

went riding several miles to see a patient. On his way, he later said, the subject of the salvation of his soul took possession of his mind in such a manner that it was completely open to his understanding—and the whole



plan of salvation by Christ was so clear to him that he saw that even a child could understand it. He wondered why it had ever seemed so mysterious to him. He greatly regretted what he had said to his wife about little Heather, and felt he must hurry home so he could take it back. When he got home, he was another man—he told his wife what had gone through his mind, encouraged dear little Heather to come to Christ, and both father and daughter have since been earnest Christians and have lived long and done much good.

But in this revival, as in others that I have known, God did some terrible things in righteousness. On one Sabbath while I was there, as we were coming out of church, a man hurried up to Mr. Gillett and myself saying that he had just come from a place where a man had fallen down dead. We later found out that three men who had been opposing the work had met that Sabbath to spend the day drinking and ridiculing the revival. They went on in this way until one of them suddenly dropped dead. His companions were speechless! They could say nothing, for it was evident to them that their conduct had brought this awful stroke of divine indignation upon their friend.

The Spirit Of Prayer

I should say a few words regarding the spirit of prayer which prevailed at Rome during this time. Indeed the whole town was full of prayer. Go where you would, you heard the voice of prayer. If you were walking down the street and two or three Christians happened to be together, **they were praying.** Wherever they met, they prayed. Wherever there was a sinner unconverted, **especially if he showed any opposition,** you would find some two or three brothers or sisters agreeing to make him a special subject of prayer.

The state of things in the village and in the surrounding area was such that no one could come into the village without feeling awestricken with the impression that God was there in a peculiar and wonderful way. As an example

of this I will relate a particular incident. The sheriff of the county resided in Utica. There were two courthouses in the county, one in Rome and the other at Utica. Consequently, the sheriff, Bryant by name, came to Rome quite frequently. He later told me that he had heard of the state of things at Rome, and he, together with many others in Utica, had laughed a great deal about it.

But one day it was necessary for him to come to Rome. He said that he was glad to have business there, for he wanted to see for himself what things were really like. He was driving in his one-horse sleigh, without any particular impression in his mind at all, until he crossed what was called the old canal, a place about a mile from the town. He said as soon as he crossed the canal, a strange impression came over him, an awe so deep that he could not shake it. He felt as if God permeated the whole atmosphere. He said that this feeling increased the whole way, until he came into the village. He stopped at Mr. Franklin's hotel, and the stable-man came out and took his horse. He observed, he said, that the stable-man looked just like he himself felt—as if he were afraid to speak. He went into the hotel and found the gentleman there with whom he had business. He said that they were both so obviously shaken that they could hardly attend to business. He reported that several times in the course of the short time he was there, he had to rise from the table abruptly and go to the window and look away, trying to divert his attention to keep from weeping. He saw that everyone else appeared to feel just as he did. Such an awe, such a solemnness, such a state of things he had never had any conception of before. He quickly concluded his business and returned to Utica—but (as he said later) never to speak lightly of the work at Rome again. And a few weeks later in Utica, he himself became converted.⁴

The Effects And Results Of The Revival

As the work progressed, almost the whole population of the town became involved. Nearly every one of the lawyers, merchants, physicians, and almost all the principal men—indeed, nearly the whole adult population of the village, were saved, especially those who belonged to Mr. Gillett's congregation. He said to me before I left, "So far as my church is concerned, the millenium has come already. My people are all converted. From all my past labors, I don't even have one sermon that is suited at all to my congregation, for **they all are committed Christians.**" Mr. Gillett afterward reported that during the 20 days that I spent at Rome, there were 500 conversions in that town.⁵

The means that were used at Rome were the same as I had always used before, and no others—preaching, much prayer (secret and public), personal conversation and instruction, visitation from house to house—and when

⁴) In the next chapter of Finney's autobiography, he describes how the revival moved from Rome to Utica, where this sheriff became converted.

⁵) This number may not seem very great to you, but New York state was very sparsely populated in the 1820's when this revival took place.

inquirers became large in number, I appointed special meetings for them. These were the means and the only means that I had used in attempting to secure the conversion of souls.

In this revival, the Spirit's work was so spontaneous, so powerful and so overwhelming, that it was necessary to exercise the greatest caution and wisdom in conducting all the meetings in order to prevent an undesirable outburst of feelings that would have quickly exhausted the emotions of the people. It is difficult to conceive of such a deep and universal state of religious feeling as was witnessed at Rome—with no instance of disorder, confusion, fanaticism, or anything that would be objectionable.

The moral state of the people was so greatly changed that Mr. Gillett often remarked that it did not seem like the same place. Whatever of sin that was left was forced to hide its face. No open immorality would be tolerated for even a moment. I have given only a very faint outline of what happened at Rome. A faithful description of all the moving incidents that were crowded into that revival would indeed take a whole book in itself.

But the Spirit's work did not stop there. Finney goes on to tell how it immediately spread to Utica (where Sheriff Bryant was converted). And then from village to village, city to city, the revival spread throughout the length and breadth of the land, until there were whole counties where there could hardly be found an unconverted soul. How grateful we are that Jesus Christ is able to change lives like this, and that He wants to enable His people, if they are willing, to be such vessels of His truth and power. "You shall find Me," He says, "when you seek for Me, with all your heart!" —Jer. 29:13

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God Comes To New York

From the Autobiography of
CHARLES G. FINNEY

Edited and paraphrased by
Keith & Melody Green

This is an account of the Spirit of God's dealings with the people of Rome (a small village in sparsely populated upstate New York) in the 1820s. It is taken from Chapter XIII of Charles Finney's autobiography. This chapter had a tremendous effect on my spiritual life and changed the very direction of our whole ministry. As you read, try to imagine yourself there. Ask yourself, "Have I ever seen anything like this in my life?" Remember this—the same God that moved like this a century and a half ago still desires to do the same today. He is ever waiting for the one who will take Him at His word.

—Keith

We were in the midst of revival—a tremendous moving of God's Spirit in the town of Western, New York. People from the nearby town of Rome began coming to the meetings in large numbers. I could see that the powerful effect the Word was having upon those coming from Rome clearly indicated that the work would soon be spreading to their town.

At this time a Reverend Moses Gillett, pastor of the Congregational Church in Rome, upon hearing what the Lord was doing in Western, came to see what was going on. He was greatly impressed by the work of God there. I could see that the Spirit of God was stirring him up to the deepest foundations of his heart. After a few days, Mr. Gillett came up again. On his second visit he said to me, "Brother Finney, it seems to me that I have a new Bible. I've never understood the promises like I do now; I've never gotten hold of them before. I cannot rest, my mind is full of the subject, and the promises are new to me!" The longer we talked, the clearer it became to me that the Lord was preparing him for a great work in his own church.

Soon after this, when the revival was in its full strength at Western, Mr. Gillett persuaded me to exchange Sundays with him.² I consented reluctantly.

The Work Begins

The day before our exchange, as I was traveling to Rome, I found myself regretting that I had consented to the exchange. I felt that it would greatly hinder the work in Western, because Mr. Gillett would probably preach some of his old sermons (which I believed would not be suited to the current state of revival there). However, the people were praying mightily, and although his preaching would not stop the work, it might set it back a bit. Nevertheless, I went to Rome and preached three times on the Sabbath—and the Word took **immediate effect**. I could see during the day that many heads were lowered, and a great number of people were bowed down with deep conviction over sin. I preached in the morning on the text, "*The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God,*" (Rom. 8:7) and followed it up with something to the same effect in the afternoon and evening.

I waited on Monday morning until Mr. Gillett returned from Western. I shared my impressions with him concerning the state of the people in his congregation. He did not seem to realize that the work was beginning with as much power as I believed it was. But he was at least willing to call a meeting for inquirers,³ if there were any in his congregation, and he asked me to be present at the meeting. I told him I would, and that he should spread the news throughout the whole village that there was going to be a meeting of inquiry that evening.

The First "Inquiry" Meeting

The meeting was called at the house of one of his deacons. When we arrived, we found the large living room crowded to its utmost capacity. Mr. Gillett looked around with surprise, obviously bothered—for he saw that the meeting was largely composed of the most intelligent and influential members of his church, including many of the prominent young men in the town. We spent a little while attempting to talk with them, but I soon saw that their feelings were so deeply aroused that there was great danger of an outburst of emotion that would be almost uncontrollable. I therefore said to Mr. Gillett privately, "It will not do to continue the meeting in this way. I will quickly share a few things they need to hear, and then dismiss them."

Nothing had been said or done to create any excitement in the meeting. The feelings were all spontaneous. The work had such power that even a few words of exhortation would make the strongest men writhe in their seats, as if a sword had been thrust into their hearts. It would probably be impossible for one who has never witnessed such a scene to realize what the force of the truth can be under the power of the Holy Ghost. It was indeed a sword, a **two-edged sword**.

Mr. Gillett became quite agitated. He turned pale, and with a good deal of excitement said, "What shall we do? What **shall** we do?" I put my hand on his shoulder and in a whisper said, "Keep quiet, keep quiet Brother Gillett." I then spoke to the people in as gentle but plain a manner as I could, calling their attention at once to their only remedy, and assuring them that it was a present and all-sufficient remedy. I pointed them to Christ, and kept on in this subject as long as they could endure it, which indeed was only but a few moments.

Mr. Gillett was becoming so shaken that I stepped up to him, took him by the arm, and said, "Let us pray." We knelt down right there in the middle of the room. I led in prayer, keeping my voice deliberately low and unimpassioned, but petitioned the Savior to intervene with His blood then and there, and to lead all those present to accept the salvation which He offered—and to believe so thoroughly, that their souls would be saved. The agitation deepened every moment, and as I could hear their sobs and sighs, I closed my prayer quickly and rose suddenly from my knees. They all arose and I said, "Now please go home without speaking a word to each other. Try to keep silent, and do not break out into any loud displays of feeling—but go without saying a word."

At that moment, a young man by the name of Walker so nearly fainted that he fell upon some young men that stood near him—and all of them began to faint and fall together. This had the effect of producing a loud shrieking from those around them—but I hushed them all down and said to the young men, "Please set that door wide open, and go out, and let everyone retire in silence."

They did as I requested. They did not shriek, but they went out sobbing and sighing, and their sobs and sighs could be heard till they got out into the street.

This Mr. Walker, of whom I was just speaking, kept silent until he entered his front door, but then he could contain himself no longer. He shut the door, fell upon the floor, and burst out into a loud wailing—in view of his awful condition. This brought his whole family around him and scattered conviction among them all. I learned afterwards that similar scenes occurred in other families. But many, as I later found out, were converted at the meeting and went home so full of joy that they could hardly contain themselves.

The next morning, very soon after sunrise, people began coming to Mr.

Gillett's home asking us to go and visit members of their families, whom they reported as being

under great conviction. We took a hasty breakfast and started out. As soon as we were in the streets, people began running out of the houses, begging us to go into their homes. Every time we went into a house, the neighbors would rush in and fill the largest room.

We would stay and give them instruction for a short time.

Then when we'd go to another house, the people would all follow us.

We found a very extraordinary state of things. Convictions were so deep and felt by everyone that we would sometimes go into a house and find some in a kneeling position and others prostrate on the floor. We visited and conversed and prayed in this manner from house to house until about noon. And then I said to Mr. Gillett, "This will never do, we must hold another meeting of inquiry. We cannot go from house to house, for we are not meeting the needs of the people at all." He agreed with me, but the question arose—where shall we have the meeting?

Mr. Franklin's Dining Room

A Mr. Franklin, a religious man, ran a hotel at that time in the center of town. He had a large dining room, and Mr. Gillett said, "I will stop by and ask him if we can hold the meeting in his dining room." He easily gained approval, and we went immediately to the public schools and gave notice that at one o'clock there would be a meeting of inquiry at Mr. Franklin's dining room. We went home, had our lunch, and then started for the meeting. We saw people hurrying, some of them actually running to the meeting. They were coming from every direction. By the time we got there, the room, though a large one, was completely packed. Men, women, and children all crowded in.

This meeting was very much like the one we had the night before. The feeling was overwhelming. Some men of the strongest nerves were so cut down by the remarks which were made that they were unable to help themselves and had to be taken home by their friends. This meeting lasted nearly until sundown. It resulted in a great number of hopeful conver-

sions, and was used to greatly expand the work on every side.

I preached that evening, and Mr. Gillett appointed a meeting for inquiry the next morning in the courthouse. This was a much larger room than the dining hall, though it was not so central. However, at the appointed hour, the courthouse was full. We spent a good part of the day in giving instruction, and the work went on with wonderful power. I preached again in the evening, and Mr. Gillett appointed another meeting of inquiry the next morning at the church (as no other room in the village was large enough to hold the inquirers).

The Work Continues

At evening we held a prayer and conference meeting in a large schoolhouse. But the meeting hardly began before the feeling deepened so much that, to prevent an undesirable outburst of overwhelming emotion, I proposed to Mr. Gillett that we should dismiss the meeting and request the people to go in silence—asking Christians to spend the evening in private prayer, or in family prayer, as might seem right to them. Sinners were exhorted not to sleep until they gave their hearts to God. After this the work became so continual that I preached every night for about 20 nights in a row, and twice on the Sabbath. Every morning we held a prayer meeting in the church, then a meeting for inquiry in the afternoon, and I would preach in the evening. There was a spirit of solemnness throughout the whole place, and an awe that made everybody feel that God was there.

Ministers came in from neighboring towns and expressed great astonishment at what they saw and heard. Conversions multiplied so rapidly that we had no way of finding out who was being converted. Therefore, every evening at the close of my sermon, I requested all who had been converted that day to come forward and report themselves in front of the pulpit, that we might be able to talk with them a little while and give them some instruction. Every night we were surprised by the number and the social positions of the people that were coming forward.

"Unless Ye Become Like Little Children . . ."

A physician, a very likable man but a skeptic, had a little daughter and a praying wife. Little Heather, a girl perhaps eight or nine years old, was strongly convicted of sin, and her mother was excited about her state of mind. But her father was, at first, very indignant. He said to his wife, "The subject of religion is too high for me. I could never understand it. Are you telling me that this little child understands it enough to be intelligently convicted of sin? I do not believe it. I know better. I cannot endure it! It is fanaticism—it is madness!" Nevertheless, the mother of the child held fast in prayer. The doctor made these remarks, I learned later, with a good deal of anger, and immediately he saddled his horse and



Southern view of Rome, New York, 1830's.

2) Meaning that Finney would preach at Mr. Gillett's church, and Mr. Gillett would preach at the church Finney had been preaching at in Western.
3) People who were anxious to talk and pray about the salvation of their souls.