

## CHAPTER VI.

## HIS ORDINATION, AND TRIALS IN REGARD TO THE SUPPORT OF HIS FAMILY.

It is proper to inform the reader that hereafter we shall not try, and should we try, we should be entirely unable, to trace the events of Mr. Phinney's life in the order of their occurrence. Sometimes we shall be wholly without dates. If any feel disposed to complain on this account, let it be remembered that Mr. Phinney kept no journal; that the writer has been compelled to obtain one fact here and another there; that a little more than a year since there was not a single shred of writing in regard to the events he relates, save what is employed in the next chapter. We have no further apology to offer.

In the last chapter, we have seen Mr. Phinney, however without design, fairly enter upon the labors of an evangelist. He henceforth expected to devote his life to that calling. Having disposed of his farm in Berlin, he, in compliance with the solicitation of many of his friends, moved in the autumn of 1816 to Standish Neck. Soon after this the Gorham Quarterly Meeting held its session in the place of his residence. Requests for his ordination came in from several churches. After the accustomed examination, he was duly set apart to the work of the ministry at the same session of the Quarterly Meeting.

It is said that the occasion of his ordination was one of deep interest. It took place, it will be remembered, where he was converted; here, too, he had taught; and here the Spirit of God had been poured out upon his labors for the conversion of his pupils and others. Besides, the ordination sermon from the passage, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the truth," delivered by Elder Joseph White, was one of the happiest efforts of that able minister; and, still more, the ordination prayer was made by Elder Z. Leach, a man who, in his supplications to the throne of grace, always seemed to approach into the very presence of his heavenly Father. More than one at this day speak of his remarkable prayer on this occasion. At its close there was not a dry eye of saint or sinner present.

From the time of his ordination, Mr. Phinney resided in Standish, Gorham and Scarborough, till 1824, or 1825, at which time he moved to Harrison. During the period just named, besides the towns above mentioned, he preached in Portland, Gray, Buxton, Harrison, and many other places, his preaching almost always resulting in revivals. Having been consecrated to the sacred work, he did not feel at liberty to relinquish it, whatever might be the pressure of poverty or the calls of his family. He assured his family as from God, that they should never want for bread while he pursued his calling faithfully as a minister.

We have seen when he began to preach he fared peculiarly well, for those times, in his pecuniary interests. But on this score there was experience in reserve for him that put his faith to severe trial. A few illustrations from his life will not prove unacceptable.

At one time, while his family was residing in Scarborough, he was engaged in a revival at Gray. One day he began to feel uneasy concerning the welfare of his family, notwithstanding they were in the midst of brethren on whom he had bestowed not a little labor. His brethren in Gray tried in vain to dissuade him from leaving the revival at such a crisis. He must go; he feared they might be in want of provisions. One brother said, "Well, if you must go, I will give you a bushel of meal;" others gave him meat and other necessaries. He took them upon his horse and started. When he was almost within sight of his house, he met his wife and children. "Well dears," said he, "where are you all going?" "We have started," said she, "to find our dinner; you told us as long as you preached we should never want for food." "You have had your breakfast, have you not?" "Yes; but we have nothing for our dinner." Putting his hand upon the bag of meal, he said, "Here is our dinner; we shall never want for food."

When he returned to Gray, the brethren of that place sent one of their number to take provisions to Mr. Phinney's family. When he arrived, he asked Mrs. Phinney if she thought it right for a man to

devote all his labors to the good of others, while he left his own family exposed to destitution. She had been tried on this point and had given up her husband to follow what she believed to be the path of duty; she replied, therefore, "It is right to obey God." This good brother, no doubt, returned with clearer ideas of faith than he came, and the wonder is that such things did not suggest to his mind and that of others, that it is important to adopt some systematic way of supplying the wants of ministers and their families. But when a denomination commences with false views upon this subject, the covetous are attracted to it, and what is a thousand times worse, those naturally generous become covetous, as if in obedience to religion.

Once certain brethren, prompted by their better impulses, determined to secure a piece of land and build a house for him. The house was begun. He labored upon it himself; perhaps he laid out some money upon it. He and his family began to dream of home and comforts. But stronger impulses overtook these kind brethren, and of course they were under no contract to fulfil any obligations to a preacher. "Cochranism" swallowed them up. What now is to become of the preacher who has been acting upon their promises? He was simply to "take care of himself."

However, he came out of this storm better off than could be expected, as the bare frame of his house was assigned to him, in part payment for the labor and means he had expended in preparing what he

expected was to be his new home. Money enough had been sent to him by unknown hands to buy him a horse, to enable him to travel to his appointments. At length he disposed of his horse, to procure a piece of land, on which the frame now in his possession might be placed. To this piece of land, which was in Gorham, some kind brethren of that town moved his house. He was now well off; he had his land and the frame of a house; but how could his family live there!

But he continued to preach. On his way, on foot, now, of course, to Gray, to fill some of his appointments, he was in Windham driven by a storm into the house of Peter White, brother of Joseph. As he entered the house with a portmanteau on his shoulder, all dripping with rain, Mr. White welcomed him, saying, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; you look like one of the old apostles."

How often some similar commendation is the end of care, with many, for the faithful preacher. They admire and praise the self-denying labors of their preacher. They do more; they trust to the goodness of their preachers to take them to heaven in their covetousness. But not so with Mr. White. He was a man of works as well as words. If the preachers of that day had trained him in the false idea that the church member is never to support the cause of Christ by any systematic efforts; if they had trained him to do his part only by impulse, only when he "felt to give," he was one of those rare men who often "felt," and freely gave. He did not suffer Mr.

Phinney to go the rest of the way on foot. He remembered, too, that the preacher had the frame of a house that needed covering, and a family that could not always live on air. He looked to it that a week did not pass till the family were well supplied with provisions; that lumber and mechanics were on hand to prepare them a comfortable habitation. Not that he did all himself. But when he had done his part, he knew how to stir up others—a kindly office very important, and yet easily accomplished by the man who never hangs back himself. From Windham and Moderation, from Gorham and other places, came lumber, men and money. The work was soon done.

It is not difficult to see that such an event caused no little excitement. It is easily imagined that many, who never before had thought of doing anything by way of supplying the wants of their preacher, partaking of the general enthusiasm, would not on this occasion be found wanting. Among these, one example must not be passed over in silence. One good brother of the church, though possessed of a good property, still never before had *anything to spare*; but now he did not withhold his hand from giving. Though he lived some two or three miles distant from Mr. Phinney's new house, one day, near twelve o'clock, he was seen approaching on horse-back. When he came up he remarked to Mr. Phinney, that he thought he must do something for him, and so had come to bring him and his two workmen their dinner. It would do you good to hear Mr. Phinney tell with

what pride and satisfaction the old gentleman delivered the precious morsel which constituted "his part."

Such was the pressure of poverty at another time, that Mr. Phinney, yielding to the solicitations of others, undertook, in addition to preaching, to teach a district school. This is the only time he ever consented to turn aside in any degree from his great calling. In this step he was unhappy; duty, he feared, after all the wisdom of his friends, called to another field. Before the term upon which he entered was half out, a good man dying in another town, [Scarborough,] made it as his last request that Mr. Phinney should preach his funeral sermon. In compliance with this request, the preacher dismissed his pupils, not to return to school till they heard from him. He never returned to the school; the funeral proved the occasion for the commencement of a great revival, which he did not feel at liberty to leave, however soon the utmost destitution might overtake him.

It was good for the progress of truth that the false principles in regard to the support of the ministry, early adopted in the denomination, so soon led ministers confessedly faithful into trial and suffering. Suffering is to our stupid race the great teacher of progress. The lessons of revelation, nature and common sense are neglected, till the neglect itself, by consequent sufferings, so enforces these lessons, that at last they are heeded. So in this case. Some portion of our ministry, by the severe pressure of want, were, at an early day, convinced of their error. New

ideas in regard to the support of the ministry thus gained a place in many minds. A strife between the conservative and progressive doctrines arose. For the last fifty years, the truth has been gaining. In this important reform, we shall see Mr. Phinney has done his part.

This would be a good place, if Mr. Phinney would permit it, to give the particulars of his greatest pecuniary trial. For the present, at least, it must suffice to say, that it was of such a nature that it *compelled* him to spend the winter of 1819—20 in Portland. But he was not there in vain; as under any trial he still continued to preach the gospel. His preaching in this city resulted in great good; but for the present we pass.

A year or two before this he went to Moderation in Buxton, to hold a series of meetings. The result was a revival, that not only proved a rich blessing to the church there, but it resulted in the conversion of not a few in Hollis.

During these meetings, Mr. Phinney relates, that one evening there knelt some thirteen or fourteen persons who were seeking mercy through Christ. Some were not more than thirteen or fourteen years of age, others were of middle age, and others still were, by the weight of years, trembling on the verge of the grave. All but the youngest were soon rejoicing in redeeming love. But he seemed sometimes driven almost to despair. At length, his soul rejoiced with the rest. Whence was this struggle, this despair?

He had slandered a neighbor; he was unwilling to confess; it was only a slight offence; surely, there could be no need of confession; but it was in vain he attempted to climb up some other way. At last he yielded this point and was happy.

“Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life.” The whole heart must be yielded; there can be no reserve. Confession and restoration, if within our ability, however mortifying, however trying, must not be neglected by those who would enter into “life.” Many, by neglecting smaller crosses than the one just noticed, have gone on from sin to sin, till at last they have been numbered in that unhappy company that shall at length hear even the Lover of sinners say, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that DOETH the will of my Father in heaven.”

Among the converts of this revival were Andrew T. Hobson, since a minister, and others of the same family, still pillars in the church of Christ. “A number of the converts of that meeting, both of Buxton and Hollis,” says Mr. Phinney, “are now in heaven; a few remain unto this ‘present’; but a few more faithful days, and they and this poor dust shall be gathered to our fathers, and our spirits be happy in the company of those gone before us. Will our children fill our places in the church?”

Mr. Phinney was never much given to tears. But as he thus recurred to the associations of other days,

and looked forward with the Christian’s hope to the renewal of friendships in heaven, the tears stole over his furrowed cheek. They were not tears of sorrow. The Christian has comfort the world knows not of.

Moderation is among the few places of Mr. Phinney’s early labors, that it has been the privilege of the writer to visit, and his visit there will always be remembered with pleasure. The church of this place has been peculiarly blessed with faithful pastors. Not only has it been blessed, therefore, to the conversion of many souls, but is always ready to lend the helping hand to others. The billows of “Cochranism,” and other later delusions, have beaten in vain. The faithful Shepherd has protected it. Still, as we write of this place, there is a sense of sadness with our pleasure: for there may be seen the grave of Seth F. Chaney, that star whose light had only begun to beam with blessings upon that church, when it was eclipsed by death.\* But on this painful occasion this church were worthy of such a pastor; for though he died far away from them, they did not rest till his remains were sleeping in their church-yard.

We must in our next chapter follow our preacher through a new class of trials.

\* Bro. Chaney was ordained pastor of this church in June, 1842, and deceased October, 1843.