

A Letter of John Dickins

The following letter of John Dickins was written to his friend and mentor, Rev. Edward Dromgoole (1751-1835), who had traveled as a Methodist preacher, and since located in Brunswick County, Virginia. The original is in the Dromgoole Papers, Collection #230, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and was transcribed by the editor. Written just a few months before his death, Dickins' letter has not previously been published in full, though excerpts can be found in Pilkington's The Methodist Publishing House, A History (1968), 1:107. It is interesting for the way it reveals something of Dickins' self-perception, his concerns over the spiritual state of his son, and his reference to the book and supply store business he began to supplement his income.

My Much Esteemed Friend,

Though our friendship is of long date, & I trust established, yet we correspond but seldom. And even now I have ventured to write, I am rather at a loss what to say. In this city we had some revival last winter, though it is still to the poor that the gospel is preached with the greatest success. And in several circuits round about us, there is a good work of God going forward. But such is my infirmity by an affliction in my breast, & weakness of body, that I don't preach more than once a week, & that with difficulty. In respect to my soul, I believe there is very little change for the better or worse since I saw you, though perhaps I possess a greater degree of the passive graces – But I find myself a very poor creature, and if it were not for fear of arrogating too much humility to myself, I might adopt Mr. Wesley's description of that grace, & say, I am "little and mean & base & vile in my own eyes." But I dare not make any great profession – suffice it to say, I love God, & have no dependence on anything but the merits of Jesus Christ – But even while I am writing, I am ready to doubt the propriety of saying so much about myself. However, I am writing to a particular friend, who I think would be glad to know.

A few days ago, I had a letter from Mr. Asbury, who was then at New York & much mended by the means of abstaining from all flesh of every kind –

My wife is very weakly & we have six children who are for the most part pretty healthy. The expense of living in this city, where everything must be bought, is very great indeed; and I am sometimes amazed at the kind Providence that has always made a way for our support.

It was with great persuasion that I yielded to my friends & entered into a little business to help in the support of my family; I should not have done it after all if I could have made out without it – And, though my family is large, I may perhaps venture to say, through grace, I am in a great measure weaned from [the] world, & am in some sense retired in the midst of this populous city. It affords me some satisfaction that I can serve the cause of God by promoting the circulation of our books. This I feel inclined to do for conscience' sake.

It would afford me great satisfaction if my oldest son were in a situation similar to yours. But it is not so yet, though very few possess better moral principles than he does.

I would be happy to receive some circumstantial of you & yours – that you are crucified with Christ, & waiting all the days of your appointed time, till your change shall come. There is no doubt but you have gained more and done more in religion than I have.

My wife & children join in sincere affection to yourself & Mrs. Dromgoole with all your offspring.

Philada.
July 12th
1798

I remain your friend & brother,
Jno Dickins