

CHAPTER III.

FROM THE TIME OF HIS ADMISSION TO THE CHURCH TO HIS FIRST TOUR AS AN EVANGELIST.

AFTER Mr. Phinney joined the church, his life was an epistle known and read of all, as that of the faithful, consistent Christian. Many, as soon as received to the church, seem to settle down in a life of indifference and selfishness, as though saying to themselves, "Now that we are saved we have no more to do." — Not so with Mr. Phinney. He always seemed to be on the alert to turn every opportunity to good account in his Master's service. Often did he hold prayer meetings, which, like that noticed in the previous chapter, resulted in the conversion of sinners. He always seemed to have a word of encouragement for his fellow Christian, and a heart yearning for the salvation of sinners. In protracted meetings he soon became a very efficient laborer, both by reason of his singing and his unction in prayer and exhortation. At the earnest solicitations of ministers, he sometimes accompanied them to neighboring towns to assist in these meetings. Before him the field of usefulness and influence constantly enlarged, as indeed it does before every faithful Christian. To every true child of God the Savior says, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you;" and every such one, whatever may be his calling, has, in reality, nothing to attend to but his heavenly mission.

In 1812, he moved from his native town with the design of residing in the town of Phillips, in another part of Maine, some seventy-five miles distant. But, as the part of the town in which he designed to make his home was very newly settled, he took his family to Farmington, one of the neighboring towns, till he could prepare for their removal. Unexpectedly, however, he spent two winters in teaching. During the second winter he was permitted to see a great revival, which owed its origin, in great part, no doubt, to his prayers.

As many of his pupils were young gentlemen and young ladies, and almost every one impenitent, his heart was pained from day to day as he saw them heedlessly pressing their way to ruin. He carried the burden of his heart to the Lord in prayer. Soon he was permitted to see the work of the Lord begin among his pupils, and spread among others till there was gathered in a great harvest of souls.

One evening four of his pupils, young ladies, paid him a visit at his house. After a few minutes had passed he turned the conversation, with a facility almost his own, to religious subjects. His sprightly visitors soon found themselves conversing with great ease, upon topics concerning which they had been scarcely able hitherto to frame a sentence. They conversed freely with their teacher of their own mental states, which they had before held as a profound secret. When he affectionately urged upon them their duty immediately to seek the Savior, he only gave utterance to their own convictions. After

he had offered an ardent petition at the throne of grace in their behalf, they, upon knees that had never before bowed in prayer, besought mercy for themselves.

Next morning, though no report of what had occurred at the teacher's house had reached the school, it seemed at least to Mr. Phinney, to be unusually solemn. One of the young ladies above noticed, appeared so different from what she was accustomed to, that one of her companions at noon inquired for the cause. The prompt reply to her inquiring friend was, "I have been praying to the Savior to pardon my sins, and my mind has been filled with peace." This circumstance was soon understood by all the school, and added much to its solemnity.

Another young lady was so deeply impressed with the importance of religion, that she went home weeping for her sins. Her father, a Universalist, sarcastically said to her, "Have you been whipped to-day, my daughter?" "I am a poor lost sinner," said she; "I must perish unless forgiven through Christ." The father replied, "I expected just such work when Phinney was employed; I'll see to this matter." Giving vent to his passion in profane oaths, he left the house, as if about to seek and annihilate the praying teacher. Before he could reach the teacher's residence his passion, despite all his efforts to nurse it, partly subsided. On the other hand, the teacher, all unconscious of his danger, received his neighbor with his usual good humor. By this time his wrathful neighbor had not the courage to make known his errand.

Soon, Mr. Phinney, with the facility before noticed, gave a religious turn to the conversation. He proceeded to narrate his own experience; his former unsatisfied longings for bliss; his vain search for it in pleasure and worldly good; his vain attempts to hush the voice of his conscience; his resort at last to Christ; the manner in which the Savior had dried up the fountains of wretchedness within him, and filled his soul with a Divine peace. With a part of this experience the unhappy hearer had formed a bitter acquaintance; for the other he had sighed in vain; so that Mr. Phinney's exhortation failed not to reach his heart. During the night he told his wife that Mr. Phinney had laid bare his heart; that he could not live; but "if I do not die," he added, "do not tell any body what I say."

The wife, who was a Christian, feared not her husband's immediate death; nor could she hardly hope for his conversion; he wanted the Christian's comfort without the Christian's character.

The next day he revealed to one of his neighbors the very things which he had desired should be kept in such sacred confidence. Better still, twenty-four hours from the time he went to pour out his wrath upon the innocent teacher, he was in the prayer meeting, confessing his sins; and only a day or two later, he was heard in a similar meeting, praising God, and exhorting his associates to flee to Christ. His heart rejoicing in the Savior's salvation, his head was soon freed from the errors of Universalism.

This proved the beginning of better days in Farm-

ington. Others besides the one noticed, who, at the time the revival begun, exercised the spirit of persecution, were converted before it closed. Many of Mr. Phinney's pupils were among the converts. This work resulted in the organization of a church at F. under the direction of Elder Samuel Hutchins.

How happy would it be for us all as Christians, if from day to day we enjoyed such a fulness of Christ's precious love, as to be able spontaneously to improve every opportunity to awaken in the hearts of the impenitent a sense of their spiritual necessities, and of the Savior's ability and willingness to meet every want! God could then consistently make us the honored instruments of leading many precious souls to His Beloved Son. Most efficiently, too, should we then contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. There are, doubtless, other methods of overcoming heresies, but surely no other is so successful as this. The adversary would always expect us to be engaged in tearing down his kingdom; nor would he be disappointed.

In 1814, after this revival closed, Mr. Phinney fulfilled his intention of making his home in Phillips, in which place we shall see the Lord had a precious work for him to accomplish. Wherever the true Christian is, whether in the forest or temple, if he will, he may be engaged in his heavenly Father's business.

The part of Phillips in which Mr. Phinney resided was, as before noticed, very new. There had been no religious meetings held for a long time. The Sab-

bath was almost unknown. The day which others observed as such, was there devoted to the ordinary occupations of the week, save that here and there one seemed, by his hunting and fishing, to remember that the Sabbath had come. But into the midst of the dwellers there God had sent one by whom he was soon to confer upon them not only the observance of the external Sabbath, but that divine communion also, which is the earnest of the "nobler rest above."

This servant of God found, like one of old, that his spirit could have no rest, being vexed from day to day by the conversation of the wicked—he could have no rest at all events, till he made efforts for their reformation. As at Farmington, so now, he carried his burdened heart to God in prayer, only with greater importunity. At length he appointed a prayer meeting at the house of one of his neighbor's. For a while only two or three attended; still he persevered.

It seems that his neighbors stayed away from these meetings by concert, in order to discourage this attempt to establish the worship of God in their midst. How the human mind, in a state of disobedience, dreads the light of truth. Finding this effort fail, they attempted to break up the meetings in the following manner: As hitherto they stayed away by concert, so now they all attended with one accord. Ladies and gentlemen with one consent kept up their vain conversation and mirth till the time appointed for prayer, with the design of inducing their Christian neighbor to give up his prayer meeting, and to join them in their visit. To add to his embarrassment, the ladies

seemed determined not to desist from their industry at sewing and knitting. Little did they understand the spirit that they had to deal with. Despite every hinderance, falling upon his knees in their midst, he began to pray. Such was his unction in prayer, and such the point and power of his address following prayer, and, most of all, such the depth and earnestness of his emotions as indicated in song, that the spirit of levity and opposition not only was banished, but very solemn impressions were made upon all present. Before the meeting closed, not only did some for the first time confess their sins, but comparatively a large share of them, to the astonishment of Mr. Phinney and each other, confessed that they were wandering prodigals.

The following incident heightened the interest of the meeting: During the day, Mr. H., confessedly a backslider, spent his time in business with Mr. Phinney. Toward evening the latter remarking that it was about time to prepare for prayer meeting, invited his neighbor to attend; but he declined, assigning as a reason that if he should attend, he should lose his disposition to go to law with his neighbor H., with whom he had a quarrel. In thus assigning in words such a reason, he became too distinctly conscious of his rebellion to God to remain at peace. He admitted too much light into the dark prison house of sin in which he was trying to incarcerate his soul forever. He could no longer hush her complaining notes. At a late hour, as if despite his efforts to the contrary, he made his way to the meeting. He arrived just in

time to hear another prodigal confess his wickedness and degradation in consequence of departing from his Father's house. This was too much; he could no longer keep silence. With tears he confessed his sins, spoke of his former happiness as a Christian, and concluded by relating the manner in which God had employed the wicked excuse assigned to Mr. Phinney as the means of rebuking his sins. It is scarcely necessary to add that, in this case, the lawyer lost his fees.

These meetings were held from time to time with such good results, that the community, instead of spending Sabbaths like heathen, soon assumed the Christian character. Those who abide in Christ, and Christ's words in them, however humble their sphere, become the means of conferring unbounded blessings upon others. "The wilderness and solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

Though Mr. Phinney had most of his neighbors now to rejoice with him in the mercy of God to sinners through Christ, his heart was not satisfied with the remembrance of past service. The same spirit that induced him to labor in Christ's cause at home, led him to establish prayer meetings in adjoining places, many of which were destitute of any public means of grace. In these meetings his labors, like those at home, were blessed. In these meetings, besides prayer and singing, by the latter of which, many no doubt were induced to attend meeting, who otherwise had spent their Sabbaths in hunting, he

often spoke to considerable length on subjects suggested by passages of Scripture.

But as much as he delighted in these labors, and as much as the Spirit seemed to render his efforts instrumental in the conversion of souls, he had not yet determined to give himself up to the ministry. He was often impressed with a sense of duty so to do; but so keenly did he feel his want of scholastic advantages, that he could but hesitate. Still, as our old preachers were accustomed to say, with a meaning which too few now appreciate, he felt "the wo" resting upon him unless he should devote his life to preaching the gospel. Before this, he had passed, as we have seen, through very severe mental struggles, still, they seemed now to him as nothing, as compared with those pressing upon him in regard to his future sphere of labor. His family, owing to the amount of time he had already bestowed upon others, and losses from poor crops, and the dishonesty of land agents, was in a sad plight to be left without the means afforded by his daily toil. His wife at this time, moreover, found it difficult to consent to give up her husband. But his chief trial was to obtain his own consent.

Under various influences, he was thus kept month after month, in a state of indecision. Sometimes almost consenting in his own mind to yield to what impressed itself upon him as a divine call to a sacred work, he would devote himself with redoubled exertions to leave his family in comfortable circumstances; then he would try to cast off his impressions, as being

temptations from the adversary. As in most cases of indecision, calamity succeeded calamity. Every day he found it more difficult to leave his family than the day before. The world seemed to be nothing but gloom. By his hesitation and want of exercising sufficient faith in God, he lost for a season his own spiritual comfort.

At length he found grace to cast all his burdens upon the Lord, resolving, at all events, to obey what seemed to him the highest call. As to the present, he determined upon making a visit to Westport and Georgetown.* He had long felt deeply impressed with a sense of duty to proclaim there the blessed gospel. When thus fully decided, his peace returned, even to an unaccustomed degree. His wife, also, becoming convinced that he was called of God to warn sinners to flee from the wrath to come, cheered him in these trying hours.

The following extract of a letter not long since written concerning his state of mind at the time of which we have been speaking, cannot fail to interest the reader:

"I was," says he, "one evening sitting with my family, feeling under the most solemn impressions in reference to leaving my family, and itinerating, when the following words were suggested to my mind. So was the tune in which I sang them. Before retiring, I committed the words to writing:

* These places, in the Life of Randall, are called respectively, Squam Island, and Parker's Island.

THE PREACHER'S CALL

(COMPOSED 1815.)

The blessed Jesus, lovely Savior,

He has called on me to go ;

In the vineyard I must labor,

Or on me must come "the wo."

Farewell, dear wife and little children,

The Gospel Trumpet I must blow,

And sound salvation to poor sinners,

For the word to me is "Go."

O, hark, poor sinners, will you hear me ?

O, come, dear sinners, now repent,

For the blessed Savior calls you,

'Tis by Him to you I'm sent ;

O, come, poor sinners, be entreated !

Say, will you have my Christ, or no !

To you my errand is directed,

And still, the word to me is "Go."

O, come, backsliders, who have wandered,

Come home, come home, to Father's house ;

Come home, come home, you wandering children,

Come home, come home, and pay your vows.

The blessed Savior now invites you,

All things are ready now I know,

And the fatted calf is killed,

And still the word to me is "Go."

Ye little lambs of my Redeemer,

Ye who feed in pastures green,

Follow, follow Christ your Savior,

Ever in his light be seen ;

Ever mind and love each other,

And shun the paths that lead to wo,

And travel on the way together ;

So farewell, brethren, I must "Go." "

CHAPTER IV.

HIS FIRST TOUR AS AN EVANGELIST.

BEING now satisfied as to duty, Mr. Phinney left home to preach the gospel in the islands named in our last chapter. *To preach*, we say, if it be lawful to intimate that one may possibly be a preacher who has received neither a human license nor a human ordination: who, perhaps, has neither heard of "Apostolic Succession," nor been graduated at any Cambridge or Oxford. He of whom we speak, had at this time, none of the qualifications these confer. The call of a world perishing in sin, was his only license; and the promptings of his own regenerate heart, his only ordination; the Holy Spirit, sending life-currents through his heart, was to him in place of priestly benedictions; and a familiarity with God's Word, acquired by the daily study of King James's translation, in place of Ancient Classics. Of education, in the common acceptation, he possessed only that modicum which, by revealing deficiencies, banishes the courage, or rather rashness, of ignorance, and confers a becoming modesty.

By necessity, not by choice, when he set out on this Quixotic expedition, as to many it well may seem, he almost literally kept the injunction given to others, to take "no money in their purse." He rode no famous Rosinante, so romantic as to half partake his master's zeal in fasting and enduring hardships to