

Subsequent Evangelistic Labors

by Frank Grenville Beardsley

Charles Finney's evangelistic labors resulted in significant spiritual awakenings, conversions, and accessions to the churches, with a notable increase in family religion and devotion to the gospel.

Scripture: Proverbs 11:30, Isaiah 28:17, 2 Corinthians 7:10, Ephesians 4:3, James 5:16

Topics: "Evangelism", "Revival"

Description

Frank Grenville Beardsley preaches about Charles G. Finney's extensive revivals in various cities in America and England, highlighting his fearlessness in calling sinners to publicly consecrate themselves to Christ, leading to numerous conversions and spiritual awakenings. Finney's impactful labors in London, Hartford, Syracuse, and other cities resulted in unity among ministers, conversions among church members, and a deepening of spiritual life in communities. His powerful preaching style, marked by logical arguments and boldness in exposing sin, led to many conversions, restorations, and instances of restitution, impacting both the rich and the poor. Despite facing opposition and denominational prejudices, Finney's revivals left a lasting legacy of spiritual transformation and unity.

Transcript

As has been intimated in the preceding chapter, Finney, in accepting the Oberlin professorship, did not expect to devote his entire time to the theological classroom, but planned to give a part of it to outside labors. The long winter vacation enabled him to do this without interfering seriously with his duties as an instructor. For two or three winters he returned to the Broadway Tabernacle, New York, and on subsequent occasions labored elsewhere. Reference has already been made to his later efforts in Rochester and Boston. In this connection it remains to be said that he conducted extensive revivals in Providence, Rhode Island; Cleveland and Cincinnati, Ohio; Detroit and elsewhere in Michigan; Hartford, Connecticut; and Syracuse, Western, and Rome, New York. He also conducted two extensive campaigns in England, the first in 1849-1850 and the second in 1858-1859.

Mr. Finney's Revival Lectures had created a very favorable impression in England, and he received invitations from various sources to visit that country. In the autumn of 1849 he saw fit to accept them, and after a stormy passage landed at Southampton. Here he was met by the pastor from Houghton, where he commenced his labors in a dissenting chapel under the patronage of Mr. Potto Brown, a wealthy and generous spirited man, who gave large sums for benevolent and religious purposes. A revival commenced immediately, attracting people from a distance of forty miles, and becoming so general that it soon

extended to the neighboring villages round about. Mr. Brown was especially concerned for a number of his acquaintances, nearly all of whom were converted in the course of the revival.

From Houghton Finney was invited to Birmingham. At first he was asked to preach in rotation at all of the Congregational and Baptist churches in the city, after which his labors were confined chiefly to Carr's Lane Chapel, of which John Angell James was then the pastor; to the congregation of Mr. Roe, a Baptist pastor; and to Ebenezer Chapel, which at the time was without a pastor.

John Angell James, author of *The Anxious Inquirer*, at that time was the best known dissenting minister in England. Although he had written an introductory chapter for one of the early English editions of Finney's *Revival Lectures*, commending it "as a book remarkably calculated to stir up the minds both of ministers and churches to a proper compassion for a dying world," nevertheless on account of certain letters which he had received from America, he was inclined, at first, to look with suspicion upon Mr. Finney. But after he had heard him several times and had had a thorough interchange of theological views with him, he became convinced that his teachings were not heretical, and so he entered into the work with great cordiality.

There were a great many conversions in the city, the vestries of the churches where Finney conducted services often being filled to overflowing with anxious inquirers. Among the converts was a Unitarian minister who, after hearing the evangelist preach on *Resisting the Holy Ghost*, was so impressed that on his way home he vowed before God that he would consecrate himself afresh to Christ as his only Saviour.

Finney proceeded next to Worcester, where on alternate week nights and Sabbath evenings he preached in the pulpit of Dr. George Redford, a well known English theologian, and in that of a Baptist minister in the same city. Several wealthy gentlemen were so impressed with his work that they proposed to build for him a portable tabernacle seating six thousand people that could easily be taken down and transported from place to place by railway. Listening to the advice of Worcester ministers, he declined the offer, although he afterwards had occasion to regret it, for he found that the dissenting chapels in many places were small, while such a tabernacle as had been proposed would have enabled him to accomplish much larger results than were possible through the ordinary channels.

From Worcester he went to London, whither he had been invited by Dr. John Campbell, editor of the *British Banner* and pastor of Whitefield's Tabernacle, Moorfields. On Wednesday, May 8, he was presented to the annual meeting of the Congregational Union, representing all of the churches of that denomination throughout England and Wales, by Dr. Redford who gave an interesting account of Finney's work in Worcester and commended him highly. Finney then addressed the Union for nearly an hour, after which a hearty vote of welcome and commendation was extended. The following Sunday Finney began a series of meetings at the Tabernacle, preaching at first on Sunday mornings and evenings, and on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings, later adding a prayer meeting address on Monday evenings and reserving Thursday evenings to meet inquirers. Religion in London had declined to such an extent that week day services were meagerly attended, but such numbers flocked to these services that Dr. Campbell expressed the opinion that Finney preached to more people on week day evenings than all of the rest of the London ministers put together.

After he had been preaching some time Finney asked for a room in which to hold an inquiry meeting. Dr. Campbell thought that the interest was not sufficient to warrant it, but as Finney was insistent he finally suggested a room in the church that would hold forty people. "Why," said Finney, "that is not half large

enough!" The pastor expressed his doubt and astonishment, but at last named a room in the neighborhood that would accommodate sixteen hundred people. "That is just the place," said Finney. Dr. Campbell ventured the opinion that such a thing might do in America, but not in London. Finney replied: "The gospel is as well adapted to the English people as to the American people. I know what the state of the people is better than you do; and I have no fears at all that pride will keep them from responding to such a call." He made the call, being careful to explain that Christians were not wanted at the meeting, that careless sinners were not wanted, but only those who were so concerned about their souls that they were ready to make their peace with God and wished instruction as to present duty.

From a window Dr. Campbell looked out nervously and anxiously to see whether any in the congregation would go. To his utter amazement Cowper Street was crowded with people hastening to the inquiry room, which was filled to overflowing. Mr. Finney addressed them for a short time on the question of immediate duty, and endeavored to make them understand that they must yield themselves entirely to God's will, make their submission to Him as their righteous Sovereign, and accept Jesus Christ as their only Redeemer. He said: "I had been in England long enough to feel the necessity of doing away with their idea of waiting God's time. London is, and long has been, cursed with hyper-Calvinistic preaching. After having laid the gospel net thoroughly around them, I then prepared to draw it to shore."

Just as he was about to ask them to kneel a man in the congregation cried out in deepest agony of mind, "I have sinned away my day of grace!" Seeing that there was danger of an outburst of feeling Finney hushed it as best he could and asked the people to kneel down but to keep so quiet that they could hear every word of the prayer which he was about to offer. This they did with manifest effort, although there was weeping and repressed sobbing all over the house. Similar meetings of inquiry were held during Finney's stay in London which continued for nine months with the result that great numbers were converted.

Finney accompanied Dr. Campbell to a school one day to address the pupils, a considerable number of whom afterwards united with the church to the great surprise of the pastor, who was expecting no such results. "The fact is," said Finney, "that the ministers in England as well as in this country, had lost sight, in a great measure, of the necessity for pressing present obligation home upon the consciences of the people. Ministers talk about sinners, and do not make the impression that God commands them now to repent; and thus they throw their ministry away."

During Finney's labors in London, Henry Ward Beecher was in England on a visit and, in a letter to the New York Independent, he wrote his impressions of Finney's work in the city. He said:

"On two occasions we were present, when, at the close of the 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 unexceptionable 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

"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 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 religious 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 better husbandmen than Charles G. Finney! May God long spare his life and increase his usefulness!"

After laboring nine months in London Mr. Finney found himself under the necessity of returning to America and his duties at Oberlin College. He accordingly bade a reluctant farewell to his English brethren and sailed for this country.

In the early winter of 1851-1852 Mr. Finney was invited to Hartford, Connecticut. At that time there was a lack of unity, in regard to questions of theology, between Dr. Joel Hawes and Dr. Horace Bushnell, the two leading Congregational pastors in the city. Dr. Hawes thought that Dr. Bushnell was unsound on the doctrine of the atonement. But these brethren attended the meetings conducted by Finney in a third church, and when they saw the manifestations of divine grace they decided to lay aside their differences so as not to be stumblingblocks in the way of the salvation of sinners. After this reconciliation there was a good degree of cordiality and the work spread throughout the entire city.

A Hartford correspondent wrote to the New York Independent of this revival: "With reference to the results, I would first allude, with gratitude to God, to the union and fellowship which has been to a good degree restored among the ministers and churches which have engaged in the work. If nothing else has been accomplished, this alone would repay the outlay of time and power. There is reason to believe that a work of permanent good has been done in this respect, and that hereafter we shall all be found standing side by side in the belief and defence of evangelical doctrine, and the practice of that genuine piety whose essence is love. As the next result, I would advert to the conversion among church members. These have seemingly been not a few. Mr. F. has preached so pure a gospel and held up so high a standard, that many self-deceived professors have renounced their hopes and gone into the inquiry-meetings and there found Christ in reality, while true Christians have been deeply searched, greatly humbled and clearly brought out into a new state of advanced spirituality."

A great revival broke out in the public school. The boys came together one morning under such conviction that they were unable to study and asked their teacher to pray with them. He was not a Christian but this circumstance led to his conviction and conversion, after which he led his school to Christ. Prayer meetings for women under the leadership of Mrs. Finney were largely attended. Large numbers flocked to the inquiry meetings even when the invitation was carefully guarded. The entire community was stirred, and as a result of this spiritual awakening upwards of six hundred persons were received into the several churches of Hartford.

The people of the city Finney found to be very fastidious, and the ministers, especially Dr. Hawes, seemed to be afraid to call on sinners to come forward and give themselves publicly to God. But Finney, with his characteristic fearlessness and aggressiveness, threw aside all restraint and urged the people to come forward publicly and consecrate themselves to the service of Christ. Dr. Hawes at first looked on with fear and trembling, but afterwards confessed, "I have always seen that something was needed to bring persons to a stand, and to induce them to act on their present convictions; but I have not had the courage

to propose anything of the kind."

In 1852-1853 Finney labored in Syracuse, New York. He commenced in the Congregational Church, which had a small membership and was rent by dissension and strife. Under his preaching there soon was a stirring among the dry bones. The church was greatly strengthened, so that not long afterwards it became necessary to erect a larger meetinghouse, and it entered upon a more prosperous history. The revival spread to other churches throughout the city with the result that some hundreds were converted.

In 1854-1855 he again conducted fruitful revivals at Western and Rome, New York, after an absence of more than thirty years. The following winter he spent in Rochester, and the two seasons thereafter in Boston.

In December, 1858, Mr. Finney visited England a second time, laboring first at Houghton and Saint Ives, where interesting revivals were experienced. The former pastor at Houghton, Rev. James Harcourt, was now pastor of Borough Road Chapel, London, and he at once invited Mr. Finney to conduct services in his church. A happy revival followed which healed an unfortunate division in the church, and its influence was felt for years afterwards.

Mr. Finney's health was now somewhat impaired by his arduous labors and he accepted an invitation from a Christian physician at Huntingdon to go to his home for a season of rest. This physician had eight children, all of whom were unconverted, while one of his sons, a young physician, had become thoroughly skeptical. In a few weeks Finney began to preach in Temperance Hall, a large audience room which was placed at his disposal. Although there never had been a revival in the place and the people had no conception of what it would be, the hall was immediately filled with interested listeners, and the Spirit of God was poured out upon the people.

One Sunday evening Mr. Finney preached from the text: "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand." He exposed the refuges of lies under which men were hiding, and he graphically pictured the destructive work of the hail and the descending torrents of rain which swept away all that the hail had not demolished. The young physician went to his home in an agony of spirit, but by morning had made his peace with God. During the course of the revival all of the remaining unconverted members of the family were gathered into the fold of Christ. To care for the results of this work there and to perpetuate it, a chapel was built at Huntingdon.

After laboring a second time in London Mr. Finney accepted an urgent invitation to visit Edinburgh, Scotland, from Rev. Dr. Kirk of the Evangelical Union Church, a denomination which was the outgrowth of a remarkable revival which had been occasioned by the reading of Finney's Revival Lectures. A notable quickening followed and Finney was invited by a minister of the same denomination to Aberdeen. Here denominational prejudices interfered with the work for a time, but under the blessing of God the opposition was overruled and a gracious revival swept over the city.

Returning to England he labored for three months at Bolton, which had been one of John Wesley's favorite fields of labor. The revival commenced immediately. The first evening the wife of his host and two servants were converted at a private prayer meeting. After a week of prayer, meetings were commenced in a large hall which was filled to overflowing. Conversions multiplied on every hand. Into this work the Congregationalists and Methodists as well as other denominations and members of the Established Church entered very heartily, while a delightful spirit of unity prevailed among them.

At first the Methodists were inclined to be somewhat noisy and demonstrative in their prayers, so that Finney was obliged to call attention to the fact that inquirers could think more effectively if there was less noise, that they needed instruction, and must be freed from confusion if they were to hear understandingly and be converted. The effect of this advice was highly beneficial and there was a perceptible increase in the numbers of inquirers. The sum total of persons awakened to the claims of God and religion was estimated to be not less than two thousand. At the conclusion of Finney's labors in Bolton, a "presentation service" was held at which a purse of gold and the following testimonial were presented:

"To the Rev. Charles G. Finney, Principal of Oberlin College, Ohio, United States, America.

"REV. AND DEAR SIR:--It is with deep regret, but also with cordial feeling and devout gratitude to the Father of mercies and God of all grace, that we assemble to bid you 'Farewell' at the close of your arduous labors in our midst. We own the Providence which directed your steps to our town, and we feel that we can never cease to be your debtors for the earnest and self-sacrificing efforts which you have made, while with us, to deepen the spiritual life in our own hearts, to increase our devotion and enjoyment of the gospel, to secure the salvation of our friends, and to extend the Redeemer's kingdom in this important and densely populated district. Some of us owe you our own souls; others the salvation of near relatives and dear friends; and all of us, without exception, have derived unspeakable benefits from your labors. And we gratefully record the fact that these blessings have been shared by vast numbers of our fellow townsmen; that some thousands have been awakened to a sense of the claims of religion --that many hundreds have found a peace and a new life in Christ Jesus--that family religion has been greatly promoted--and that there have been large accessions to our various churches. Now that your labors have come to a close, we feel bound to acknowledge the grace of God which has been manifested in and through your instrumentality, and we beg you to receive the assurance of our deep and fervent esteem for your person, and our ceaseless interest in your labor. Wherever you go, we will follow you with our earnest prayers and deepest sympathies. May you be long spared to labor, and after you have finished your course with joy, may you receive the crown of life that fadeth not away, and shine as the brightness of the firmament in the kingdom of our Father forever and ever."

A similar "presentation" was made to Mrs. Finney on another occasion, and the highest expressions of appreciation were given for the invaluable assistance which she had rendered in connection with her husband's labors.

From Bolton Finney went to Manchester, where there were many conversions, but as there was wanting that spirit of unity which had characterized the work at Bolton, the revival was neither so general nor so sweeping as it had been in the latter place. Of the work at Manchester, *The Revival*, a weekly published in London, gave the following account:

"Mr. Finney is well known in America and England. His preaching is marked by strong peculiarities. It is highly argumentative keenly logical--yet, being composed of good strong Saxon, is intelligible to the common people. Boldness, verging to severity, is one of its chief characteristics. Unpalatable truths are urged with a fearless courage. Human responsibility and the obligation of every one to repent and believe the gospel are handled with a master's grasp. Professors are not suffered to hide beneath the covert of mere formalism, or an orthodox creed. Masks, pretexts, subterfuges of all sorts, are exposed; and the selfish, the worldly, the cowardly, the inconsistent, are driven from their retreats. Then comes the gospel, with its full and free antidote to despair; its gracious invitations to the penitent; its pardon and peace for the believing. Mr. F. is sixty-eight years of age, and has been a laborious worker in the cause of God forty

years; yet he preaches with wonderful energy six times every week, and after every service holds meetings for anxious inquirers. The meetings for inquiry have been attended variably as to numbers, but, altogether, some hundreds of anxious souls have been gathered on these occasions. Many striking instances of conversion have occurred. Many backsliders have been reclaimed. Many professors have been quickened with new life. Rich and poor are all alike proving the power of truth. Cases of restitution are not uncommon. Merchants, tradesmen, servants who have robbed employers, have confessed and restored what they had dishonestly obtained

"Mrs. Finney's meetings have also produced a considerable effect. They have had a salutary and blessed influence on many a wife and mother; many have been stirred up to pray for themselves; and their husbands and children have seen, in several instances already, the answers to their prayers."

Upon the conclusion of his labors in Manchester Finney returned to America and resumed his duties at Oberlin. For nearly forty years he had been a conspicuous figure in the American church, laboring through evil as well as good report for the salvation of men. His advancing years and the state of his health would no longer permit the continuance of his public revival work. For several years he retained his connection with the college and supplied the pulpit of the First Church, in which his labors were abundantly blessed, the years 1860, 1866, and 1867 being characterized by revivals of unusual magnitude.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/frank-grenville-beardsley/subsequent-evangelistic-labors/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net