

Great Evangelists and Temperance

No. 4 CHARLES FINNEY

By VICTORIA GRIGG, M.A.

No man was used more mightily in America than Charles G. Finney. He was born in Warren, Connecticut, 1792, but his childhood was spent in New York. At the age of twenty, he commenced teaching in New Jersey, having acquired in the course of his studies a fair knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. When he was twenty-six years old, he decided to abandon teaching for the old study of law, and he says that in these studies he found the old authors frequently quoting the Bible, particularly the Mosaic Law. This led to his purchasing the first Bible he had ever owned, and he began to study it intently, taking special note of what Christ had said in regard to prayer and answers to prayer.

He noticed that at the Church he attended the members were always praying for revival, yet at the same time complaining that they were making no progress in securing it. "On further reading my Bible," he says, "it struck me that the reason why their prayers were not answered was because they did not pray in faith in the sense of expecting God to give them the things that they asked for."

When he was twenty-nine, he passed through an intense religious crisis in his life, when he experienced a very real baptism of the Holy Spirit. He then became a candidate for the Presbyterian ministry, and from that time was very wonderfully used in revival work both in America and England. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, he was used for the conversion of hundreds, and the leading into deeper spiritual life of many church people. His logical arguments, greatly helped by his legal mind, appealed to other lawyers and other professional people, but he helped all classes.

His Work for Temperance

The cause of Temperance was very dear to Finney's heart, and he stated that he had never known a minister who opposed temperance reformation to have a revival in his church. Finney was just as strong against slavery as against drink. "The time was," he says, "when ministers and Christians could enjoy revivals notwithstanding that ardent spirit was used among them. But since light has been thrown upon the subject, and it has been found that the use is only injurious, **no church member or minister can be innocent and stand neutral in the cause. They must speak out and take sides. And if they do not take ground on one side, their influence is on the other.** Show me a minister who has taken ground against the temperance reformation who has had a revival. Show me one who stands aloof from it and has a revival. Show me one who now temporizes upon this point who has a revival. It did not use to be so.

But now the subject has come up and has been discussed, and is understood, no man can shut his eyes to the truth. The man's hands are **red with blood** (Finney's emphasis), who stands aloof from the Temperance cause, and can he have a revival?"

To him, the silence of Christians upon such evils as slavery and drink was as if they said that they did not consider these evils as sins. He considered that the Church should take up right ground on the subjects of temperance and moral reform, and all subjects of practical morality which came up for discussion from time to time.

"It is not needful," he says, "that a person should rail at the cold water society in order to be on the best terms with drunkards and moderate drinkers. Only let him plead for the moderate use of wine, only let him continue to drink it as a luxury, and all the drunkards account him on their side. If he refuse to give his influence to the temperance cause he is claimed, of course, by the other side as a friend. On all these subjects, when they come up, the churches and ministers must take up the right ground, and take it up openly, and stand to it and carry it through if they expect to enjoy the blessing of God in revivals."

He considered and practised in his own ministry, that the church should cast out of its communion such members as, in contempt of the light that was shed upon them, continued to drink or traffic in ardent spirits, and engaged in the slave trade. How many ministers dare to do this to-day? Such fearlessness, as you may imagine, brought him many enemies, including fellow ministers, but the names of those who opposed him are forgotten, while only recently, extracts from Finney have been reprinted, and are having a good sale. My copy of Finney's Lectures was printed in 1840, so it is over a hundred years old. I am fortunate in possessing the full copy, which so far as I know is not obtainable new to-day. If Finney were alive to-day what would he say about the proposals put forward by the Licensing Commission?

The Commission says there is too much drunkenness, but for some extraordinary reason, evidently in the hope of reducing this, proposes increased hours of sale and widespread facilities for obtaining drink. The Commission has been dealing with a subject that creates a craving for itself, and absolutely ignores the fact that every drunkard was once a moderate drinker, also, that no drunkard ever intended to become such. After the repeal of Prohibition in America, the Brewers stated that they would have to get the taste for beer into thousands of young people who had never known it. It is

DOMINION PRESIDENT IN STH. AUCKLAND DISTRICT

During some time spent in the South Auckland District in September, Miss Kirk was kept very busy. Arriving in Tauranga on September 10th, she addressed, the same afternoon, a meeting of the Methodist Ladies' Guild, proceeding the next day to Opotiki, a hundred miles down the Bay of Plenty. Here she spoke at the monthly meeting of the Local Union, who were very delighted to be visited by the Dominion President, and also addressed the Women's Institute by invitation. The return journey to Tauranga was made on the 13th. On the evening of Sunday, the 15th, Miss Kirk gave the address at the service of the Tauranga Baptist Church, at the invitation of the Minister, the Rev. L. P. Bryan.

On the 16th, a gathering of Tauranga Union members was held at the home of Mrs. Bulmer, one of our members, who was also Miss Kirk's hostess during her stay. Twenty-five members were present and thoroughly enjoyed an informal chat with the guest of honour, this being followed by an account by Miss Kirk of work under present organisation by the Dominion Officers. A bouquet was presented by the President to Miss Kirk, who expressed her pleasure at being able to renew her acquaintance with the members.

On Tuesday evening, the Methodist Bible Class had the privilege of a talk by Miss Kirk, and the following day the journey to Te Awamutu was taken in readiness for the South Auckland Convention on the 19th. Miss Kirk was the speaker for this, and gave a very informative and inspiring address on the task awaiting the Unions in regard to the poll. She also presided for the election of officers and led the opening devotions for the morning session.

As a conclusion to the activities in the district, Miss Kirk attended a meeting specially arranged by the Tauramarunui Union, another Union which does not have many opportunities of making contact with Dominion officers, where great appreciation of her visit was expressed, one new member being gained at the meeting.

The district is greatly indebted to Miss Kirk for the cheering and very valuable effect of her visit, and hopes that the rainy weather experienced at the time will not deter her from making a return visit when opportunity occurs.

the duty of every Christian man and woman to fight any increase whatever in the facilities for drinking, and the sale of liquor.

Says Charles Finney: "The evils have been exhibited. The call is made for reform. And what is to reform mankind but the truth? And who shall present the truth if not the Church and the Ministry? Away with the idea that Christians can remain neutral and yet enjoy the approbation and blessing of God."