and kept traveling until came to _____ the office of _____ Willasin and back to the house. When I started out I asked God by my humble faith to take charge of me and lead me as he saw fit. Well, I prayed as I walked alone. Finally I got to _____ my mind run on the temporal things and the possibilities and the _____ straight of what my Patriarchal Blessing said that if I could live for it, I should be blessed with means to do a great many things. I found my mind run on temporal things instead of spiritual as is the commandments of God. It says 6 days thou shalt work and on the 7th thou shalt serve the Lord Thy God, and then I prayed more earnestly as I walked alone. Well it is now just 9 o'clock in 35 minutes. Will take a walk as my mind has been somewhat blank. It is now 11 o'clock in 10 minutes. My mind has been running in all directions. I have some great trustings that if I will do my duty I will be greatly blest and then again it run back to the day I left Richfield and how I had been treated. Some time I would feel like well I will wait awhile. It is now a quarter to 12 o'clock. There is one thing that has come to my mind. I _____ and _____ my little boy Ernest's ear _____ and I will try and _____.

It is now 12 o'clock and 13 min. I have just prayed but my mind is still blank. I stayed right in the area of an old limekill [sic] up towards the hills about 1/2 mile from the last houses, the track runs right along in a southwesterly direction towards the hills. It is now 25 min. to 1:00 o'clock. I am sitting on a pile of rock on the left of the road running to the hills. My mind is still blank. I ask the Lord to take charge of me and dictate my mind while I pray. Well it is just one o'clock. I am on a little slope running nearly in the direction of the sun.

I have been praying to be led by the Spirit of God what well [sic] that I may be enabled to teach my children the proper way to go that I may leave a little footprint here and there and then they may follow. There is a big rock on the left of the road where I prayed this time. It is 25 min. past one o'clock. I came to a main traveled road running very nearly south and will say that the Lord has loosed my tounge [sic] and _____ if I am not _____ and I got so I was not afraid to hear my own voice. It is now 25 min. till 2 o'clock. I am on top of a little raise [sic] on the left of the road. I will pile up some rocks if you will look to the right of the road about 50 yards you will see a white rock. Well with all of my will power trying to concentrate my thoughts upon spiritual things, I was just planning land matters on the Batcheton. I ask the Lord to forgive me for that and do ask him who gave me my being to help me to overcome this weakness that I may learn to concentrate my mind on the things I am doing and I will try to keep the Sabbath day holy and teach them to do this. I pray after this manner prayers. It is now 7 min. after 2:o'clock. I was just knowing there is sweeter rest in heaven and now I pray again as the Lord may dictate.

Coming right up the main traveled road to the rock quarry just take the left-hand road that is traveled by the Erntz Wagons about 10 rods up the hill you will find quite a large rock on the left hand of the road. Here is where I last prayed. It is now 25 min. to 4 o'clock. I have been resting in the shade of a rock. Just on the right hand side of the road about 3 rods from the dim road running around the hill, it is truey [sic] manifest that there is 2 powers striving with men and it keeps a person all of his time to keep on the right track. It is now 15 min. to 5:P.M. I am sitting in the shade of a river as you (flow-go) around the hill the rock quarry is on nearly? right. Behind it on the right of the road about 4 hundred yards from the hole that the rock quarry is. As I came along I was constrained to talk of what Brother N.K. Thurber said in a Priesthood meeting in Richfield. He asked the people to try to concentrate their minds to the inside of that _____ and to what was being said.

I feel that the Lord opened my mouth and gave me utterance beyond my expect[ta]tions. I feel to trust him, but I made one mistake right in the heat of my talk. I got off something like this _____ that I had not been a teacher but I had been a tithe payer and had taught my children the necessity of paying tithing, that had a brother there could preach a sermon 1 1/2 hrs long but he did not pay as much tithing as I did. Now, that is _____. Lord forgive me for that. I do not want to say or do anything to grieve the spirit of God, therefore I ask his assistance at all times in helping? :

I have just finished praying. I was constrained to pray for my wife it was? but to my mind what Brother Harry said when he blest her he gave her a good blessing and he told me he felt constrained to say he felt as if she was taken to the sea coast it would probably her _____. My mind also goes back

to think if I could get some glasses for her she could read some good books it would comfort her and do her good. I feel to ask my Heavenly Father to bless Lizzie Strengthen her in her mind, strengthen her nerves and cause that she may be prepared for the labor that does await her. Bless James A. in his weaknesses. Also John T. in his weakness. Also Bessie Cause that she may have thy holy spirit to be with her. Bless Caroline to inspire her with thy Holy Spirit. Also bless little Ernest. Bless him. Cause that he may regain his strength and hearing and that he may grow up and be a good and useful man and stay at home and be a comfort to his parents.

Well it is 6 o'clock P.M. If it be the Lord's will I will start to my room and I ask that his [...] out upon me. Well I make a record of these things so I will leave land marks along my trail so if my children can [follow?] if they feel so desirous for some aid. What it takes to get in possession of the promptings of the still small voice of the whisperings of the spirit of God. I had started to write to Lizzie several times but it seems like I could not concentrate my mind long enough to write an intelligent letter. That seems the worst thing for me to do.

Well enough of that.

I read once where a man had wonderings in his mind. The piece run something like this: Mortal, fix your wondering mind upon the everliving knowledge. Let thy curious inclinations to the active present bow. _____

It is now 20 min after 9 a.m. in the _____

It is now about 10 a.m. I find I had a fever and a very bad headache this morning. I went to bed took some Jamaica ginger? I felt some what _____ since but I feel pretty well now.