

# Supplementary Readings

To be used with *The Shaping of American Congregationalism*

Readings in the History and Polity of the National  
Association of Congregational Christian Churches

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Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

## PREFACE

Learning about the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches is not easy. No comprehensive history has been written. Only a few of the founders remain active. No seminary offers a course tailored to it. Months or years of participation, informal contacts, and overhearing the scuttlebutt are usually required. The "Congregational History and Polity" course is designed to accelerate the learning curve by immersing the student in modern Congregationalism's traditions and practices, as well as in the more comprehensive Congregational story.

We see this as essential for seminarians seeking a firm foundation in the community they are preparing to serve. Equally important is educating the many ministers who come to Congregationalism from other traditions. Church members seeking a better understanding of their faith may also appreciate a package that brings widely scattered materials together.

The first volume, for instance, *of Readings in the History and Polity of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches* collects Congregational reflections of the nature of the church(es) as recorded in the *Congregationalist* magazine. The articles collected are neither comprehensive nor definitive; we are not even certain to what extent they are representative. What can, however, be said is that the authors are men and women active in the Association whose views the magazine's editors deemed worthy of distribution.

At the very least the readings collected inform the reader of the parameters of discussion within the NACCC. They will additionally provide an introduction to leaders of the Congregational way and hopefully some insight into this movement's peculiar contribution to the Body of Christ.

This project is in its early stages. We would appreciate your suggestions and notice of our errors and omissions.

Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

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## INTRODUCTION

Though of paramount importance to the sixteenth century founders of Congregationalism, and to the twentieth century founders of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, polity concerns have never constituted the sole focus of Congregationalism. Congregationalists have been deeply involved in the full range of American intellectual, cultural, social, and political life. The Supplementary Readings will engage you in this wider scope of concerns. Most are excerpted from longer works, hoping to give the flavor of the authors' style and letting them define the issues in their own terms. Perhaps you will want to follow up with the complete version of some. The Congregational Library in Boston is available to help you find documents that are no longer in print.

These authors expressed concerns and views in ways considered exemplary or definitive by their contemporaries. It behooves us to pay attention. To understand earlier sections of the path we are now on. To gain insight into contemporary situations. Perhaps even to be wakened to issues and modes of understanding to which our ancestors were better attuned than we. Are certain actual events the will and action of God & others not? When, for example, Edward Johnson marvels at the "Wonder-working Providence of Zion's Savior," which he sees at work in the Puritan migration, it makes our contemporary sense of God's working seems vague & indefinite. As mainline Protestantism is challenged by Pentecostalism and evangelicalism, the early Congregationalists' focus on conversion and church membership again becomes relevant. Urbanism, multiculturalism, immigration? We have still not resolved the issues attended to by Josiah Strong and Washington Gladden.

Some works may feel vaguely alien, even objectionable, from a twentieth century perspective. It could be literary style. The use of "f" for "s" and "v" for "u" (and vice versa), the "thee's" and "thou's" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Or it may be more substantive. Jonathon Edward's "angry God." William Ellery Channing's debunking of traditional doctrines. Josiah Strong's celebration of (and challenge to) the "Anglo-Saxon" race. The point, however, is not so much to judge as to understand the depth and scope of Congregational faith, and to appreciate its enormous creativity. Hopefully to let our minds be expanded by our forebearers and join the dialogue with them in contemporary circumstances.

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THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF

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CHARLES

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G. FINNEY

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On a Sunday evening in the autumn of 1821 I made up my mind that I would settle the question of my soul's salvation at once, that if it were possible I would make my peace with God. But as I was very busy in the affairs of the office, I knew that without great firmness of purpose I should never effectively attend to the subject. I therefore resolved to avoid all business and everything that would divert my attention, and to give myself to the work of securing the salvation of my soul. I carried this resolution into execution as sternly and thoroughly as I could. I was, however, obliged to be a good deal in the office. But as the providence of God would have it, I was not much occupied either on Monday or Tuesday, and had opportunity to read my Bible and engage in prayer most of the time.

I was very proud without knowing it. I thought the opinions of others didn't matter, whether they thought this or that in regard to myself. I had in fact been quite faithful in attending prayer meetings and in the degree of attention that I had paid to religion while in Adams. In this respect I had been so faithful as to lead the church at times to think that I must be an anxious inquirer. But I found that when I came to face the question, I was very unwilling to have anyone know I was seeking the salvation of my soul. When I prayed I would only whisper my prayer, after having

stuffed the keyhole to the door, lest someone should discover that I was engaged in prayer. Before that time I had my Bible lying on the table with the law books, and it never had occurred to me to be ashamed of being found reading it, anymore than I should be ashamed of being found reading any of my other books.

But after I had addressed myself in earnest to the subject of my own salvation, I kept my Bible, as much as I could, out of sight. If I was reading it when anybody came in, I would throw my law books upon it to create the impression that I had not had it in my hand. Instead of being outspoken and willing to talk with anybody and everybody on the subject as before, I found myself unwilling to converse with anybody. I did not want to see my minister, because I did not want to let him know how I felt. I had no confidence that he would understand my case and give me the direction that I needed. For the same reasons I avoided conversations with the elders of the church or with any of the Christian people. I was ashamed to let them know how I felt on the one hand, and on the other I was afraid they would misdirect me. I felt myself shut up to the Bible.

During Monday and Tuesday my convictions increased, but still it seemed as if my heart grew harder. I could not shed a tear. I could not pray. I had no opportunity to pray above my breath, and frequently I felt that if I could be alone where I could use my voice and let myself out, I should find relief in prayer. I was shy, and avoided, as much as I could, speaking to anybody on the subject. I endeavored to do this in a way that would excite no suspicion in any mind that I was seeking the salvation of my soul.

Tuesday night I had become very nervous, and in the night a strange feeling came over me as if I were about to die. I knew that if I did I would sink down

to hell, but I quieted myself as best I could until morning.

At an early hour I started for the office. But just before I arrived at the office, it seemed as if an inward voice confronted me with questions like these: "What are you waiting for? Did you not promise to give your heart to God? And what are you trying to do? Are you endeavoring to work out a righteousness of your own?"

Just at this point the whole question of Gospel salvation opened to my mind in a manner most marvelous. I think I then saw, as clearly as I ever have in my life, the reality and fullness of the atonement of Christ. I saw that his work was a finished work, and that instead of having, or needing, any righteousness of my own to recommend me to God, I had to submit to the righteousness of God through Christ. Gospel salvation seemed to be an offer to be accepted, and that it was full and complete. All that was necessary on my part was my own consent to give up my sins and accept Christ. Salvation was not achieved by my own works, but was to be found entirely in the Lord Jesus Christ, who presented himself before me as my God and my Savior.

Without being distinctly aware of it, I had stopped in the street right where the inward voice seemed to arrest me. How long I remained in that position I cannot say. But after this distinct revelation had stood for some little time before my mind, the question seemed to be, "Will you accept it now, today?"

I replied, "Yes, I will accept it today, or I will die in the attempt."

North of the village and over a hill lay a wooded area in which I walked almost daily when it was pleasant weather. It was now October and the time was past for my frequent walks there. Nevertheless, instead of going to the office I turned and bent my course



toward the woods, feeling that I must be alone and away from all human eyes and ears so that I could pour out my prayer to God.

But still my pride wanted to show itself. As I went over the hill it occurred to me that someone might see me and suppose that I was going away to pray. Yet probably there was not a person on earth that would have suspected such a thing had he seen me going. But so great was my pride, and so much was I possessed with the fear of man, that I remember skulking along under the fence until I got so far out of sight that no one from the village could see me. I then penetrated into the woods, about a quarter of a mile, went over on the other side of the hill and found a place where some large trees had fallen across each other, leaving an open place between. There I saw I could make a kind of closet. I crept into this place and knelt down for prayer. As I had turned to go up into the woods I remembered having said, "I will give my heart to God, or I never will come down from there." I remembered repeating this as I went up, "I will give my heart to God before I ever come down again."

But when I attempted to pray I found that my heart would not pray. I had supposed that if I could only be where I could speak aloud without being overheard, I could pray freely. But lo! when I came to try, I was dumb; that is, I had nothing to say to God; or at least I could say but a few words, and those without heart. In attempting to pray I would hear a rustling in the leaves and would stop and look up to see if somebody were not coming. This I did several times.

Finally I found myself fast coming to despair. I said to myself, "I cannot pray. My heart is dead to God, and will not pray." I then reproached myself for having promised to give my heart to God before I left the woods. When I came to try, I found I could not

give my heart to God. My inward soul hung back, and there was no going out of my heart to God. I began to feel deeply that it was too late, that I was given up of God and was past hope.

The thought was pressing me of the rashness of my promise that I would give my heart to God that day or die in the attempt. It seemed to me as if that was binding upon my soul, and yet I was going to break my vow. A great sinking and discouragement came over me, and I felt almost too weak to stand upon my knees.

Just at this moment I again thought I heard someone approach me, and I opened my eyes to see whether it were so. But right there the revelation of my pride was distinctly shown to me as the great difficulty that stood in the way. An overwhelming sense of my wickedness in being ashamed to have a human being see me on my knees before God took such powerful possession of me that I cried at the top of my voice and exclaimed that I would not leave that place if all the men on earth and all the devils in hell surrounded me. "What!" I said, "such a degraded sinner as I am, on my knees confessing my sins to the great and holy God, ashamed to have any human being find me on my knees endeavoring to make my peace with my offended God!" The sin appeared awful, infinite. It broke me down before the Lord.

Just at that point this passage of scripture seemed to drop into my mind with a flood of light: "Then shall you go and pray unto me, and I will hearken to you. Then shall you seek me and find me, when you shall search for me with all your heart."

I instantly seized hold of this with my heart. I had intellectually believed the Bible before, but never had the truth been in my mind that faith was a voluntary trust instead of an intellectual state. I was as conscious of trusting at that moment in God's truthfulness as

I was of my own existence. Somehow I knew that that was a passage of scripture, though I do not think I had ever read it. I knew that it was God's word, and God's voice, as it were, that spoke to me.

I cried to him, "Lord, I take Thee at Thy word. Now Thou knowest that I do search for Thee with all my heart, and that I have come here to pray to Thee; and Thou hast promised to hear me."

That seemed to settle the question that I could then, that day, perform my vow. The Spirit seemed to lay stress upon that idea in the text, "When you search for me with all your heart." The question of when, that is of the present time, seemed to fall heavily into my heart. I told the Lord that I would take him at his word, that he could not lie, and that therefore I was sure that he heard my prayer and that he would be found of me.

He then gave me many other promises, both from the Old and the New Testament, especially some most precious promises respecting our Lord Jesus Christ. I never can, in words, make any human being understand how precious and true those promises appeared to me. I took them one after the other as infallible truth, the assertions of God who could not lie. They did not seem so much to fall into my intellect as into my heart, to be put within the grasp of the voluntary powers of my mind, and I seized hold of them with the grasp of a drowning man.

I continued thus to pray and to receive and appropriate promises for a long time. I know not how long. I prayed till my mind became so full that before I was aware of it, I was on my feet and tripping up the ascent toward the road. The question of my being converted had not so much as arisen to my thought, but as I went up, brushing through the leaves and bushes, I remembered saying with great emphasis, "If I am ever converted, I will preach the Gospel."

I soon reached the road that led to the village, and began to reflect upon what had passed. I found that my mind had become most wonderfully quiet and peaceful. I said to myself, "What is this? I must have grieved the Holy Spirit entirely away. I have lost all my conviction. I have not a particle of concern about my soul. It must be that the Spirit has left me." "Why!" thought I, "I never was so far from being concerned about my own salvation in my life."

Then I remembered what I had said to God while I was on my knees, that I would take him at his word. Indeed, I remembered a good many things that I had said, and concluded that it was no wonder that the Spirit had left me, that for such a sinner as I to take hold of God's word in that way was presumption, if not blasphemy. I concluded that in my excitement I had grieved the Holy Spirit and perhaps committed the unpardonable sin.

I walked quietly toward the village, and so perfectly quiet was my mind that it seemed as if all nature listened. It was on the 10th of October and a very pleasant day. I had gone into the woods immediately after an early breakfast, and when I returned to the village I found it was lunch time. Yet I had been wholly unconscious of the time that had passed. It appeared to me that I had been gone from the village but a short time.

But how was I to account for the quiet of my mind? I tried to recall my convictions, to get back again the load of sin under which I had been laboring. But all sense of sin, all consciousness of present sin or guilt, had departed from me. I said to myself, "What is this, that I cannot arouse any sense of guilt in my soul, as great a sinner as I am?" I tried in vain to make myself anxious about my present state. I was so quiet and peaceful that I tried to feel concerned about that, lest it should be a result of my having grieved the Spirit away. But take any view of it I

would, I could not be anxious at all about my soul and about my spiritual state. The repose of my mind was unspeakably great. I cannot describe it in words. The thought of God was sweet to my mind, and the most profound spiritual tranquillity had taken full possession of me. This was a great mystery, but it did not distress or perplex me.

I went to my lunch but found I had no appetite. I then went to the office and found that Squire W— had gone to lunch. I took down my bass viol and, as I was accustomed to do, began to play and sing some pieces of sacred music. But as soon as I began to sing those sacred words I began to weep. It seemed as if my heart was all liquid and my feelings were in such a state that I could not hear my own voice in singing without causing my feelings to overflow. I wondered at this and tried to stop my tears, but could not. After trying in vain to stop my tears, I put up my instrument and stopped singing.

After lunch we were engaged in moving our books and furniture to another office. We were very busy and had but little conversation all afternoon. My mind, however, remained in that profoundly tranquil state. There was a great sweetness and tenderness in my thoughts and feelings. Everything appeared to be going right, and nothing seemed to ruffle or disturb me in the least.

Just before evening the thought possessed my mind that as soon as I was alone in the new office, I would try to pray again. I was not going to abandon the subject of religion and give it up at any rate. Therefore, although I no longer had any concern about my soul, still I would continue to pray.

By evening we had the books and furniture adjusted, and I made a good fire in an open fireplace, hoping to spend the evening alone. Just at dark Squire W—, seeing that everything was adjusted, told me good night

and went to his home. I had accompanied him to the door, and as I closed the door and turned around my heart seemed to be liquid within me. All my feelings seemed to rise and flow out and the thought of my heart was, "I want to pour my whole soul out to God." The rising of my soul was so great that I rushed into the room back of the front office to pray.

There was no fire and no light in this back room; nevertheless it appeared to me as if it were perfectly light. As I went in and shut the door after me, it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face. It seemed to me that I saw him as I would see any other man. He said nothing, but looked at me in such a manner as to break me right down at his feet. It seemed to me a reality that he stood before me, and I fell down at his feet and poured out my soul to him. I wept aloud like a child and made such confessions as I could with my choked words. It seemed to me that I bathed his feet with my tears, and yet I had no distinct impression that I touched him.

I must have continued in this state for a good while, but my mind was too much absorbed with the interview to remember anything that I said. As soon as my mind became calm enough I returned to the front office and found that the fire I had made of large wood was nearly burned out. But as I turned and was about to take a seat by the fire, I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Spirit. Without any expectation of it, without ever having the thought in my mind that there was any such thing for me, without any memory of ever hearing the thing mentioned by any person in the world, the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity, going through and through me. Indeed it seemed to come in waves of liquid love, for I could not express it in any other way. It seemed like the very breath of

God. I can remember distinctly that it seemed to fan me, like immense wings.

No words can express the wonderful love that was spread abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love. I literally bellowed out the unspeakable overflow of my heart. These waves came over me, and over me, and over me, one after the other, until I remember crying out, "I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me." I said, "Lord, I cannot bear any more," yet I had no fear of death.

How long I continued in this state, with this baptism continuing to roll over me and go through me, I do not know. But I know it was late in the evening when a member of my choir—for I was the leader of the choir—came into the office to see me. He was a member of the church. He found me in this state of loud weeping, and said to me, "Mr. Finney, what's wrong with you?" I could not answer for some time. He then said, "Are you in pain?"

I gathered myself up as best I could, and replied, "No, but so happy that I cannot live."

He turned and left the office, and in a few minutes returned with one of the elders of the church, whose shop was nearly across the way from our office. This elder was a very serious man and in my presence had been very watchful. I had scarcely ever seen him laugh. When he came in I was very much in the state in which I was when the young man went out to call him. He asked me how I felt and I began to tell him. Instead of saying anything he fell into a most spasmodic laughter. It seemed as if it was impossible for him to keep from laughing from the very bottom of his heart.

There was a young man in the neighborhood, with whom I had been very intimate, who was preparing for college. Our minister, as I afterward learned, had repeatedly talked with him on the subject of religion

and warned him against being misled by me. He informed him that I was a very careless young man about religion, and he thought that if he associated much with me, his mind would be diverted and he would not be converted.

After I was converted and this young man was converted, he told me that he had said to Mr. Gale several times, when the latter had warned him about associating so much with me, that my conversations had often affected him more than his preaching. I had, indeed, shared my feelings a good deal with this young man.

But just at the time when I was giving an account of my feelings to this elder of the church and to the other member who was with him, this young man came into the office. I was sitting with my back toward the door and barely observed that he came in. He listened with astonishment to what I was saying, and the first I knew he partly fell upon the floor and cried out in the greatest agony of mind, "Pray for me!"

The elder of the church and the other member knelt down and began to pray for him, and when they had prayed, I prayed for him myself. Soon after this they all retired and left me alone.

The question then arose in my mind, "Why did Elder B— laugh so? Did he think that I was under a delusion, or crazy?" This suggestion brought a kind of darkness over my mind, and I began to wonder whether it had been proper for me—such a sinner as I had been—to pray for that young man. A cloud seemed to shut in over me. I had no hold upon anything in which I could rest. After a little while I retired to bed, not distressed in mind but still at a loss to know what to make of my present state. Notwithstanding the baptism I had received, this temptation so obscured my view that I went to bed without feeling sure that my peace was made with God.

I soon fell asleep, but almost as soon awoke again because of the great flow of the love of God in my heart. I was so filled with love that I could not sleep. Soon I fell asleep again and awoke in the same manner. When I awoke, this temptation would return to me, and the love that seemed to be in my heart would lessen; but as soon as I was asleep, it was so warm within me that I would immediately awaken. Thus I continued until late in the night, when I finally obtained some sound sleep.

When I awoke in the morning the sun had risen and was pouring a clear light into my room. Words cannot express the impression that this sunlight made upon me. Instantly the baptism that I had received the night before returned upon me in the same manner. I arose upon my knees in the bed and wept aloud with joy, and remained for some time too much overwhelmed with the baptism of the Spirit to do anything but pour out my soul to God.

It seemed as if this morning's baptism was accompanied with a gentle reproof, and the Spirit seemed to say to me, "Will you doubt? Will you doubt?"

I cried, "No! I will not doubt. I cannot doubt!" He then cleared the subject up so much to my mind that it was in fact impossible for me to doubt that the Spirit of God had taken possession of my soul.

In this state I was taught the doctrine of justification by faith as a present experience. That doctrine had never taken possession of my mind. I had never viewed it distinctly as a fundamental doctrine of the Gospel. Indeed, I did not know at all what it meant in the proper sense. But I could now see and understand what was meant by the passage, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." I could see that the moment I believed, while up in the woods, all sense of condemnation had entirely dropped out of my mind, and that from that moment

I could not feel a sense of guilt or condemnation by any effort I could make. My sense of guilt was gone, my sins were gone, and I do not think I felt any more sense of guilt than if I never had sinned.

This was just the revelation I needed. I felt myself justified by faith, and, so far as I could see, I was in a state in which I did not sin. Instead of feeling that I was sinning all the time, my heart was so full of love that it overflowed. My cup ran over with blessing and with love. I could not feel that I was sinning against God, nor could I recover the least sense of guilt for my past sins. Of this experience of justification I said nothing to anybody at the time.

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Soon after I returned to New York I began my labors in the new tabernacle. The Spirit of the Lord was poured out upon us and we had a precious revival as long as I continued to be pastor of that church. While in New York I had many applications from young men to take them as students in theology. The number of applications became so large that I made up my mind to deliver a course of theological lectures in one of the larger rooms, and let such students as chose attend them without fee.

But before I had opened my lectures, in January 1835, Rev. John Jay Shipherd of Oberlin and a companion arrived in New York to persuade me to go to Oberlin as professor of theology. Mr. Shipherd had founded a church and organized a school at Oberlin about a year before this time and had obtained a charter broad enough for a university.

I said to Mr. Shipherd that I would not go unless two points were conceded by the trustees. One was that they should never interfere with the internal regulation of the school, but should leave that entirely to the discretion of the faculty. The other was that we should be allowed to receive black people on the same conditions that we did white people, that there should be no discrimination made on account of color.

When these conditions were forwarded to Oberlin

the trustees were called together, and after a great struggle to overcome their own prejudices and the prejudices of the community, they passed resolutions complying with the conditions proposed. This difficulty being removed, the friends in New York were called together to see what they could do about endowing the institution.

But still there was a great difficulty in leaving my church in New York. I had never thought of having my labors at Oberlin interfere with my revival labors and preaching. It was therefore agreed between myself and the church that I should spend my winters in New York and my summers in Oberlin, and that the church would be at the expense of my going and coming. When this was arranged I took my family and arrived in Oberlin at the beginning of summer, 1835.

The trustees put up "barracks" for housing, and students thronged to us from every direction. After I was engaged to come, the brethren at Oberlin wrote requesting me to bring a large tent to hold meetings in, as there was no room in the place large enough to accommodate the people. I made this request known to some of my brethren, who told me to go and get a tent made and they would furnish the money. This tent was of great service to us. When the weather would permit we spread it upon the town square every Sunday and held public services in it, and several of our earliest graduations were held in it. It was used to some extent also for holding extended meetings in the region round about, where there were no churches large enough to meet the necessities.

We had just barely entered upon the work of putting up our buildings and had arranged for a large amount of money, when the great commercial crash prostrated our leading contributor and nearly all the men who had subscribed for the fund for the support of the faculty. The commercial crash went over the country and

occasions have been multiplied so that it has become more and more difficult to secure a powerful revival during the summer term. This ought not to be.

I began to see that an impression seemed to be growing in Oberlin that during term time we could not expect to have a revival, and that our revivals must be expected to occur during the long vacations in the winter. This was not deliberately decided by anyone, and yet it was plain that that was coming to be the impression. But I had come to Oberlin and resided here for the sake of securing the conversion and sanctification of the students. It was only because there was so great a number of them there, which gave me such a good opportunity to work on so many young minds in the process of education, that I had remained there from year to year. Frequently I had almost made up my mind to leave and give myself wholly to the work of an evangelist. But the plea always was that we could not do as much in this country in promoting revivals anywhere, except during the long vacation. I could do more good at Oberlin during term time—that is, in the spring, summer, and early autumn—than I could anywhere else.

Our fall term was properly our harvest here. It began about the first of September when he had a large number of new students, and many of these were unconverted. I always felt, as a good many others had, that during that term was the time to secure the conversion of our new students. Our revival efforts took effect among the students from year to year because they were aimed at securing the conversion especially of the students. Our general population was a changing one, and we very frequently needed a sweeping revival through the whole town, among the householders as well as the students, to keep up a healthy tone of piety.

A goodly number of our students had learned to

work in promoting revivals and were very efficient in laboring for the conversion of their fellow students. The young men's prayer meetings were also blessed. The efforts of brothers and sisters in the church had been increasingly blessed from year to year. We had more or less a continual revival, summer and winter.

My health soon became such that I found I must relinquish one of my fields of labor. The interests connected with the college seemed to forbid utterly that I should leave it, so I took a dismissal from my church in New York. The winter months which I was to have spent in New York I spent in laboring in various places to promote revivals.

The two winters before leaving New York, after my lectures on revivals, I gave lectures to Christians, which were also reported by Mr. Leavitt in the *New York Evangelist*. Those sermons to Christians were very much the result of a searching that was going on in my own mind. I mean that the Spirit of God was showing me many things in regard to the question of sanctification that led me to preach those sermons to Christians.

Many Christians regarded those lectures as an exhibition of the Law rather than of the Gospel. But I did not, and do not, so regard them. For me the Law and Gospel have but one rule of life, and every violation of the spirit of the Law is also a violation of the spirit of the Gospel. I have long been satisfied that the higher forms of Christian experience are attained only as a result of a terribly searching application of God's law to the human conscience and heart. The result of my labors up to that time had shown me more clearly

than I had known before the great weakness of Christians, and that the older members of the church, as a general thing, were making very little progress in grace. I found that they would fall back from a revival state even sooner than young converts. It had been so in the revival in which I myself was converted. I saw clearly that this was due to their early teaching; that is, to the views which they had been led to entertain when they were young converts.

I was also led into a state of great dissatisfaction with my own lack of stability in faith and love. To be candid and tell the truth, I must say, to the praise of God's grace, he did not allow me to backslide to the extent many Christians did. But I often felt myself weak in the presence of temptation, and needed frequently to hold days of fasting and prayer, and to spend much time in overhauling my own religious life in order to retain that communion with God and that hold upon the divine strength that would enable me to labor efficiently for the promotion of revivals.

In looking at the state of the Christian church as it had been revealed to me in my revival labors, I was led earnestly to inquire whether there was something higher and more enduring that the Christian church was aware of; whether there were promises and means provided in the Gospel for the establishment of Christians in altogether a higher form of Christian life. I had known somewhat of the view of sanctification entertained by our Methodist brethren. But as their idea of sanctification seemed to me to relate almost completely to states of emotional feeling, I could not receive their teaching. However, I gave myself earnestly to search the Scriptures and to read whatever came to hand upon the subject until my mind was satisfied that an altogether higher and more stable form of Christian life was attainable and was the privilege of all Christians. This led me to preach two sermons on



Christian perfection in the Broadway Tabernacle.

But about this time the question of Christian perfection in the antinomian sense of the term came to be agitated a good deal in the East. I examined these views, as published in the periodical entitled *The Perfectionist*, but I could not accept them. Yet I was satisfied that the doctrine of sanctification in this life, and entire santification, in the sense that it was the privilege of Christians to live without known sin, was a doctrine taught in the Bible and that abundant means were provided for the securing of that attainment.

The last winter that I spent in New York the Lord was pleased to visit my soul with a great refreshing. After a season of great searching of heart he brought me, as he has often done, into a large place and gave me much of that divine sweetness in my soul of which Jonathan Edwards speaks as attained in his own experience. That winter I had a thorough breaking up—so much so that sometimes for a considerable period I could not refrain from loud weeping in view of my own sins and of the love of God in Christ. Such seasons were frequent that winter and resulted in the great renewal of my spiritual strength and enlargement of my views in regard to the privileges of Christians and the abundance of the grace of God.

But after I came to Oberlin, within a year or two the cry of antinomian perfectionism was heard, and this charge was brought against us. Letters were written, ecclesiastical bodies were visited, and many pains were taken throughout the length and breadth of the land to represent our views as entirely heretical. This led to many ecclesiastical bodies passing resolutions warning the churches against the influence of Oberlin theology. There seemed to be a general union of ministerial influence against us. But we said nothing. We had no controversy with those brethren who were taking pains to raise such a powerful public sentiment against

us. We kept about our own business and felt that in respect to opposition from that quarter, our strength was to sit still, and we were not mistaken. We felt confident that it was not God's plan to allow such opposition to prevail. The policy that we pursued was to let opposition alone. We kept about our own business and always had as many students as we knew what to do with. Our hands were always full of labor, and we were always greatly encouraged in our efforts.

One of the leading ministers who had heard much of the opposition spent a day or two at our house. He said to me: "Brother Finney, Oberlin is to us a great wonder. The ministers almost universally arrayed themselves against Oberlin, and many denominations have warned their churches against you and discouraged young men from coming to Oberlin, and still the Lord has built you up. You are supported with funds better than almost any college in the West; you have had far more students, and the blessing of God has been upon you so that your success has been wonderful. The opposers of Oberlin have been confounded. God has stood by you and sustained you through all this opposition, so that you have hardly felt it."

It is difficult now for people to realize the opposition we met with when we first established this college. An illustration of it, a representative case, occurred when I had occasion to go to Akron to preach one Sunday. I went with a horse and carriage. On my way I observed in the road before me a woman walking with a little bundle in her hand. As I drew near her, I observed that she was an elderly woman, nicely dressed, but walking with some difficulty on account of her age. As I came up to her I reined up my horse and asked her how far she was going on that road. She told me, and I then asked if she would accept a ride in my carriage.

"Oh," she replied, "I would be very thankful for

a ride, for I find I have undertaken too long a walk." I helped her in and drove on. I found her a very intelligent lady, free and homelike in her conversation.

After riding for some distance she said, "May I ask to whom I am indebted for this ride?" I told her who I was. She then inquired from whence I came. I told her I was from Oberlin.

This announcement startled her. She made a motion as if she would sit as far from me as she could, and turning and looking earnestly at me she said, "From Oberlin! why," she said, "our minister said he would just as soon send a son to state prison as to Oberlin!" Of course I smiled and soothed the old lady's fears, and made her understand she was in no danger from me.

During these years of smoke and dust, of misapprehension and opposition from without, the Lord was blessing us richly within. We not only prospered in our own souls there as a church, but we had a continuous revival, or were in what might properly be regarded as a revival state. Our students were converted by scores and the Lord overshadowed us continually with the cloud of his mercy. Gales of divine influence swept over us from year to year, producing abundantly the fruits of the Spirit—"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

I have always attributed our success in this good work entirely to the grace of God. It was no wisdom or goodness of our own that achieved this success. Nothing but continued divine influence pervading the community sustained us under our trials and kept us in an attitude of mind in which we could be efficient in the work we had undertaken. We have always felt that if the Lord withheld his Spirit, no outward circumstances could make us truly prosperous.

When the question of entire sanctification first

came up here for public discussion, and when the subject first attracted the general attention of the church, we were in the midst of a powerful revival. The point that I pressed upon the people was the distinction between desire and will, so that they might know whether they were really Christians or not, whether they were really consecrated persons, or whether they merely had desires without being in fact willing to obey God.

When this distinction was made clear the Holy Spirit fell upon the congregation in a most remarkable manner. A large number of persons dropped down their heads and some groaned so that they could be heard throughout the house. It cut up the false hopes of deceived professing Christians on every side. Several rose on the spot and said that they had been deceived and that they could see where. This was carried to such an extent as greatly astonished me; indeed, it produced a general feeling of astonishment in the congregation.

The work went on with power, professing Christians obtaining new hope, or being genuinely converted in such numbers that a very great and important change came over the whole community. In a few days after this, one of our theological students rose and asked whether the Gospel provided for Christians all the conditions of an established faith, and hope, and love; whether there was something better and higher than Christians had generally experienced; in short, whether sanctification was attainable in this life; that is, sanctification in such a sense that Christians could have unbroken peace, and not come into condemnation or have the feeling of condemnation or a consciousness of sin.

The president of the school immediately answered, "Yes." What occurred at this meeting brought the question of sanctification prominently before us as a practical question. We had no theories on the subject, no philosophy to maintain, but simply took it up as a Bible question. In this form it existed among us as an ex-

perimental truth, which we did not attempt to reduce to a theological formula until years afterward. The discussion of the question was a great blessing to us and to a great number of our students.