

The Editors of the Independent

by Charles Finney

Charles Finney responds to criticism of his labors in England, denying the claims and requesting facts and evidence to support them.

Scripture: Matthew 7:16

Topics: "Revival", "Accountability in Ministry"

Description

Charles Finney addresses the editors of The Independent, expressing his dismay at the negative portrayal of his revival efforts in America, particularly the claim that his ministry has caused harm to churches. He challenges the anonymous critics to provide concrete evidence of any disastrous results from his revivals, asserting that the fruits of his labor have been overwhelmingly positive. Finney emphasizes the importance of truth and accountability in the Christian community, urging those who spread rumors to come forward with facts rather than hearsay. He reflects on the genuine conversions and lasting impact of his revivals, asserting that they have brought many to a deeper faith in Christ. Finney's heartfelt plea serves as a reminder of the need for unity and support among believers in the face of criticism.

Transcript

To the Editors of The Independent

12 December 1850

[Published in the "Foreign Correspondence" column of The Independent (New York), 17 April 1851. p. 61. It was also published the same day in The New-York Evangelist, 17 April 1851, p. 64, with part of one paragraph omitted, and a few other minor variations.]

Finney gave the background to this letter in his Memoirs. At the beginning of the section on his visit to England in 1859, he said:

Before I speak of the labors that I at this time performed in England, I must notice some opposition that I met with the first time that I was there, that I have passed over. I have already spoken of the letters received by John Angell James when I was at Birmingham, both from this and the other side of the Atlantic. When I arrived at London the letters were directed to Dr. Campbell; but as they were nearly or quite all anonymous, he would have nothing to do with them. As soon as he saw that they were anonymous, and were about me, he would hand them to me, and would not read them unless I requested

him to do so. They made no other impression upon him that I could see than to arouse his indignation. A little while before I left him, however, he received a copy of "The Presbyterian," published at that time, I believe, in Philadelphia, and edited, as I afterwards learned, by Mr. Prime, since editor of the New York Observer. The article was designed to warn the British churches against me and my influence (Finney, Memoirs, edited by Rosell and Dupuis, 1989, p. 573).

The article reads:

The Rev. Charles G. Finney, of Oberlin, Ohio, is preaching in London, and according to some accounts, is attracting great attention. The British Banner gives a very favourable notice of his preaching. ... It is obvious from this, that Finney preaching is to have its run in London, as it had here. Similar accounts, even far more favourable, were given in the early years of his labours in this country; but the churches that enjoyed his ministrations have wept bloody tears of regret that he ever saw them. We presume that no man, now living or dead, has inflicted more injury upon the cause of religion, and especially upon revivals of religion, than Charles G. Finney. Thousands who were once his admirers and friends, are now witness to the truth of this solemn and awful declaration. We make it in view of our accountability to God, as well as those who read this paper; and if our friends in Great Britain should be tempted to try the experiment of Mr. Finney's gospel in their churches, they will find it eminently successful at first, and disastrous in the end. ... ("Finney in London." The Presbyterian [Philadelphia], 20 July 1850, p. 112).

At the end of August 1850, Henry Ward Beecher, who had stayed with Dr. Campbell in London and had attended some of Finney's meetings, wrote to Finney from Liverpool, as he was about to embark for America:

On arriving in New York, I shall not only by my tongue speak of the Lord's doings by your hand, but shall take an early opportunity to speak through the Independent on the interference of American Christians in this shameless manner. I am both grieved and mortified at such things done by Christs ministers, as would be scorned even by a second rate politician (Beecher to Finney, 30 August 1850, Finney Papers).

After his return to America, Beecher wrote an editorial for The Independent: "Mr. Finney in England" which was published in the paper on 21 November 1850, p. 190.:

The success of Mr. Finney's labors in England cannot but fill every Christian heart with joy. There are few, perhaps, who sympathize with some minor peculiarities of Mr. Finney's system: but fewer still we believe who do not regard his practical success in revival labors as a matter of common gratulation to all Christians. ...

It was while here [in Birmingham] that letters began to arrive from America warning ministers, and especially dehorting [sic] so influential a man as John Angell James, from putting confidence in Mr, Finney. ...

Mr. Finney was introduced to the Congregational Union of England and Wales, in May, by John Angell James and Dr. Redford: nor has that confidence so justly and generously extended to him been withdrawn, although efforts have been frequently made by private letters from America, and through American religious journals, to destroy his influence. One American paper which I saw in London, declared that however flattering present appearances might be in London, the final fruit would be most disastrous, and that the churches in America in which Mr. F. had labored have since wept tears of blood in consequence.

Upon invitation of Dr. Campbell, pastor of the Tabernacle, once the scene of Whitefield's labors, Mr. Finney began to labor in London and has continued there until late in Autumn. In that time many hundreds have been hopefully converted. On two occasions we were present, when, at the close of Sabbath evening's service more than a thousand persons presented themselves in an adjoining hall, as inquirers. Nor have we ever witnessed in any place, more solemnity, order, and unexceptional propriety in the conduct of meetings, than has prevailed under Mr. Finney at the Tabernacle. And now, if we were an English clergyman, and if we were inclined to doubt the reality of Revivals, and seeing the results of Mr. Finney's labors, should hear it testified, from the land of revivals, that they were spurious, that good as they might now seem, they would end in mischief, we should conclude not against Mr. Finney; but against revivals. We should say, "If these are spurious all revivals are spurious." This is the tendency of the efforts put forth by religious newspapers in America to undermine Mr. Finney in England. For the sake of pushing at a theological antagonist, they are deepening the impression, already too deep, that revivals of religion are disorders; the channels of mischief and not of blessings!

...

We are very far from thinking Mr. Finney a model; or the Revivals which sprung up under his labors early in his career to be such in all respects as we should now wish to see.

It is very unfair to take a higher state of things which has in part resulted from a man's labors and by it criticise those labors. If the choice presented us were the revivals of Western New York from 1825 to 1837, and a train of purer revivals, we should choose the latter. But if the choice were between no revivals at all and such as followed Mr. Finney's labors, we should most gratefully receive such memorable works of grace, even though their imperfections were greater. An imperfect Revival is better than a perfect stagnation. ... Our English brethren ought to understand that the opinions expressed by several religious newspapers on this side are not the opinions of the American church; that there is a large proportion of American Christians, differing from Mr. Finney in his views of Christian perfection, and not ignorant of some evils in his early Revival labors, who, notwithstanding, regard his life to have been an era in the Revival history of America, and his labors, upon the whole, to have been a precious blessing to the cause of God in America. Another generation will sift the chaff from the wheat, and then, we firmly believe, few men will be found to have been a better husbandman than Charles G. Finney! May God long spare his life and increase his usefulness!

In reference to the article in The Presbyterian, Finney went on to say in his Memoirs:

I do not know that this made any particular impression on Dr. Campbell's mind other than to arouse his indignation. However I wrote a letter to the editor of the New York Evangelist, and inquired who this editor of the Presbyterian was, for then I did not know. I also inquired where those churches were that had wept tears of blood over those revivals; and what evidence he had of any such thing. I then appealed to all the churches and brethren where I had labored, if they knew of any such disastrous results from those revivals to write, and publish their letters, and let it be known throughout the world. I affirmed that I knew of no such results anywhere where I had labored. I made as strong an appeal as I could to all the churches and ministers where I had labored to say if they knew ought of the things with which he had charged me. That I did not want them to say ought in my favor. But if they knew anything against me, or the results of my labors, I wanted they should make it known, for I did not know it myself. This letter I directed to Brother Joshua Leavitt the Editor of the New York evangelist; and I waited, and received no notice of it. He did not publish it, and I could not understand why. This was but a little while before I left London to return home;

but the answer did not come as soon as I expected, by any means. When I arrived in New York I found that the letter had been published and several answers were given by brethren with whom I had labored. This had taken place while I was on my passage home from London. On inquiring of brother Leavitt why the letter had not been published sooner, he informed me that he received it from the office just as he was starting on a journey, and by mistake he put it in his pocket instead of leaving it in the office to be published. Hence no more attention was paid to it until after he returned, and by chance found it in his pocket, and then he had it immediately published. But as I had returned and was again in this country, but two or three letters had been written by my friends on this side and published. They supposing that now I had returned there was no use of writing further, those of them that were expecting to write said no more about it. How Mr. Prime came by such an idea of those revivals I cannot say; but I presume he came by it very much as Mr. Nettleton and Dr. Beecher received their information (Finney. Memoirs, pp. 574-76).

Finney's letter was as follows:

LETTER FROM REV. CHARLES G. FINNEY.

TABERNACLE HOUSE, Finsbury, }

LONDON, Dec. 12, 1850.}

To the Editors of the Independent:

DEAR BRETHREN:--Since I have been in England I have been pained and surprised to hear the glorious revivals of religion with which our country has been so blessed, especially within the last 25 or 30 years, spoken of as resulting in disaster to the churches where they have occurred. Special pains have been taken to convince the churches of this country that my own influence has been particularly injurious in labors in those revivals. It has been asserted with the utmost solemnity, "that no man living or dead has done so much injury to the cause of revivals" as I have done; that the churches where I have labored "have wept tears of blood in view of the results" of my labors in their midst; that all appeared well for a time, but the results have been as above described.

Now, dear brethren, are these things so? This is the opposite of that which to this day I had supposed to be true. Especial reference has been made to the revivals in Western New York, between the years 1825 and 1837. At the time of those revivals I know, as has always been the case in such extensive outpourings of the Holy Spirit, that much was said against them, and that too, in some instances, from sources that misled good men, and excited alarm and even hostility for a time, in certain quarters where I have supposed the most cordial sympathy would have existed had those who were misled as to facts been in the midst of those thrilling and sacred scenes. But until of late I did not know that the facts were so utterly misapprehended by many even to this day. I had no idea that any one now called in question the general purity and soundness of those revivals, or would say any such things as have been said about them.

As to my doctrinal views, and the immediate results of my labors, the brethren in England can judge for themselves. From my preaching and my published works they understand my views; and of what at present occurs under their own eyes they can well judge. But they are assured in the most solemn manner by editors and anonymous correspondents, and perhaps some of them by responsible names, that such things are true about those revivals as I am an utter stranger to. If they are true, none needs to know them more than myself.

I have read everything that I could obtain, both in sacred and in church history, of revivals in all countries and in all times. I have labored much in revivals. I have witnessed all their phenomena and results for many years, and can now say that I have, up to this day, regarded the revivals during the period above mentioned, so far as I had any knowledge of them, as quite equal in purity and in everything valuable and glorious in revivals to any I ever saw, read, or heard of in any place, at any time. I heard much said, and saw much in print and in manuscript, concerning those revivals, that I knew to be false. I had supposed until now that this was generally, if not universally, admitted at present; but it seems that much misapprehension and misrepresentation still prevail even on that side the Atlantic. I ask myself, Is it possible that such things can yet be said about these revivals, and about my influence in promoting them?

And now will you allow me to ask, Where have I done so much to disparage revivals? What churches have I labored in where so much evil has resulted? When have they "wept tears of blood," or any other tears, because of evils that have resulted from my labors? I had supposed that it was now well understood that much, very much of the religious stamina, efficiency and moral power of those churches were the fruits of those revivals; that as a general rule, at least, the converts of those revivals have given as decisive evidence of being born of God as any members of those churches. Where, I ask, have I rent churches, introduced divisions, led the churches astray, or unsettled pastors? I appeal to those who know. Let those churches and ministers who have been so injured by any fault of mine speak.

Give us facts, names, dates, places, not hearsay. I have heard much talk, give us truth. Do not tell us what you have heard; tell us what you know, or prove what you say, not by loose report but by credible witnesses. If any such facts as are reported, have occurred under my ministry tell us when and where. I want to know them myself, and I want others to know them. I ask not that you should speak in my praise, but speak against me and my labors, if you have aught to say. But give your name, your residence, your facts. Publish them in the face of the churches and ministers where they occurred. I will not deny them if they are true. But I beseech my brethren slander not those glorious revivals. If there ever were genuine revivals I believe they were such. If there is any true religion in the world I believe it is found in the mass of those precious converts, who have ever since made up no small portion of the membership of those churches. Things may have resulted to some of those churches of which I am not informed. But I have frequently been at the places where most of them occurred, and I must say that if any churches were blessed by revivals, they have been. What will those churches say whose membership is so largely composed of those converts, to be told that "they have wept tears of blood over the results of those revivals?" There was opposition to those revivals among some of the ministers of Christ, but who were they? That some of them were good men I doubt not. But they were not men on the spot. They were men misinformed as to facts. Did I ever labor with a minister who will testify to any such evil results? If so let him speak. Have I distracted and divided churches? If so let them speak. Have I been instrumental in filling churches with spurious converts? Let them speak. Give us names, places, dates, this is the way. It is important to me and to the cause of God; if I have done such things, it should be known.

But if these reports are false, I beseech my brethren not to hinder me in my efforts to do good by following me across the Atlantic with falsehood. The brethren who circulate such reports are misled. I am not willing to believe that they intend to lie. I have, as you know, never been in the habit of replying to reports, nor would I now, were I in my own country, where I am known. But I am among strangers. God is, as heretofore, blessing my labors. The brethren here see and rejoice in it. But they are told of disastrous results by-and-by. To this I can make no answer, as some on the other side of the water profess that such has been the case there. Then I am in the dark. I ask When? who? where?

If any one wonders how good men could have engaged in opposition to those revivals, unless something very wrong existed in them. I ask how it is that now the revivals in the days of Edwards and Whitfield, &c. are so generally lauded, when in their day the most extensive opposition to those revivals and to those ministers existed among the leading ministers. I recommend to those who make the opposition an occasion of stumbling, to read Dr. Chauncey's book against those revivals, and see what a great number of the principal ministers in the United States opposed them. But enough. For my own sake I would not speak. But for the cause of revivals I will speak.

The work of the Lord prospers here. I have not written the above because the brethren here desire it, but because I wish to know if there are any such facts as are reported, and where they occurred. Your Brother,

C. G. FINNEY.

The publication of Finney's letter was accompanied by an editorial in The Independent from the pen of Rev. Joseph P. Thompson, pastor of the Broadway Tabernacle:

One of the liveliest recollections of our youth is of a series of revivals some twenty years ago, or rather a continuous revival of religion, in the Fifth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia. Night after night for weeks that spacious edifice was thronged with a solemn assembly; multitudes would remain after the preaching as inquirers, and scores and even hundreds were hopefully converted to God. Besides the pastor, Rev. Dr. Skinner--in labors most abundant and most blessed--several ministers from abroad, then active in revival efforts, were for a time employed in that great work. Among these were Drs. Lyman and Edward Beecher, Drs. Beman, Lansing and Parker, Mr. Finney, and Messrs. Norton and Patterson, now gone to their reward. For these ministers we then acquired a regard and an affection which continued to this day. We love to think of them in connection with those hallowed scenes. Next to our honored pastor and spiritual father, stand Beecher and Beman, Finney and Parker, and the rest, as servants of Christ, faithful and beloved. Then distinctions in theology, disputes about measures, controversies about doctrine and reform, to us were all unknown. We knew only that in our guilt and helplessness we had need of Christ, and these his servants, by clear, pungent, and earnest preaching, brought us to know and to rejoice in Him. We may not now follow these men with a reverence and confidence almost implicit. We would not stand with one upon his platform of church policy, with another on the slavery question, with another on his theory of Christian perfection, but they still are embalmed in the tenderest, holiest memories of the heart, and there we would ever keep them.

How strange it seems that after the lapse of almost twenty years we should find ourselves the successor in the ministry of two of these honored men, Messrs. Finney and Parker,--preaching in the pulpit built for the one, and for a while occupied so successfully by the other--and in the capacity of editor called to pass judgment upon the character and fruits of their labors. The appeal on our first page from Mr. Finney is one that should be met by facts. In the midst of present encouragement and success in England he is called to refute the allegation that his past labours at home have in their results been injurious to the churches, nay even that ministers and Christians in America have "wept tears of blood" over the disastrous consequences of his measures. Is this so? The appeal must be to facts.

The revival in Philadelphia was not characterized by extravagances, yet there were passages in it analogous to those witnessed at Enfield and other places under the preaching of Edwards. The "anxious seat" was in constant use. Before the great congregation we ourselves went forward to a bench in front of

the pulpit as a subject of special prayer and exhortation. Before the great congregation we stood in token of a resolution thenceforward to serve the Lord. We remember to have seen a young man of one of the first families in the church leave his seat, walk hastily up the aisle to meet Dr. Skinner as he came out of the pulpit, fall upon his neck, and sobbing aloud, beseech him to pray for him. We remember that sometimes it was necessary to urge the inquirers and converts to retire lest midnight should overtake them in the house of God. There was some excitement, something of a Pentecostal air about those scenes, to us as vivid as of yesterday. But what was their result? What do the intervening years witness to their effects. Great numbers made a profession of religion. Of these some fell away. Some with whom we were once familiar in the inquiry meeting, the convert's meeting, and the youth's prayer meeting, are now living in open worldliness and sinful indulgence. The church too, that memorable Fifth church, once a leader in every good work, became a prey to dissension, was divided, and at last is disbanded and scattered. But these unhappy events had no connection whatever with that revival. They were owing to the removal of Dr. Skinner, to the unfortunate position of the church property, to pecuniary embarrassment, and to various providential circumstances. No one acquainted with the facts would ever think of tracing the disasters of that church in any way to the revival of 1830-33.

But we ask ourselves, What were the proper fruits of that revival period? Were they spurious? Have they been disastrous? Before we can believe this, we must give up our own hope in Christ, and count the major part of our life an awful mistake,--a journey from a wrong starting point, under false guides; we must discredit the piety of the mother who gave herself up to God at the same altar with her child; we must dishonor the memory of the sister who walked in saintly purity till God took her. Pardon, reader, the outgushing of a heart that would soliloquize a moment upon its own experience.

When we visit the city of our nativity we find in several of the churches there, among their most active members, some of them Sabbath-school superintendents, elders and deacons, those who were converted in that revival in the Fifth church. Among the fruits of that revival we find merchants that honor God with their substance, lawyers that adorn the bar with their Christian integrity, physicians that minister grace to the soul as well as health to the body. We find that young man who fell on his pastor's neck and wept aloud, having been providentially detained from the foreign missionary field, leading a devoted and useful life in the ministry of the gospel. Others who were converted at that period are scattered over the wide West, building up new churches, active in temperance, in revivals, in Christian benevolence. One at least is among the most honored names in the ministry.

Now let it be remembered that in the revival of which we speak, there were no distinctions known in doctrine or in measures between Mr. Finney and Drs. Skinner, Beecher, and Parker. Let it be remembered also, that the "new measures" of the time were practiced in that revival, and were defended by pulpit and pen;--and the fruits of that revival may answer in part the letter of Mr. Finney.

We turn to another case. In the church to which we minister are not a few who were hopefully converted under Mr. Finney's labors or who coöperated actively with him in revivals of religion. These members are, to say the least, in no respect behind others in Christian experience and continued devotion. They do not follow Mr. Finney in his later peculiarities of doctrine, but they cherish toward him an almost reverential regard as a holy man of God. The place of our studies was hallowed by his prayers and by his faithful counsels to inquiring souls. We have found no trace of evil from the labors of Mr. Finney as our predecessor.

This is our humble testimony in reply to the inquiries of Mr. Finney. We have at hand an answer from another source. Rev. Mr. Knox, of Rome, has published a discourse on the half century in which he gives an account of the great revival in that place twenty-five years ago. Though the narrative is long it will well repay the reader and may prove to him a means of grace.

...

The Christian Mirror of Portland publishes this narrative as "a reminiscence which may prove quickening to Christians and impart new fervency to their spirits when they pray, 'Thy kingdom come;'" and yet the Mirror omits the paragraph relating to Mr. Finney and suppresses all allusion to his name. Is this ingenuous?

We hope that Mr. Finney's letter will evoke like reminiscences from others. With his speculations on sanctification we have little sympathy. Our dissent from these views stands recorded in the earlier discussions of this journal respecting the council at the Sullivan-street church. But because like Dr. Emmons and Prof. Upham, Mr. Finney is in error on a point in philosophy, shall all his labors for good be disavowed and denounced? Men should take heed in such a warfare lest they be found fighting against God. ("Revival Reminiscences." The Independent (New York), 17 April 1851. p. 62.)

A month later, the following editorial notice was published in The Independent (New York), 15 May 1851, p. 82:

MR. FINNEY'S LETTER

We have been requested to state why the letter of Mr. Finney did not appear till four months after its date, and as the circumstance has given rise to evil surmises we hasten to make the explanation. The letter was sent under cover to Mr. Beecher, who gave it to Mr. Leavitt just as he [Mr. L.] was setting out upon a journey. Thus it got mislaid, and had passed out of mind till it was accidentally recalled. It came to the knowledge of the acting editor only one week before its publication. It was published really as soon as received. We meant that it should go in without date, and therefore made no explanation at the time. The surmise that it was withheld by design till the eve of Mr. Finney's arrival is wholly gratuitous, and so is every other surmise or conjecture about it. Mr. F. knew nothing of the circumstances. As the letter was sent to the Evangelist from this office, the same explanation will apply to our neighbour.

The version of the letter in The New-York Evangelist, April 17, 1851, p. 64 was accompanied by an editorial by W. H. Bidwell, the editor, on p. 62:

REVIVALS OF WESTERN NEW-YORK

A letter will be found on our fourth page, from Rev. Charles G. Finney, to which we desire to call attention. It was elicited, it seems, by the circulation of some unfriendly criticisms in the country, which wafted over the waters, have been seized upon to injure and calumniate the successful labors in which he is at present engaged in London. We saw these remarks at the time; but knowing their source, and supposing them designed mainly for the home market, they excited no feeling but sorrow, that there should still be Christian men among us in whom prejudice, and the memory of old animosities, should retain such a tenacious life. It is a curious illustration, too, of the value of these charges, that the editor of one of the journals which gave them currency, has been engaged all winter in writing and personally laboring to promote the very species of revivals, in the church of which he is pastor, which he thinks so disastrous

when connected with Mr. Finney's ministrations. The truth is that the grand system of revivals which had their impulse, if not their origin, in the preaching of Mr. Finney, has become so incorporated into the settled usages and convictions of the churches, that our brother editor has been unconsciously lending the sanction of his own labors and thoughts to the very measures and practices he condemns. No finer demonstration of the genuineness and Scriptural character of these revivals, as a system, could be afforded. Indeed, the absence, for any length of time, of these very revivals--for his agency in which ministers and Christians are sometimes ready to reproach Mr. Finney--in any church, would be regarded as a calamity and a grief. Now if men are not just enough to acknowledge the merit of Mr. Finney's labors in this revival period, it is, at least, satisfactory that the subsequent practice and history of the churches in this country, can be pointed to as evidence that in that mighty movement he was but the instrument, and God the Spirit the great moving power.

For ourselves, though fully alive to all the evils connected with them, and owning but little sympathy with much that characterized the movement, we do not doubt that those great revivals which overspread and shook to its center Western New-York, in that remarkable period associated with Mr. Finney's first labors, were really the work of God. We think no man intimately acquainted with those scenes, or with the churches which are largely composed of the converts of them, can honestly doubt it--and that the better they are known, the stronger will be the conviction of it. So potent and striking are the evidences that they were, as a whole, seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, that we had supposed, before the utterance of the remarks which have called forth Mr. Finney's letter, that the most skeptical and mistaken were ready to concede their virtual genuineness. If it be a good rule that a tree is known by its fruits--that the active and vigorous existence of Christian virtues is the best proof that the piety in which they have their origin is genuine, the most casual traveler through that favored region will find enough to convince him. If anywhere in this country, out of the most favored portions of New-England, there are churches more plentiful, more active, orderly, spiritual, or sound in faith; or blessed with a more discreet and faithful ministry--or any where a higher standard of Christian life, or a nobler grade of benevolence, than in those which come within the sweep of that great movement, we know not where to find them. Yet of these churches the stablest, and perhaps, with all the lapse of time, still the largest, element is composed of those converted under Mr. Finney's preaching, or in revivals which had their direct impulse in his labors.

Far be it from us to excuse the faults of those labors, or the evils of those scenes. Many there were, undoubtedly; but we have never thought them to be the result of system or principle, or anything more than the incidents of an excitement powerful enough to stir up society to its very bottom. Such excitement could not fail of doing some damage. Whitefield was not without fault, nor the revivals he promoted free from alloy; and evils marked even the work of the Apostles. Our impression has always been that a wide distinction is to be made between the labors of Mr. Finney and some of those professed revivalists that followed in his wake, and imitated his style and his measures, on the one hand; and the influence of Mr. Finney himself, at subsequent stages of his history, on the other. Of the theologian and professor, we have no call now to speak; but that his labors as a revivalist, in following the labors of Mr. Nettleton, and extending them from New-England into Western New-York, while they were far from being faultless, were beneficial, we have never seen reason to doubt. They have a grand attestation of their utility and blessedness in the history of those churches ever since. There are not many of them that would be willing to extract from their number, all the converts of Mr. Finney, or of the revivals that sprang from him. There is no benevolent society that could afford to do without the prayers and alms of those converts; and there is no Presbytery that would willingly part with all of its members, whose spiritual life was kindled at those revivals. Evils there were; but there is a mighty residuum of good, after all allowances, which candid men

ought to acknowledge, and which ought to excite, in all Christian hearts, instead of suspicion and reproach, a feeling of gratitude, to the Author of Revivals, and devout aspirations for the return of such seasons to vivify and adorn the church.

In addition to the editorials in the Independent and New-York Evangelist, two other letters were published. One was written by Rev. Dirck C. Lansing, the minister of the First Presbyterian Church in Auburn, where Finney had conducted meetings for the revival of religion for two months in the summer of 1826. Finney described his labors there in his Memoirs, pp. 193-201. Lansing's letter was published in The Independent (New York), Vol. III (1 May 1851), p. 69:

LETTER FROM REV. DR. LANSING.

MESSRS. EDITORS:--I have read in your last number with great interest, and yet with painful sympathy, a letter addressed to you by the Rev. Mr. Finney, now in London. My feelings have been not a little agitated for some time past, on seeing occasionally such hints, extracted from English papers, on the disastrous results of Mr. Finney's labors during the revivals which occurred in the State of New York between the years 1826 and 1833-4, as might operate unfavorably upon his efforts in London and its vicinities. I have frequently been upon the point of making some statements to the public on the subject, but delayed doing so under the hope that the work would be done by other and abler hands, or that the manifest success of his labors under the Divine blessing, and his personal intercourse with our British brethren, would be a sufficient refutation of those slanderous insinuations, not to say charges, which have been sent across the waters, by persons no doubt thinking themselves influenced by a commendable zeal for God and truth. My personal and familiar acquaintance with Mr. Finney, and with almost the entire field of his labors, must be my apology for declaring my full conviction that their zeal, however commendable, is not according to knowledge,--by which I mean that it is not awakened by a personal knowledge of the facts of the case.

I have personally visited various places both in Eastern and Western New York, where God has blest Mr. Finney's labors. With the ministers and churches, and very many private Christians in these places, I have had frequent opportunities of affectionate interchange. The history of the state and progress of things in these churches is familiar to me, and I confess, as an honest man, now in the course of Divine providence drawing nigh to the period when my earthly testimony for Jesus must close, that I look in vain over the total field of his labors, to find any occasion for those to "shed tears of blood" whose hearts have been softened with the love of Jesus, or who have heartily sympathized with him in the love of souls. I have myself frequently been present during seasons of such heavenly interest as have led hundreds to shed tears of joy, and to shout thanksgivings to God for the wondrous achievements of his grace; and when, I doubt not, angel witnesses too, in sweet sympathy with earthly weepers and earthly singers--

"Have made the heavenly arches ring

With loud hosannas to their King."

Were I to go into detail of particulars, Messrs. Editors, your broad and noble sheet, approved I doubt not of God, and well deserving of human praise, would be filled to the exclusion of all other matter. I must of necessity, therefore, limit myself.

1.--I ask, then, on the behalf of our brother so unjustly dealt with--Where, in the history of more than twenty years past, are we to find those disastrous results which might call for the "shedding of tears of blood?" Will it be said, there came a reaction which brought with it a painful dearth of Divine influence for years? But why was this--suppose it even so? Was it because Mr. Finney and his friends deserted the field, became wild fanatics, and went off into heresy? This will not be pretended, and was never charged. Was it not rather the opposition of those who were unfriendly to what they conceived an injudicious manner of conducting these revivals? And that, too, when they acknowledged that the hand of God was manifest in them, their injudicious management notwithstanding? Who stood aloof from the work because the wicked complained and raved, and by their position condemned both Peter and Paul, because under their preaching "some mocked" and "others blasphemed?" Who, looking upon the work with a cold speculative philosophy, thought they saw the ghostly spectre of coming evils, and so were frightened from the field of holy combat, and thus weakened the hands of those who dared to trust God and fight on? And who, had they tenderly taken brother Finney and his co-laborers by the hand, could easily have modified whatever in manner they conceived undesirable,--for I have yet to learn that complaint to any extent was made as to the doctrine he preached, unless indeed it might be a defect in topical variety. He was advised of this fact, but continued, most conscientiously I believe, to preach such great truths as he thought best adapted to the existing state of things. The reason that the heavenly influence of God's holy spirit did not reduce to sweet submission our entire land under the labors of the Tennants, and Whitfield, and Edwards, is not to be found in the want of a right spirit in them, an unwillingness on their part to labor, or the absence of a tender sympathy with the existing ministry of that day. No--but in the opposition, I speak of Whitfield more particularly, both clerical and lay; lay mostly, because clerical influence invited to it;--to these burning and shining lights whom God in mercy had sent among the people. Had the existing ministry of that day united their tender and zealous efforts with the affectionate and fervent labors of Whitfield, our country had been another thing than it is to-day, under the influence of a reckless political partizanship, framing iniquity by a law, and invading and threatening the utter extinction of the dearest privileges of our individual and national birthright. Is it logical--is it ingenuous--is it Christian, I ask, to raise a storm ourselves, and then charge its disastrous results over upon others?

But 2.--What are the facts in this matter? Ask the pastors who are and have been, of the churches of the Broadway Tabernacle, Troy, Utica, Rome, indeed most of the churches of Oneida county, of Auburn, Rochester and vicinity, and Cleveland, and the region round about it in Ohio. Will it be said that many of these churches were divided? So they were, and although the cause of their division is to be found in the painful fact of the opposition above spoken of, yet has it proved a great blessing to the cause of God and souls that they were. We see here another illustration of the glorious truth that "The wrath of man shall praise him." Some were talking about dividing, as I have occasion to know, before Mr. Finney came among them; and of those which were divided afterwards I have yet to learn the first instance in which the result has not been the promotion and advancement of the cause of piety and truth.

But 3.--How is it with these churches which cheerfully coöperated with Mr. Finney? Have their members become fanatics? Have they run wild as to doctrine? Theologians of a certain school might here affirm, while those of another would deny. But this grand doctrinal difference in the Church in these United States is before the total Christian Church, and it remains for the light of the future to determine the matter at issue. But I ask again, have these churches ceased to be co-laborers with sister churches by withholding their contributions for the various benevolent enterprises of the day? Let the table of the pecuniary statistics of the various benevolent institutions of our land answer. Let the preaching and general course of such God-honored and God-blest men as the elder and younger Drs. Beecher, and Drs. Beman, Skinner,

Wisner, Hopkins, Aikin, Parker, and Brother Kirk, with many others of the living that might be named, answer. Let the answer also come, in the tender remembrance of their activity, and their multiplied and increasing labors and prayers, from the graves of Patterson, and Frost, and Norton, lovely and loving in their lives, and now in their death not divided. I am pained to feel myself called upon by the force of circumstance to institute seemingly invidious comparisons. And yet I do not design them as comparisons. I do not say that other ministers and churches have not done as well--perhaps better. I only say that the past history and present condition of the brethren and churches alluded to, determine the point, that through the grace of God they have done and are doing well, acting nobly their part as an important section of "the sacramental host of God's elect." And to close what I have to say on this article, I would observe, with all due respect to every other portion of the Church of Christ in our land, that I verily doubt whether there is through the total length and breadth of Christendom, a congeries of churches more pure and steadfast in the faith once delivered to the saints, more prayerful, more intelligent, more self-sacrificing and self-denying, more imbued with the heavenly spirit of love than are those churches which have been the scene of brother Finney's labors.

Finally, I deeply regret that there should be found any among our American Christian family, who, after the lapse of nearly a quarter of a century, should feel called upon, as a solemn matter of duty, to send across the mighty waters vague and unsupported rumors against a brother whom all concede God has abundantly blest; and especially so, when the testimony of the choicest and most reliable spirits on the other side of the waves, was, that great good was resulting from the labors of Brother Finney--that he was approved by the ministry and the people, and that nothing particularly exceptionable in doctrine had appeared in his preaching.

I shall be pardoned, if, in the honesty of my heart, I say a word respecting the writer or writers of the anonymous letters.--Such a course towards a brother evidently blest of God, and beloved by many brethren, is not only disingenuous, but also most decidedly unchristian. It must be repented of, or it cannot be forgiven. Worldly men abhor it--Goodness weeps over it. Let such anonymous assailants of a Christian brother's reputation, such covert, cloaked hinderers of his usefulness, either come out like men, and Christians, and table their charges before the church and the world, and sustain them by the testimony of facts, or living witnesses--or honestly confess their blameworthiness first to God, and then to their injured brother. We ask them not to publish their names to the world, if they take the latter alternative. But we will say to them, if they would be at peace with God and their own consciences, they must, privately, to their injured brother, say, Brother, we have offended--we are sorry. This would be noble--this would be Christian. This must become fact, or the writer or writers of such letters must meet the consequence set forth by the blessed Savior in Matthew 18. 6.

We shall not be understood as sympathizing, in what we have said, with what we suppose Brother Finney's views of Christian perfection. I say, with what we suppose his views, because it is quite possible that we may misinterpret him. His fundamental position, "That God requires, of right, perfect obedience of every one of his creatures," will hardly meet with a demurrer from any school of theologians in our day. If he makes deductions from this position which we cannot adopt, we are nevertheless not prepared to cast him out of the pale of our Christian fellowship, because he would have men more holy than they are, or even perfectly holy, any more than we would the laborious and excellent Wesley, and that vast multitude of his worthy, God-honored, and God-blest successors.

O that the spirit of the meek and lovely John did dwell more richly and fully in the heart, and control the life of every minister and every friend of Jesus, the land and world over! "Beloved, let us love one another: for

love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God: for God is love." D. C. LANSING.

Brooklyn, April 21st, 1851.

The other letter was written by Rev. Josiah Hopkins, who had taken over the First Presbyterian Church of Auburn from Lansing in 1830. Finney was again there in March 1831 for six weeks. See his Memoirs, pp. 330-35. Hopkins's letter was published in The New-York Evangelist, Vol. XXII, No. 24 (12 June 1852), p. 93 :

FOR THE NEW-YORK EVANGELIST.

RESPONSE TO MR. FINNEY'S LETTER.

MR. EDITOR--With your leave I would say a few words, if it be not too late, to your readers in reply to Mr. Finney's letter, which appeared recently in your columns. It may be expected both by brother Finney and the public, from the circumstances in which I was placed. My only apology for delaying it to the present time, may be found in the fact that my mind has been occupied with my removal from Ohio to Western New-York. In reference to those remarkable statements (such they appear to me) which found their way to London concerning the evils that resulted from Mr. Finney's labors in Western New-York, I have felt and now feel that they never could have been made by any Christian brother, who had a knowledge of the facts in the case. Reports will sometimes obtain circulation that have their origin in unfriendly hints, thrown out by the enemies of revivals, or by limited minds strongly prejudiced by their education, which by passing through several hands, finally come to assume a frightful shape. I am confident that it must have been by some such process that those reports got into circulation, and that the conductors of those papers had been too hasty, when they knew nothing of the facts, in giving them character and sending them to London. If any change in the doctrinal views of brother Finney since that time has taken place, which might be suspected would affect the character of his labors, it will be seen at once, it does not affect the question in the least concerning the soundness of his views, or of the conversions under his labors at that time. From the most intimate and repeated conversations as well as from his discourses, I have the most perfect confidence that his views at that time on all the important points in the whole plan of salvation, agreed most perfectly with the leading divines in New-England. I have it in my power to show that if such men as Drs. Perine, L. Beecher, B. Dickinson, S. H. Cox, Wm. Patton, &c. were Orthodox at that time, brother Finney was equally so. I am aware that he dwelt more on the distinction between natural and moral ability and inability, as defended by Edwards and Smalley, than what had been customary by most of our preachers previous to that period, and I have little doubt but that it will be acknowledged by all who were acquainted with the state of the public mind at that time, that such a course was demanded to meet the antinomian impressions that so extensively prevailed.

With regard to the genuineness of the conversions under his labors, I have but a few statements to make. Brother Finney came to my assistance after the powerful revival of the winter of 1830 and '31 had been in progress some six or eight weeks, and for six weeks he continued to preach twice on the Sabbath, and twice on other evenings during the week. The number that was first received after those labors did not vary much from one hundred and fifty, and enough were received to the Second Presbyterian church to make nearly or quite two hundred; and this number was increased, as nearly as I can recollect, by such as were afterward received by at least one quarter. I have been endeavoring for several weeks to look over and examine the characters of those converts after the ordeal of twenty years, so far as I have been able

to retain a knowledge of their course, and I have not the least doubt but that they will compare in every mark of genuineness, with the most pure and genuine that ever existed in New-England. I have certainly had an opportunity, so far as memory is able to perform its office, to make this comparison, and if entireness of devotion, permanence, enlarged and liberal desires, and a vigorous activity, are considered marks of the Spirit's work, I feel safe in saying that I have seen none in New-England to exceed them. I have seen so many changes in the characters of men that were an honor to truth and to God, as the result of brother Finney's labors, that if others in view of the same have felt that they saw reasons to shed tears of blood, those tears I am confident would not equal in number the songs and the joys occasioned by the same among the angels of God.

J. HOPKINS.

Seneca Falls, May, 1851.

Footnotes:

The New-York Evangelist version has had here.

The New-York Evangelist version has prevails (in the plural).

have is omitted in The New-York Evangelist version.

The New-York Evangelist version has place (in the singular).

From here to the end of the paragraph was omitted from The New-York Evangelist version.

Whitefield is spelt with an e in The New York-Evangelist version. This is probably a correction as Finney spells it incorrectly also in other places.

The letter was copied from The New-York Evangelist with editorial comment into The Oberlin Evangelist, 7 May 1851, p. 76.

There is a printing error here--the word is printed or.

The letter was copied with editorial comment into The Oberlin Evangelist, 2 July 1851, p. 108.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/the-editors-of-the-independent/>

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