

LIFE OF CLEMENT PHINNEY.

CHAPTER I.

FROM HIS BIRTH TO HIS CONVERSION.

CLEMENT PHINNEY was born in Gorham, Maine, August 16th, 1780. To this town, John Phinney, his great-grandfather, removed from Cape Cod, Mass., more than a hundred years ago. That this ancestor of his first settled Gorham, and the date of his settlement, appear from the following copy of a part of the inscription on a block of granite, erected at "Gorham Corners," by public authority:

CAPT.

JOHN PHINNEY

COMMENCED THE

FIRST SETTLEMENT OF THIS TOWN

MAY 1736.

To Edmund Phinney, son of John, and grandfather of Clement, though only fourteen years of age at the time of "the settlement," is attributed the honor of felling the first tree cut in the town by the

white man's axe. Tradition makes him the hero of other exploits in equal esteem among pioneers. Of these the following may be of interest to some :

The first inhabitants of Gorham, like those of most frontier towns, especially in those times, suffered from the attacks of hostile tribes of Indians. When Edmund was only twenty years of age, it is related, that to ascertain if the enemy was near, he with two others was sent forth from the fort, which the inhabitants had built upon a spot still known as "Fort Hill." The party had proceeded but a little way, when Edmund, as he stepped upon a stump the better to observe, saw three Indians skulking in the thick under-wood. He had time only to exclaim, "Here they are," till they fired upon him. He fell, and his companions snatching him up for dead, hastened back to the fort. Fortunately, being only stunned, he speedily recovered. Two balls wounded his head, and a third passed through the flesh of the arm. It was ascertained afterward that these Indians were his personal acquaintances and play-fellows; and, that they aimed at him especially, as they themselves confessed when peace returned, because they feared in him a formidable enemy.

This anecdote, though without the heroic denouement of many that are related of him, gives us a glimpse of the kind of training through which many of our ancestors passed, preparatory to the great struggle for Independence—a struggle which was then approaching, and in which this Edmund served to good purpose as a Colonel.

One of those who carried him to the fort was his future father-in-law, Clement Meserve, whose Christian name has descended to the subject of our sketches. Edmund's third son, Edmund, Jr., was Clement Phinney's father. He married Sarah Hamblen, some descendants of whose family are still residing in Gorham. Of the eight children sprung from this marriage, the eldest is Clement, to whom we now return.

Of his childhood and youth we have but few things to relate, and none of these wonders. There is not often a case of which it may be said with so much truth, however, that he inherited a good physical constitution, and consequently a large share of good nature and cheerfulness, as well as that strong common sense which is so exceedingly rare, notwithstanding its name.

His intellectual endowments present that combination which is adapted to quick and accurate observation, rather than to profound and consecutive reasoning. His talent, as we say, is practical, rather than theoretical—adapted to present visible execution, rather than to operating silently and systematically upon ages. His impulses in youth and middle age were strong, but combined with those generous sentiments which render even a forcible nature agreeable.

His love of music, even in childhood, was excessive. He early learned to exercise his powers of song, by which he attached his equals to himself, and rendered his company desirable to adults. This talent, being cultivated and consecrated to God, has

been, as we shall hereafter see, very instrumental in awakening in the human heart responses to the calls of the Divine Word. Aptness "to teach" he possesses to a degree quite above mediocrity; and another talent, quite as important to the minister, an instinctive capability of acquiring friends, without making at the same time an equal number of enemies.

The other natural endowments by which, through a long series of years, he has been able to hold the undivided attention of large audiences, may be indicated, perhaps sufficiently, by saying that he has in his composition a rich vein of genuine wit, and not a slight sprinkle of enthusiasm, accompanied by an eccentricity, which, though it will not bear imitation, is nevertheless very agreeable, because in him it is perfectly spontaneous. The glow of enthusiasm, and a striking eccentricity, when combined in a public speaker of no more than ordinary qualifications in other respects, while they have no little effect upon the learned, never fail to exercise a controlling influence over the mass of mankind.

His advantages for education, in the ordinary sense of the term, were such only as the district school of New England fifty years ago afforded. The education here received he improved, however, by teaching; but, it must be remembered that the common school fifty years ago was not what it now is. If we judge of the schools of those days by the noble men with which they blessed the world, we shall not, however, come to the conclusion that they were altogether deficient.

To become acquainted with his theological education, we have not to follow him to the feet of any Gamaliel, but to follow him long years in the actual warfare of practical life. So far then, as he has proceeded in his studies — for he has not yet graduated — it is our purpose to follow him. Having introduced the reader to the natural man, we invite him to observe the development of this combination of faculties, under the various influences of good and bad to which he has been subjected, and under the like of which each one, who lives long in this world, must decide for himself whether he will be saved or lost.

The reader rightly infers that in youth he was very fond of merry-making company. Still, amid youthful excitements and the influence afforded by the example of depraved companions, he never fell into the disgusting vice of profanity. For this preservation he still cherishes a lively gratitude for his mother's influence. Happy will it be for our country, when each son can bear a similar testimony to his mother's worth.

When about eighteen, Mr. Phinney was attacked on a side, however, not so well fortified by parental influence. By some vile men, such as yet infest society in great abundance, he was enticed to places for drinking and gambling. Well nigh did his musical talent, in this instance, prove the occasion of his ruin. Under the admonitions of the Spirit of God, he was soon rescued from those places of degradation.

Soon after, he was taken very ill of a fever, from which his friends despaired of his recovery. He

began to reflect upon his religious interests. Beyond the grave there was for him neither light nor hope. In the deep anguish of a soul, conscious of a want of preparation for the exchange of worlds, he vowed, if his life should be spared, to devote the rest of his days to the service of God. His vows, like all others made to postpone present duty, were made only to be broken. Upon his recovery, though no longer found in the company of gamblers, there were few balls within his reach without his presence. In mere pleasure he sought for happiness.

For the age of twenty-one he looked forward with those bright anticipations which are the invariable ushers of disappointments correspondingly sad. A gloom overtook this pleasure-seeker, as, sooner or later, all such are overtaken. It was so marked that his father and other friends inquired for its origin. To them he returned almost any answer but the true one, a want of communion with his Maker. Vainly he pursues the same course, though his mental night becomes more and more dismal.

In his twenty-third year, [March, 1803,] he was married to Joanna, daughter of Captain Josiah Wallace, of Cape Elizabeth. Both with hearty good will left their pleasure-going associations to seek for happiness in the pursuit of wealth. With good prospects he entered upon business in his native town. But success in worldly good cannot banish a sense of internal poverty.

During his twenty-fourth year, under the pressure of his unhappy spirit, he betook himself to prayer for

the first time in his life. This only revealed to him more clearly his sad want of conformity to the divine law. Sin revived in him with unwonted power. His hopes died. But, instead of applying to a crucified and risen Christ to deliver him from the death in which his spirit was struggling, he thought to banish his wretchedness by fleeing to the company of those who spoke of the Savior only to deride. Such, however, is God's mercy, that his Spirit, to increase conviction, often employs the very means to which the sinner resorts to escape from it altogether, and thus leads him who was bent upon destruction to that repentance not to be repented of. Take some illustrations.

In the winter of the twenty-sixth year of his age, Mr. Phinney, with the express design of gaining a respite from his convictions, took great pains to devote one day to the kind of company before named. Friday night he dismissed his school. Having engaged to accompany him a neighbor who, upon every convenient opportunity, was accustomed to become intoxicated, he went on Saturday morning to Portland, a few miles distant. There they met a large company of glee companions. They all gave themselves up to bacchanalian revelry. Of this company Mr. Phinney was leader and life. Calling himself Paul, Junior, he delivered mock sermons, and engaged in mock theological debates with some of those who so much disgrace the cause of Christ, known as backsliders. On their way home that evening his drunken associate

was converted into a real preacher. "Clement," said he, "your wickedness to-day has fairly frightened me." This remark carried to the heart of his hearer conviction, no less pungent than that experienced by John Bunyan, when a wicked woman said to him, that he "was the ungodliest fellow for swearing that she ever heard in all her life." "That day," to use Mr. Phinney's own words, "was the worst of my life. I can scarcely recur to it without a shudder."

Having spent most of two nights and the intervening Sabbath in great distress of mind, he was on his way Monday morning to his school. While passing through a woody vale that seemed to his excited imagination a chosen place for Divine manifestations, he hears a voice which, though deep in the recesses of his own heart, seems to him to come from above. "Whither," cried the voice of the Eternal, "whither, O young man, art thou bound?" "To destruction," he involuntarily responds. "Why press on to that destiny," said the voice, "why not turn and live?" "Lord help," said he, "and I will."

He still procrastinated and still suffered. How the day passed he cannot remember. But he well remembers that a release from cares and the solemn hours of night brought him to a full consciousness of his wretched condition.

At the close of this term he accepted an invitation to take charge of a school at Standish Neck, within himself again resolving, when separated from his wicked associates, to pay his vows. He prepared

himself thus to learn by bitter experience that truth of the Bible, so hard for us all to learn, "Behold, now is the day of salvation."

"It is a poor relief we gain
To change the place but not the pain."

By contract he was to board in the family of John Plaisted. He wished to board in that quiet Christian family the better to carry into effect his resolutions. When he arrived he found that his evil fame had preceded him. Mrs. P. consented to take him into the family only till other arrangements could be made.

He commenced his school, and in a few days his pupils, as usual, became warmly attached to him. Among them was an adopted son of his hostess. The time came for the change. The son plead with the mother in his teacher's behalf. The teacher determined to stand upon the contract or leave the school. All the children of the district declared for their teacher, and Mrs. P. herself had seen nothing out of the way in her boarder. It is scarcely necessary to add that, as in most cases, the children carried the day, and the school continued.

Sometimes Mr. Phinney strove to derive from conversation with Mrs. P., some light concerning the way of life. She mistrusts in him only a desire to play the sanctimonious part for his own amusement, and, therefore, afforded him very little instruction. For the same purpose he attended prayer meetings, but with like success. He was regarded as one who came in merely to spy out the liberty of Christians, and, therefore, they took the precaution to change meetings appointed for vocal prayer into those of the

most approved Quaker style. The faith of such Christians never removes mountains.

In the same town, though a few miles distant, resided Sargeant Shaw, a Christian to whom living and walking "in the Spirit," imported something more than attention to forms and dogmas. He believed the Holy Spirit prompted him to visit Mr. Phinney for religious conversation. He obeyed the inward call, notwithstanding some of his friends urged him not to expose himself to the ridicule of "the wicked teacher." He arrived at Mr. Plaisted's a little before the teacher was expected to return. As soon as he heard him he hastened to meet him. "Mr. Phinney," said he, "I have come to converse with you on the subject of religion." "I am glad to see you on that errand," said Mr. Phinney, adding, "I greatly feel the need of religion." He related in full to Mr. Shaw his trials of mind.

This visit gave great strength to the Christian, and to the seeker a determination never to yield till he should experience the pardoning mercy of Christ. Should we always be as prompt to obey the Spirit's call as was Mr. Shaw, how often might we act the part of an Ananias to some groping Paul. Though God speaks from the sky to awaken in the human heart a deep yearning for salvation, he leaves it to his written word and to Christians to give specific directions.

The next Saturday after this visit, while Mr. Phinney was on his way to Gorham to spend the Sabbath with his family, he was overtaken by one of his companions. "Clement," said he, "what makes you look

so solemn?" The unhesitating reply was, "I am seeking God." To his family's inquiries he made similar reply. Sabbath evening while at singing school, (for he was accustomed to teach such,) a very profane man, during an intermission, roughly addressed him as to his seriousness, but the candid reply soon checked the spirit of ridicule. Here is one whose soul is in earnest; he cares not how many or who know that he is seeking for redemption through Christ. Many a one brought near to the kingdom of heaven loses his soul, for want of resolution to face the sneer of some worthless associate.

May [1806] had made the earth glad and gay before he entered upon the last week of his term; but still there was yet no joy in his heart. He felt, as he remarked this week to one of his pupils, that he was "a poor lost sinner." But to his sad heart joy was approaching. He had lost all dependence upon himself. He was wholly intent upon mercy through Christ. Slumber had forsaken his eyelids. As at the midnight hour he wrestled in prayer the burden of his guilt passed away. A glorious light burst upon his soul and filled it with a divine ecstasy. He waited not till morning to communicate the glad intelligence to the Christian family in which he was boarding. Together, till break of day, they praised and prayed.

This morning, as he passed along the shores of a beautiful lake to a grove where, in his darkness, he had often prayed and wept bitter tears of repentance, it seemed to him that literally "old things" had passed away, and all things become "new." All things

seemed to partake of his own joy. The bright waters wear a new smile; the birds have new songs; the groves are filled with the presence of a life-giving Deity.

In a day or two he entered his school for the last time. He felt much more like praying with his pupils, and exhorting them to flee to Christ, than attending to his ordinary duties. He commenced his accustomed routine, but soon the scene was changed. One of the pupils while reading began to shed tears at the thought of parting so soon with her teacher. Many from kindred feelings soon imitated her. The teacher found himself unable to restrain his tears. He spent the remaining hour in accordance with his own feelings. "Though more than forty years have passed," said one of those pupils the other day, "I have not forgotten that scene. I never shall. We all wept." Years afterward Mr. Phinney had the privilege of reaping fruit of that day's sowing.

Dear reader, you have seen in this case the sinner strive to sear his conscience by plunging deeper and deeper into sin. But such is the nature of the soul of man, that it can never be at rest till reconciled to God. In a state of alienation it has tribulation, but in Christ it has peace. May that peace be yours, evermore.

CHAPTER II.

FROM HIS CONVERSION TO HIS UNION WITH THE CHURCH.

UPON Mr. Phinney's return from Standish, the news of his conversion soon spread among his neighbors, and furnished them with a theme for not a little conversation. Many of his former associates took early occasion to call upon him, that they might converse with one after his conversion, who before, had so often made them merry by his witticisms in regard to religion; and, when they found him who once "had the legion, in his right mind," they were not a little astonished. When they left, instead of the idle curiosity which had prompted their calls, a wholesome conviction of their need of a similar change, had possession of their minds; and one of the number soon submitted to God.

Though for no good reason he delayed joining the church, he exercised his influence in awakening the consciences of others, and his own soul made rapid advancement in the new life. But he could not long remain in this condition in safety; for soon he began to feel the need of sympathy and encouragement from others, both for his own progress, and for his highest usefulness toward others. On the other hand he began to fear, that if he should join the church, and be faithful to the grace already operating in his heart, he would be called to a life more public than he desired. Here he faltered. His zeal departed. He