

FINNEY'S FIGHT AGAINST THE MASONS

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Mention antimasonry and the historian and scholar think immediately of the famous Morgan affair of 1826. The story of the abduction of William Morgan, a bricklayer of Batavia, New York, after he had published a book revealing the secrets of Freemasonry is a familiar one in American history. The resultant wave of ill-feeling against Masons which culminated in the rise of a national political party strong enough to poll 128,000 votes in 1830 is too well known to need retelling here.¹ Few, however, are aware that a similar campaign was launched on a lesser scale and with less serious results shortly after the Civil War under the leadership of that colorful evangelist Charles Grandison Finney.

Charles Finney (1792-1876) played a varied and active role in early nineteenth century American history. Noted principally for his extensive work in conducting religious revivals throughout the country from 1826 until the Civil War, Finney also threw himself into the antislavery and temperance movements as well as other reform activities of the day. He became interested in the cause of education in the West, joined the faculty of Oberlin in 1835, and later became its president. Highly individualistic and something of a rebel at heart, Finney stirred up a number of religious issues among his fellow Presbyterians and Congregationalists, aided in the Free Church movement in New York City,

¹The best short account of the early antimasonic campaign is found in Alice F. Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment* (Minneapolis, 1944), 351-358. For a contemporary view, see Henry Brown, *A Narrative of the Anti-Masonic Excitement, in the Western Part of New York, During the Years 1826, '7, '8, and a Part of 1829* (Batavia, N. Y., 1829). Also useful are Charles McCarthy, *The Antimasonic Party: A Study of Political Antimasonry in the United States, 1827-1840* (*American Historical Association Annual Report*, 1902, I, Washington, 1903, pp. 365-574), and Milton W. Hamilton, "Anti-Masonic Newspapers, 1826-1834," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, XXXII (1938), 71-97.

and with Asa Mahan of Oberlin elaborated his religious theories of perfectionism.²

This nineteenth century revivalist had a remarkable faculty for precipitating disputes, causing crises, and contributing to controversies. Early in his career, he and Lyman Beecher, noted New England evangelist, crossed verbal swords over the heads of a group of converts while engaged in carrying on a revival in Boston.³ At other times Finney disputed with Asahel Nettleton, Horace Bushnell, and other religious notables of the time. Even in his travels to England, he left controversy and dissension in his wake. One of his English correspondents, in commenting on Finney's style of preaching, expressed the views of his compatriots when he declared that "the system is not adapted to England. My own opinion is that it is not adapted to any place."⁴

Finney's reputation for getting into disputes, therefore, was well founded. Prior to the Civil War he had carved for himself no small niche in nineteenth century religious history. The age of threescore and ten, however, found Finney still contemplating new worlds to conquer, and shortly after the end of the Civil War he joined his last great crusade, the drive against secret societies.

The spirit of the times was ripe for just such a campaign. The animosities fired by the war sought other outlets now that the Confederacy had been destroyed, and one outlet that seemed to present itself was an attack against secret societies. As one of Finney's correspondents put it, "I believe that the secret of all our failures in the late war . . . is due to the order of Masons."⁵ Church bodies expressed their concern with what appeared to be a rising tide about to engulf them. Typical was the following resolution passed by the Second Congregational Church in Ober-

²Although inadequate, the most complete biography of Finney is George Frederick Wright, *Charles Grandison Finney* (Boston and New York, 1891). For Finney's relationship with Oberlin, see Robert S. Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College* (2 vols., Oberlin, 1943).

³Charles G. Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney*, (New York, 1876), 315-316.

⁴M. Robinson to Finney, February 4, 1859, in the Finney Papers in the Oberlin College Library, Oberlin, Ohio. All the letters quoted below are in this collection.

⁵Ellen T. Beaumont to Finney, April 13, 1868.

lin: "This church hereby expresses its conviction that the Institution of Free Masonry is wrong and opposed to the spirit of the gospel,—particularly because of its stringent secrecy [sic]."⁶ Local churches were not the only bodies to pass such resolutions. Methodist conferences, Presbyterian synods, and Baptist unions expressed opinions on the subject. The Church of the United Brethren went so far as to favor excluding those connected with secret societies from church membership.⁷

To others a connection between Masonry and politics seemed particularly dangerous. Charles B. Glenville, who wrote a paper on the actions of Masons in the United States government, asserted it was "next to impossible for anyone to gain a nomination for office unless he belongs to some secret society—much less could he be elected."⁸ The most significant illustration of this sentiment was expressed in a convention that was held in the city hall in Aurora, Illinois, in October 1867 by a group that called themselves simply "Christian men."⁹ This group issued a call for a national meeting to be held in Pittsburgh in 1868 and laid plans for the formation of a National Christian Association. The principal figure behind this movement was Jonathan Blanchard (1811-1892), a Presbyterian minister and president of Wheaton College.¹⁰ At the height of the antimasonic campaign, Blanchard and Finney were to rival each other in the intensity of their crusading enthusiasm.

Into such an atmosphere Finney launched his attack. Using the columns of the *Independent*, a New York weekly religious paper, as his sounding board, Finney in April 1868 began a series of articles designed to expose and condemn Freemasonry. "It is high time," he announced at the beginning of his first ar-

⁶ Copied from the *Lorain County News, Extra* (Oberlin, Ohio), December 27, 1867, in Finney Papers.

⁷ *Religious Telescope*, XXXII (1868), 252.

⁸ Charles B. Glenville to Finney, June 11, 1868.

⁹ *The Anti-Masonic Scrap Book* (Chicago, 1883), 2.

¹⁰ Blanchard followed the pattern of the evangelistic reformer of Calvinist tradition, taking an active part in the temperance and abolitionist movements. He was president of Knox College for twelve years, of Wheaton for twenty-two, and at various times edited a number of religious papers. See John W. Bailey, *Knox College* (Chicago, 1860).

title, "that the Church of Christ was awake to the character and tendency of Freemasonry."¹¹ Explaining his motives for writing on the subject, Finney continued: "Forty years ago, we supposed that it was dead, and had no idea that it could ever revive. But, strange to tell, while we were busy in getting rid of slavery, Freemasonry has revived, and extended its bounds most alarmingly."¹²

The evangelist explained to his readers his connection with the society, confessed that in his youth he had been a third degree Mason, had become secretary of the lodge at Adams, New York, but that after his religious experience in 1821 he realized he had been converted "from Freemasonry to Christ." He finally forced his resignation in spite of the opposition of the lodge members. Recalling his initiation almost forty years later, he declared, "Its oaths appeared to me to be monstrously profane and barbarous," and he now considered the institution "highly dangerous to the state, and in every way injurious to the Church of Christ."¹³

It is interesting to note, however, that in spite of Finney's early withdrawal from membership in the society, he had a considerable influence among Masons in New York state. A fellow evangelist recognized this and in a letter requesting Finney to come help him lead a revival at New Lebanon, New York, wrote in these words: "Many of the band of opposers here are Masons, and you might have an influence over them which I cannot, and could not, even if I possessed your talents."¹⁴

The second installment of Finney's attack retold the story of William Morgan's murder and the subsequent spirit of opposition to the society. In the third, Finney considered how the public was to know what Freemasonry really was and denied that the eulogistic books or "the oral testimony of adhering Masons" gave accurate pictures of the institution's character. Only from "the published and oral testimony of those who have taken the degrees; and, afterward, from conscientious motives, have confessed their

¹¹ *Independent*, XX, No. 1010 (April 9, 1868), 1.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Daniel Nash to Finney, March 8, 1827.

error, and have publicly renounced Masonry" could the truth be known.¹⁵ That narrowed the field of authorities considerably!

By the first week in May, Finney had warmed up to his subject, and his weekly articles had almost doubled in length. In the May 7 issue he took a new tack, questioning the society's claims to great antiquity. After refuting the society's assertions of great age, the crusader addressed himself principally to young men, declaring: "You have been deceived. You have been imposed upon, as I was imposed upon. You have been made to believe a lie. They have drawn your money from you under false pretenses that some very ancient mysteries were to be revealed to you."¹⁶

In the sixth installment Finney launched into a diatribe against the claims of benevolence made by the society. "The benevolence so much boasted by Freemasons is a sham," he declared, "and the morality of the institution is opposed to both law and Gospel." Again bringing the Masonic oaths under attack, he asserted that Freemasonry enjoins only partial benevolence and added, "Freemasonry, at the best, is but a mutual insurance company."¹⁷

And so the articles continued. In the May 21 issue Finney wrote of the society as a false religion; the following week he spoke of it as a "fatal delusion," as "a system of gross hypocrisy"; in the ninth installment he examined the argument that great men in the past have been Masons.

Finney reached the peak of his attack in the tenth installment, in which, after quoting from the Masonic oath, he asserted, "The candidate swears to keep a secret of which he has at present no knowledge."¹⁸ To Finney what was particularly obnoxious was that the initiate had to promise to assist a fellow member whether he was right or wrong and to promise political preferment to Royal Arch Masons in preference to another of equal qualifications. "Is that right?" he asked, and continued:

¹⁵ *Independent*, XX, No. 1012 (April 23, 1868), 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 1014 (May 7, 1868), 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 1015 (May 14, 1868), 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 1020 (June 18, 1868), 2.

No wonder that Masons seize upon all the offices, and are so apt to have everything in their own way. And here we see what is the real use to which Masonry is appropriated in this country. It is to seize on all lucrative offices, and to control the government by this secret combination.¹⁹

In the conclusion of the article Finney revealed his political bias by commenting on the most pressing issue then before the nation, the trial of President Johnson. He mentioned a letter he had received from a devoted follower suggesting that because he was a High Mason, Andrew Johnson could not be convicted before the senate and that Jefferson Davis, for the same reason, would go free. "Let the country ponder this," he warned. "Let the Church of God look to it."²⁰

The articles continued for two more installments, and after the twelfth, which appeared in the July 2 issue, they were abruptly discontinued. In his writings Finney borrowed heavily from published antimasonic materials, particularly from David Bernard's *Light on Freemasonry*.²¹ On the whole, the articles shed little new light on the subject of Freemasonry (although they do reveal much about the personality of their author!). They are unoriginal, repetitious, verbose diatribes containing an elderly man's harsh invective.

What makes much more interesting reading than Finney's articles, however, is the correspondence between the author and the acting editor of the *Independent*, Oliver Johnson. As early as April 23, when only three of Finney's lengthy installments had been printed, Johnson expressed concern over the nature and scope of Finney's attack. "I am afraid you are going into the subject of Freemasonry far deeper and at much greater length than is compatible with the various and pressing demands upon our space," Johnson wrote. He added that it was the paper's policy

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.* Similar charges were contained in several letters Finney received shortly thereafter. See especially Robert T. Conant to Finney, June 20, 1868.

²¹ This familiar work was one of the bibles of the crusaders. First published as *Light on Masonry* in Utica in 1829, it was revised by the author in 1858 and subsequently ran through fifteen editions by 1873.

to print only articles that were complete in themselves and that in Finney's case this rule had been suspended. "But I must beg you to put your pen under some restraint," he warned. "Otherwise we may be compelled to stop before you get to the end."²²

Finney lost no time in replying, reminding Johnson that when the editor, Theodore Tilton, promised to print whatever Finney would write on the subject, he understood it was to be a series of articles. "I had no idea of how many numbers would be required," continued Finney.

I did not intend & so I suppose Br. T. understood, to merely snap a percussion cap on the subject. I think Br. Tilton understood that I intended to ventilate the subject so thoroughly as to check it & if possible cure so great and rapidly growing an evil. . . . Rely upon it, this is the next great question of reform to which the church and the nation will be forced to attend. . . . I have 15 numbers completed & have supposed I should not need to write much more.²³

At the conclusion of his letter Finney alluded to pressure on the *Independent* from its readers who were Masons, to which Johnson was quick to retort, making it clear that the paper was not flinching because of anyone's hostility. "You can have no conception of the pressure upon our columns. My pigeon-holes are stuffed with grand articles from eminent writers, many of whom have waited for weeks, and some for months. . . . I must beg you not to go further than is absolutely necessary."²⁴

Finney was not convinced and wrote his New York friends about his editorial difficulties. If any man could, Lewis Tappan would tell him the whole story. "You ask if a certain person is afraid of the Masons," wrote Tappan. "I think he is more afraid of losing subscribers. It is, I am sorry to say, a money-making concern. I read your articles with interest."²⁵

Another inquiry from the Oberlin crusader brought encouraging words from the editor himself. "Write your full mind on

²² Oliver Johnson to Finney, April 23, 1868.

²³ Finney to Oliver Johnson, April 25, 1868.

²⁴ Oliver Johnson to Finney, April 29, 1868.

²⁵ Lewis Tappan to Finney, April 30, 1868.

the subject. Pour the hottest shot you can forge. Spare not." But, Tilton quickly added, don't write so much that people will get tired reading the articles. The *Independent* has no room to print a book on the subject! "I have now printed four articles. I will print six more, making ten in all. After that the ax must fall."²⁶

The same week that Tilton's letter arrived, Finney received one from the assistant editor as well. Johnson was a bit caustic in his comments on Finney's style. "Your method of writing is the one of all others least adapted to the newspapers." And as for Finney's offer to relieve them by making each installment longer, Johnson had all he could do to restrain himself. "Now that is the *one* thing not to be thought of for a moment!"²⁷

Johnson's letters continued to arrive at regular intervals with apparently no influence upon Finney's productive pen. One dated May 18 pleaded with him again to stop writing such long articles. Another, dated June 11, announced that no more than twelve numbers were to be printed. Finney complained bitterly, but the patient Tilton refused to continue the rambling discourses. "I would not complain," counseled Jonathan Blanchard. "It was a bold act to print your articles and must have cost them 50 thousand dollars."²⁸

Finney's articles in the *Independent* had no sooner appeared than scores of letters commenting on his campaign converged upon Oberlin. "I have just finished reading your article on Freemasonry," wrote one Harold Wheatkeep. "I pray God you may be 'spared' until you complete the contemplated series." The writer added he had long thought that Freemasonry was a great evil and assured Finney that for conducting the present struggle, "none are better qualified than yourself."²⁹ Some of his correspondents were not content merely to express their support in his drive but engaged in dire prophecies regarding Freemasonry. "I have long felt that unless something should stay the progress of

²⁶ Theodore Tilton to Finney, May 2, 1868.

²⁷ Oliver Johnson to Finney, May 6, 1868.

²⁸ Jonathan Blanchard to Finney, July 4, 1868.

²⁹ Harold Wheatkeep to Finney, April 14, 1868.

it," one wrote, "it will end in revolution in this Country."³⁰ Others supplied additional information about Masons and their influence, with the hope of providing their hero with additional ammunition. The octogenarian philanthropist Lewis Tappan reminded him, "I too was a renouncing mason, & can testify to all you have said of the folly & iniquity of Freemasonry."³¹

Some of Finney's supporters gained space in the *Independent* to champion the cause. Typical was an article by the Rev. Daniel Kimball, who, on the pretext of recounting old revival anecdotes about Finney, inserted the following: "It is gratifying that he is still bearing his testimony against the encroachments for [sic] Masonry. His testimony accords with my own observation of the institution sixty years ago, when all its active supporters were, without exception, hostile to practical religion."³²

What pleased Finney more than the letters of support were the notices about the articles that cropped up in other papers and the offers he received from various church publishing houses wishing to print his articles in pamphlets and periodicals. "They are already copied by the political press more extensively than I had anticipated," he wrote his reluctant New York editor, adding that he was sure the future numbers would interest the public even more.³³ By 1870 articles against Masonry had appeared in a number of religious periodicals, the principal of which were the *Religious Telescope*, *American Wesleyan*, *Earnest Christian*, *American Baptist*, *Reformed Presbyterian*, *Christian Statesman*, *Free Methodist*, and *Congregationalist*.

Not all the reaction, obviously, was favorable. Some of the letters Finney opened that spring spoke out against his accusations and criticized him severely for the stand he had taken. Masons wrote to defend their society; old friends penned notes warning him against hurting the cause of religion; strangers addressed themselves to him, questioning his sanity, suggesting he was in his

³⁰ Isaac J. Gilbert to Finney, April 13, 1868.

³¹ Lewis Tappan to Finney, April 24, 1868.

³² David Kimball, "Rev. Charles G. Finney," *Independent*, XX, No. 1015 (May 14, 1868), 6.

³³ Finney to Oliver Johnson, April 25, 1868.

dotage, and asking him how much money he was receiving for his articles. One ardent Mason from Connecticut commenced a lengthy correspondence with him defending his group to the end and declaring, "There is nothing that I can now recall in the Obligations or Oaths of the Three Degrees that is in violation of my Christian Duties or Obligations any more than would be the Oath required in a Court of Law."³⁴

Some of the letters asserted that the society would prosper in spite of his attack. As Charles Raymond put it, "The numbers are said to be increasing faster than ever before—and I hardly think you can do more to prevent it than you could stop the Flow of the Ohio River by taking in your Hands sand from the shores and casting it into the River."³⁵ Putting it less politely, another Mason, after calling him "a man guilty of the basest falsehoods," added, "If you for one moment think you can destroy or injure Masonry you must be a most egregious fool."³⁶

A few helpful individuals recommended other areas for Finney's energies, suggesting "evils" more serious than Freemasonry. "Romanism to me looks far more formidable," warned Charles F. Raymond.³⁷ "Odd Fellowship is not any better than Freemasonry," added another.³⁸

Finney did not answer all these letters, but in his eighth installment he publicly acknowledged the many communications he had received from Masons accusing him of lying and misrepresentation. "To such, I say," wrote Finney, "Wait, gentlemen, until you are better informed upon the subject, and you will hold a different opinion."³⁹

The *Masonic Monthly* quickly rose to the challenge and advised Masons in Oberlin to have nothing to do with those who opposed them. Earlier this organ had dismissed the drive against them with a few sarcastic sentences. "It is ever the same old story

³⁴ Charles F. Raymond to Finney, April 13, 1868.

³⁵ Charles F. Raymond to Finney, April 14, 1868.

³⁶ E. O. Lindley to Finney, April 29, 1868.

³⁷ Charles F. Raymond to Finney, April 13, 1868.

³⁸ Alex Cochran to Finney, July 16, 1868.

³⁹ *Independent*, XX, No. 1018 (June 4, 1868), 2.

revived, the same stale catalogue of complaints." The editor, however, added significantly, "There is at least some partial justification for the demonstrations of the churches against Masonry."⁴⁰

While the Oberlin evangelist was penning his shafts, others were more active in the campaign. Led by Blanchard, the "Christian men" who in October 1867 had laid plans for a great national convention were hard at work rounding up delegates. In due time Finney received his invitation: "I hope you are to be present, and that the West is to be largely and ably represented."⁴¹

The convention got under way at Pittsburgh the evening of May 5. Some 170 delegates met for two days, listening to speeches and passing resolutions.⁴² After electing Bishop David Edwards of Ohio president, a plan was approved for establishing "a national Christian organization opposed to all secret societies, in order to save the Church of Jesus Christ from being depraved by their influence; and also to redeem the administration of justice from perversion and our republican government from corruption."⁴³

The major addresses were made by President James H. Fairchild of Oberlin and by Blanchard. The convention unanimously agreed to start and support a paper that would be a sounding board for their pet peeve. The last major resolution passed before the convention adjourned, called for the churches "to exclude from the fellowship of the church all persons who persist in adhering to these secret orders."⁴⁴ Belittling the meeting, the *Masonic Monthly* summed up the convention's work in these words: "It is likely that we have heard the last of President Blanchard, the modern Peter the Hermit, and his new crusade." The magazine did not overlook Finney in its account of the proceedings. Commenting on the selection of Oberlin as the site for the next

⁴⁰ Samuel Evans, "Revival of Antimasonry," *Masonic Monthly*, V (1868), 17-18.

⁴¹ Amasa Walker to Finney, May 3, 1868.

⁴² The *Masonic Monthly* put the date of the first meeting on May 6 and reported less than one hundred in attendance. *Masonic Monthly*, V (1868), 180.

⁴³ *Independent*, XX, No. 1017 (May 28, 1868), 6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

convention, it declared, "From the well-known bigotry and intolerance of this place, we should say that a better selection could not have been made."⁴⁵

The end of Finney's articles in the *Independent* served only to increase the agitation on both sides. "I have just written to the Editor to express . . . my sincere regret," one friend announced when the articles were finally cut short.⁴⁶ "Your letters have moved the country and you have thereby begun to roll the ball in the right direction," Finney was told.⁴⁷ Many spoke of the "violent opposition" set up against his followers, and one Baptist minister requested "documents to circulate."⁴⁸ Others agreed that there was a "hungering & thirsting for light on the subject" and urged Finney to write more.⁴⁹

The lines of criticism and condemnation addressed to Finney became more violent. Some went so far as to include threats and prophecies. "Set thy house in order," wrote one correspondent, "for thus Sayeth the Lord thou Shalt die and not live. turn thy face to the wall and weepe [sic] for this year, thou Shalt die."⁵⁰ Even the papers ran notices about "the many anonymous letters threatening him with assassination if he did not desist from his exposure of Freemasonry."⁵¹ And the *Masonic Monthly* continued its defense of the institution. As one writer put it, mentioning the December 1868 issue, "The Editor gives you Oberlin fanatics some notice."⁵²

Offers to print more of Finney's writings continued to pour in. The columns of the *American Baptist* were opened to him for whatever he wrote devoted "to the exposure of this mystery of iniquity."⁵³ The editor of the *Religious Telescope* was just as

⁴⁵ "S.R.N.," "The 'Blanchard' Antimasonic Convention," *Masonic Monthly*, V (1868), 181.

⁴⁶ James Vincent to Finney, July 4, 1868.

⁴⁷ John G. Mix to Finney, December 19, 1868.

⁴⁸ Benjamin T. F. Clark to Finney, November 9, 1868.

⁴⁹ Alex Cochran to Finney, July 16, 1868.

⁵⁰ "BPZ" to Finney, May 5, 1868.

⁵¹ Lucia C. Cook to Finney, August 16, 1868.

⁵² A. Ward to Finney, June 30, 1868.

⁵³ Nathan Brown to Finney, July 3, 1868.

solicitous.⁵⁴ These magazines, with smaller circulations than the *Independent*, had much less to lose from accepting Finney's offerings!

Meanwhile, others were providing editorial ammunition to carry on the campaign. The fiery Jonathan Blanchard, laying plans to launch the official organ of the National Christian Association, kept Finney informed.

I shall try and get our executive committee together next week and start a paper. I have thought of beginning with a small dollar paper once in two weeks. We have no money and I have expended all I could get as I go along. . . . I have thought of this: "The American Christian—Opposed to Secret Societies" for a heading. Ask your brethren what they think of it.⁵⁵

By early summer he was able to write, "Our new paper is to be out in three or four weeks."⁵⁶ Every two weeks for the next three years the *Christian Cynosure* published abroad addresses and articles against secret societies. Its purpose was to devote itself exclusively to further the ends of the national organization, "to meet this anti-Christ; to turn back the inky flood of ignorance, timidity and fear, which chloroforms now the press, the pulpit and the legislature of the United States; in short, to tear off this political, moral and religious shroud, which . . . enfolds our entire globe."⁵⁷ At its peak, the paper's circulation reached 5,000.

The paper was well received by the rank and file. One of Finney's followers expressed his support in these words, "I am heartily glad that the cause has now got an organ of thought of their own—a journal which cannot be bought nor sold, bribed nor browbeaten, 'hoodwinked' nor 'cable-towed.'⁵⁸"

In the meantime Finney was not inactive. Elaborating on his early articles over the winter of 1868-69, he wrote a book which after considerable discussion was finally published by the

⁵⁴ William Dillon to Finney, July 4, 1868.

⁵⁵ Jonathan Blanchard to Finney, May 11, 1868.

⁵⁶ Jonathan Blanchard to Finney, July 4, 1868.

⁵⁷ *Anti-Masonic Scrap Book*, 4.

⁵⁸ James F. Layton to Finney, April 27, 1869.

Western Tract and Book Society in Cincinnati. The main argument of the book can be summed up in one paragraph:

How can we fail to pronounce Freemasonry an anti-Christian institution? . . . Freemasonry knows no mercy. . . . Its oaths are profane. . . . The penalties of these oaths are barbarous and even savage. Its teachings are false and profane. Its design is partial and selfish. Its ceremonies are a mixture of puerility and profanity. . . . It is a false religion. . . . It is a swindle. . . . It is a virtual conspiracy against both Church and State.⁵⁹

Finney followed the book's reception closely. "We have sold about 1300 copies," his editor wrote shortly after publication. "I think they are just coming into notice."⁶⁰ By the end of August the small supply had been exhausted, and by the end of September total sales had reached 3,000.

Again the letters from supporters flooded Finney. "I thank you for the work so faithfully, fearlessly, thoroughly & yet kindly done," wrote a well-wisher. "I hope it will have an unusual circulation." "It is a sound argument against them," wrote one friend. "Your books are producing their anticipated effect," added another.⁶¹

By summer 1870 the members of the National Christian Association, having held their second annual meeting in Chicago in June, turned their attention to building up state societies. Finney's presence at these state-wide meetings was in demand. He was urged to attend the convention scheduled to meet in Syracuse in November of that year. "We want an address from you," he was told. "Your expenses will be paid by us. . . . You are known throughout the state. You are loved in Syracuse. You have an influence no other man who takes your position can have."⁶²

Because of poor health Finney had to decline, but some sixty people representing ten religious denominations attended the

⁵⁹ Charles G. Finney, *The Character, Claims and Practical Workings of Freemasonry* (Cincinnati, 1869), 261-263.

⁶⁰ A. Ritchie to Finney, June 24, September 3, 21, 1869.

⁶¹ A. S. Stone to Finney, June 14, 1869; A. S. Raymond to Finney, August 25, 1869; S. Jewett to Finney, January 18, 1870.

⁶² L. N. Stratton to Finney, August 22, 1870.

three-day meeting. The usual addresses were made, the usual resolutions passed. One of the climaxes of the convention occurred when Gerrit Smith, the old philanthropist and reformer, made an appearance, donated one hundred dollars toward the expenses of the meeting, and was made honorary president of the society.⁶³ Before adjourning, the convention drew up a constitution creating the New York State Christian Association Opposed to Secret Societies. It is interesting to note that the assembly also passed a number of temperance resolutions, suggesting perhaps a close affiliation between the two groups.

The movement continued through the 1870's. Annual meetings of the National Christian Association were held every year until 1881. Tracts written by Blanchard, Finney, and others were circulated. Finney went on a lecture tour to speak against the Masons. Political action was even considered. In June 1872 a small group met at Oberlin and nominated Charles Francis Adams for president and J. L. Barlow for vice president on a platform the principal plank of which was "to use this mild and safe corrective of some of the abuses arising from secret societies, from the use of intoxicating liquors, from casting the Bible out of the schools and from allowing the public desecration of the Sabbath."⁶⁴ It was this same group two years later that joined with others at Syracuse to form the American Party.⁶⁵

As early as 1871 dissension and petty jealousies appeared among the antimasonic ranks. Dissatisfaction centered particularly around the policies of the association's organ, the *Christian Cynosure*, and with Blanchard's editorship. Finney felt that Blanchard inserted his "personal difficulties" too much in the columns of the paper and that the Finney forces suffered as a consequence. "The paper must itself be reformed or it cannot go far in reforming others," he asserted.⁶⁶

⁶³ See *Proceedings of the New York Anti-Secret Society Convention, 1870* (n.p., 1870).

⁶⁴ *Anti-Masonic Scrap-Book*, 40.

⁶⁵ The American Party was a short-lived organization that ran candidates in the 1876 and 1880 elections. The party at no time polled more than .03 percent of the popular vote.

⁶⁶ Finney to Philo Carpenter, October 25, 1871.

Blanchard's son quickly rose to his father's defense and castigated Finney for "bitterly and personally" reproaching the editor. While he recognized the "noble work" Finney had done, he reminded the evangelist that "when the secret lodges were undermining the liberties of America . . . the alarm was not sounded from Oberlin but from Illinois." Continuing, the young Blanchard declared, "The man who has kept the fires burning when his brethren were asleep; who started the paper they lacked strength or courage to start, this man is struck, struck in the dark, and in the back by a brother in Christ!"⁶⁷

The rift widened with Finney's reply. "I did not know until now, that you claimed infallibility in the conduct of that paper."⁶⁸ The paper was temporarily discontinued, came out again in November 1871 in smaller form, and was later changed to a monthly magazine. Its fate was symptomatic of the course of the entire campaign. Before long, even Finney's books were forgotten. His more ardent supporters reported that "no one had ever heard of them. No bookstore when I enquired knew anything of them."⁶⁹ By and large, the crusade was a failure, and the period after 1880 witnessed a marked increase in fraternal orders.

A study of this obscure campaign in the late 1860's suggests several conclusions. First, the antimasonic drive, although not primarily the work of Finney, was aided immeasurably by the blows that that evangelist struck in its behalf. He was the catalytic agent stirring up deep-seated emotions, reviving long-smoldering hatreds. And in his denunciations against secret societies we see the last efforts of an aging man to whip up an emotional antagonism to the level of a crusade.

Second, this was a grass roots movement, national in its scope, bridging sections and religious sects, and gaining its greatest support from the small town, the isolated hamlet. Letters praising Finney poured in from Mankato, Minnesota, to Waterbury Center, Vermont, from Tunkhannock, Wyoming, to Mystic

⁶⁷ C. A. Blanchard to Finney, October 27, 1871.

⁶⁸ Finney to C. A. Blanchard, November 2, 1871.

⁶⁹ Sarah A. Brown to Finney, June 28, 1874.

River, Connecticut, from Epworth, Iowa, to Doe Run, Pennsylvania. While New York City and San Francisco are represented among the two hundred letters touching this subject in the Finney Papers, the preponderant majority come from places the size of Osceola Mills, Pennsylvania, and Randolph Station, Wisconsin.

In addition to its rural nature, the campaign was supported mainly by the elderly, who still recalled the bitterness of the 1826 affair and to whom Finney represented the paragon of righteousness and spiritual perfection. Indeed, some of those who experienced the results of the Great Revival engineered by Finney in the 1830's took up their pens to relive old memories.

Then too, this antimasonic sentiment can be looked upon as the last example of the quasi-religious ultraism for which the Middle Period was noted—a sentiment strikingly out of keeping with the broadening secularism and materialism of the late 1860's. It was the religious societies that came to the fore to support the movement and to pass resolutions against secret organizations, societies like the state Congregational associations of Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, the Baptist Association in Illinois, the Conference of Congregational Ministers of the South Presbyterian Synod in Michigan, and the American Missionary Association of the United States.⁷⁰ Just as the earlier antimasonic impulse had recruited members from religious strongholds,⁷¹ so too did the later antimasonic excitement.

Yet in a sense this campaign of intolerance and vituperation was perhaps symbolic of a post-war period when antagonisms and hatreds, so recently leveled against an enemy in battle, took their vent against a little known and understood mystery which in 1868, for Finney and those like him, happened to be the secret society. The wave of hysteria ran its course. The antimasonic movement gradually died, and Charles Grandison Finney, his last lance shattered, joined the other Quixotes, enjoying at last, presumably, his just reward.

⁷⁰ *Proceedings of the New York Anti-Secret Society Convention, 1870*, 6.
⁷¹ Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment*, 351.