

**Charles G. Finney:**

**To the Editor of The British Banner**

**15 August 1850**

[Published in The British Banner (London), 21 August 1850, p. 572.]

In The British Banner for 14 August 1850, p. 539, the editor, Rev. John Campbell, published an article under the heading "Rev. C. G. Finney." in which he reported on Finney's labours for the revival of religion during the previous three months at the Tabernacle in London. He then added the following:

Something rather curious and interesting, perhaps instructive, has come to be mixed up with this business. Just as we penned the last notice of Mr. Finney and his labours, a few weeks ago, we received from a young Englishman, now resident in Oberlin College, of which Mr. Finney is Theological Professor, but with which our Correspondent has become connected since the departure of Mr. Finney for England, so that he has not seen Mr. Finney, and was wholly unacquainted with the fact that he was living under our roof, and occupying our pulpit. He was, also, personally unknown to us, but we have had correspondence with his brother, at present a student in the Lancashire Independent College. The letter is one of a very interesting description, and not the least interesting portion of it is that which speaks of the official character and public labours of Mr. Finney the general strain of which is in perfect harmony with our own convictions, from constant personal intercourse. The letter is the following:--

Oberlin, Lorain Co. Ohio, June 6th, 1850.

Sir,--After being absent from England for 19 months, I feel disposed to send you a few lines, which I will endeavour to make as interesting as possible. ...

Professor Finney is in England. I have never seen him. We all want him to return. I do not know how many students there are here, but suppose there may be nearly 500, some studying one thing, some another, and, alas! but few studying for the ministry.

There is one thing which I wish to observe with regard to men who visit England, and the accounts, which they give, either in their letters or on their return. They seem to try to degrade England in the eyes of Americans, and they succeed, which makes it very hard for English people here. I have actually heard such monstrous absurdities, false statements, and unkind expressions, made use of by men who have visited England, that I have been disgusted at their lack of sense, and small regard for truth. I heard before I left Galesburg, that Professor Finney, in one of his letters, which was published in the Oberlin Evangelist, remarked that the ministers in England are "fifty years behind the times." Now, Sir, I do not understand what he means; if he means to say, that they are so much behind the American ministers in intellectual strength, I repudiate that charge as a slander. If he means to say, that there is that difference in religious attainments, I agree with him, and more too, for they are not fifty, but, I had almost said they are 500 years behind the times; but, if he means by "the times" American times of piety, I would pray to God that they might always remain behind such times. Professor Finney is by no means a sample of American piety. He stands alone here. Yes, Sir, he stands alone, and is without exception the most powerful preacher in the United States. What I mean by powerful is, that his preaching is accompanied with power from above, and that is the power which Satan dreads most. I do not speak of Mr. Finney from personal knowledge: but his fame is in all the Churches as a man of God, and his sermons bear the impress of the most exalted piety, it rises high, and is in constant communion with heaven. He cannot, therefore, be taken as a specimen of American piety. Since I have been in this country, I have been amongst ministers a good deal, amongst Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists (Wesleyan and Protestant), Baptists (Free-Will, Close Communion, and Iron-side), and, Sir, I do candidly assure you, that low as the English ministry is in my estimation, i.e., a great part of it, I never had one fiftieth part of the reason for esteeming them so lightly as I have to undervalue the American ministers. If you take the ministers of large towns and cities, they are, so far as I have seen, as cold, formal, and aristocratic, as the Church of England clergy. If you go into the "far West," and see them there, you will see them on the Sabbath discoursing to the people on their duty, and all very orthodox; but see them during the week, they are speculating, "trading" as they call it, and it is proverbial, that the ministers are the closest shavers. One shaved me I know--(and I am

The Editor of The British Banner

sorry to say that he was educated at Oberlin)--he had some money (some few dollars) sent by him to me, and he kept every cent of it, and never said one word to me about it, yet that man is preaching every Sabbath. I do not say that all the ministers are like this, but I do say that most that I have seen are. My object is to prove, that the assertion of brother Finney is (if I understand him) unfounded; and when the American people, who know what their ministers are (for I have heard them speak of them as being anything but what they ought to be), hear such a saying coming from a man like Mr. Finney, the English ministry is in danger of suffering materially in the eyes of Christians abroad. Indeed, I heard it remarked at the time when I was told what brother Finney's letter contained, "What a dreadful condition the ministry is in in England!" I knew it, but the idea which they attached to it was, that the ministers were worse than their own, that there was less piety, and less conversions, which God knows is not the case.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is almost universally the case, that the American mind is stamped with impressions wholly inconsistent with truth, by prejudiced visitors to England, so that it is impossible for an Englishman who knows where the truth is, and tells it, to gain credence, because, say they, "Mr. So-and-So has been there, and he knows," and they will believe anything distorted and frightful before they will the solid truth. ... You are at liberty to use this letter as you please. I am prepared to defend any position which I have taken, should anything be disputed contained in it.

I am, Sir, yours truly,

J. VINCENT.