

## CHAPTER IX.

## TO HIS REMOVAL TO BUCKFIELD.

IN 1824, Mr. Phinney moved to Harrison. The brethren of that place built him a house; he undertook a pastoral charge, and his labors were apparently blessed; but we never find him long at home, nor happy in constant labors with one church. He says of himself that he could never be anything but what he is as an evangelist, "Not even a good cooper." Though we are not obliged to agree with him in this view of himself, we should appreciate his wisdom and goodness in pursuing so perseveringly the duties of the sphere to which he is so manifestly adapted.

About the only time of which we shall have occasion to speak of any suffering of his from ill health is this: Soon after he settled in Harrison, by excessive labors and continual exposures, he became much reduced in strength. The influenza then setting in, caused him to fear that he should soon be called away from the church on earth. When he could no longer labor in public, he was faithful in his private exhortations to brethren, begging of them, as they loved the Lord, to cast aside all indifference, and serve God with undivided hearts.

While he was yet feeble, being scarcely able to speak above a whisper, a Quarterly Meeting occurring at Moderation, he could not deny himself the privilege afforded by it of meeting his fellow laborers

once more on earth. Though he met, on this occasion, not less than fifteen ministers, the moderator exhorted him with the rest, as the custom then was, "to look for duty." After preliminaries, he arose to deliver the message that rested upon his own heart with great weight. At first he could scarcely be heard, but at length, his voice becoming clear, he proceeded in his discourse with freedom and power. His sickness was gone. When the eye is single to some great purpose, when the soul is swallowed up in self-forgetfulness, man rises above many "ills flesh is heir to."

The last year the Legislature of Maine held its session in Portland, many of his townsmen wished to send him to represent his town in that body. They urged him to take this step, as he could be elected without entering into party strife, and from another motive that sometimes has great force with good men whose families are next door to suffering by poverty, and especially he ought to accept, they thought, this proffered kindness, as he might be of great service by preaching on Sabbaths, during the session, in the city where his preaching had been instrumental in the conversion of so many. Whatever other preachers might think their duty under such pressure, he told his friends that they must look out some other man to "serve tables," as he had given himself entirely "to the ministry of the word." But still, many of his townsmen were determined to elect him, and he only accomplished his own defeat through the efforts of his relatives. Such singleness of devotion to a

worthy object rarely goes unrewarded, even in this life. "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men."

Having thus refused to turn aside from the duties of the ministry, he immediately started on one of his "preaching tours," taking his way through Lewiston and Bowdoin to Richmond. When at Lewiston, he was prevailed upon to attend the funeral solemnities of "the oldest inhabitant." At Bowdoin, he preached a few times with good effect in reviving the church, which he found in a "low condition."

At the close of one of his meetings here, a lady confessed herself to be a backslider. In conversation, after this, one of her neighbors remarked that she was happy to hear such a confession, as it had long been necessary. "It was good," said he, "and there is much more hope of a confessing backslider, than of one who does not apprehend his condition." This remark resulted in the confession and reformation of the self-righteous.

At Richmond, he attended a meeting that lasted several days, appointed for Christians of every name, to unite in supplicating God to revive his work. After this meeting closed, in which he labored with all his heart, he continued to preach in the same place. The Spirit of God began to be poured out, but, as the ground had always been occupied by other denominations, sectarian whisperings were begun, which, of course, always endanger God's work. Mr. Phinney had seen enough of human nature to know that

prompt steps must be taken to prevent the progress of this evil. In the public assembly, alluding to the danger, he therefore said, "My Master never sent me to throw clubs, nor to proselyte, but he sent me to preach his gospel. If, in this meeting, minister or layman attempts to proselyte, let him be marked as a transgressor. Permit each to follow his own preferences, but let us all, as brethren in Christ, work together for the salvation of sinners." Such statements are not unfrequently made by the veriest proselyters the earth ever sustained, still, to keep their spirit in its fulness is always indicative of a soul raised by Christ's indwelling love far above the mean sectarian self-seeking that too often appears among so called ambassadors of God.

After this, all worked together in unity, and the result was, one of the most glorious and extensive revivals in which Mr. Phinney has been permitted to labor. It spread to many towns. Elders Robinson, Allen Files, Samuel Hathorn and Andrew Rollin, were faithful and successful laborers in this revival. And as fruits of it, several churches were gathered.

Soon after Mr. Phinney commenced labors in Richmond, being called upon to deliver a funeral discourse, he selected as his text the words, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." There was present a large audience, and his words fell with power upon the hearts of many. Among those deeply convicted was D. R., who was the ringleader of the irreligious in what was then called "the Reed neighborhood," a place then noted for its wickedness, rather

than for its piety. Soon after this, D. R. attended "a raising," and in the evening, was expected to lead in the dance. All were ready and waiting. Oddly enough for him, he hesitated, but being pressed, he exclaimed, "I cannot do it; I have danced long enough over hell; God have mercy on my wicked soul." His earnest words, under such circumstances, were to his companions like a clap of thunder in an unclouded sky. His wife was likewise under conviction, at home. As she thought of the influences to which her husband was exposed that evening, she determined to go for him. She had gone but a little way in her path, which led through the forest, when she heard her husband's voice, and saw by the light of their lanterns several of his companions with him. She hastily returned, and retired to bed. The husband and his company soon arrived. He called up his wife and son; they all cried mightily to God for mercy; the whole family found peace. As they related their experience, it appeared that conviction had fastened upon their minds at the funeral spoken of; the husband had not mentioned his conviction to his wife from fear of her mirth: she had been alike silent from fear of his profanity; and the son from fear of the frowns of both his parents. Often, even the impenitent, might aid each other in finding the true path to happiness, if, instead of the reserve they usually maintain in regard to their own mental states, they should freely and frankly express to each other their desires and aspirations, hopes and fears, in regard to their own religious interests.

Soon, the report spread that God's work had broken out in the "Reed neighborhood." It was strange, but true, and this carried conviction to the hearts of many. Those who considered themselves reprobates, began to hope there was yet mercy for them, if, indeed, the Lord was working in that wicked place. Saturday came, and with it a meeting for inquirers. "Such confession and begging for mercy," says Mr. Phinney, "I never listened to before or since."

After many had made confession of their sins and asked an interest in the prayers of Christians, one lady arose to confess her wrongs toward another, her neighbor; but, concluded in that manner that marks the half-sincere confession, "you, too, have done wrong, and ought to confess." Mr. Phinney, with mildness, promptly rebuked the evil spirit, assuring the possessed, till it was cast out, that she could have "neither part nor lot in this matter." This incident afforded an opportunity of checking that fanatical spirit of confessing in public those things that it is requisite to confess in private to the individuals wronged, or to God alone.

One Sabbath, a C. Baptist minister asked him to preach from the text, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation." This preacher, though entirely blind, had proved himself very useful in Boston; but at length, wine and flattery, that still greater destroyer, especially of preachers, caused him entirely to backslide. In the afternoon, Mr. Phinney announced the words proposed as his text. They made such an impression upon his own mind, that his emotion ren-

dered him unable to proceed: he paused not less than fifteen minutes: indeed, his text constituted mainly his sermon; he was compelled to take his seat; but the very power of God seemed to be in the words as he read them: the whole assembly was moved to tears; then followed a conference, in which each spoke as he was moved by the Holy Spirit, and sinners, publicly confessing God is in you of a truth, cried out, "Men and brethren, what must we do to be saved."

Among the latter class that day was D Waterman, now an able minister of the gospel. He arose and said, "I often hear you Christians say, you have a heaven to go to heaven in: however that may be, one thing I certainly know, that I have a hell to go to hell in. Pray for me, that I may escape, and receive salvation by Christ."

Another impenitent man who was accustomed to ridicule the cause of Christ, went to meeting that day, as he said, to get a half dollar's worth of religion. He went home weeping, begging for mercy through the Savior.

There is ground to hope that the backslidden preacher who proposed the text, was also benefited, as he was subsequently restored, and lived a life of faithfulness.

In Litchfield, D. P., a young man, who attended the meetings, appeared for many days to be deeply convicted, but he could find no peace. He thought an associate had wronged him, and he determined to avenge himself. In this state, it was of course im-

possible for him to be forgiven. He attempted to pray in the language of the Lord's prayer. When he came to the words, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," he could go no further. He felt he was calling down the vengeance of God upon his own head. He was at work at midnight in a saw-mill when he gave up the spirit of revenge. So great was his joy, that he hastened to his father's house, where Mr. Phinney was passing the night, to tell him what God had done for him.

Two or three of his fellow-laborers, under whose care the meetings were mostly conducted in Litchfield, rejected the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Soon, however, the converts demanded baptism at their hands. The preachers called upon Mr. Phinney to baptize the converts, as they did not like to say to them, "Baptism is an idle ceremony." He utterly refused, urging them at the same time, to attend to their own duties. This resulted in the conversion and the obedience of the preachers.

The closing scene of this revival in Richmond was impressive. After the candidates had been baptized, they, and the multitude in attendance, took position upon the banks of the stream, around the preacher, as he stood upon an elevation of land. After he explained briefly his views as to a few fundamental principles of the gospel, he desired those who wished to be formed into a church to come forward. They, taking each other by the hand, formed a circle about him. He knelt and prayed. They became a church, and appointed their officers. Then he said, "I have

now labored with you fifteen weeks, night and day; many here have been almost persuaded to become Christians; to-day I leave you: before I go, I wish to pray once more, especially for such as design now to seek Christ. Let such form a circle within the church." A great many coming forward, knelt around him. Once more the man of God lifted up his voice in prayer in behalf of perishing sinners. "In that prayer," says he, "I was nearer heaven than I ever expect to be again, till I arrive there."

In concluding our account of this revival, it is worthy of remark, that the brethren did not forget that the preacher has temporal wants. They put into the hands of Mr. Phinney, more, by far, than he would have received for "serving tables," had he gone to the Legislature. In this time of declensions, how needful is that faith which trusts that he who feeds "the fowls of the air," will not see his faithful servants suffer. Should more go forth with the same spirit of devotion, with the same single eye, should we not hear less complaint about temporal wants, and instead thereof hear of revivals!

From Richmond he went to Topsham. Here he was invited to preach in the old meeting houses which the congregations had left for new places of worship. He accepted, and the people said the old gospel was preached in the old houses, and they went in multitudes to hear him. The President of Bowdoin College was among his hearers. Those converted, were all added to other denominations, as there was then in that place no F. W. Baptist church.

After a short excursion to Bath, where he was very kindly treated by the C. Baptists, he returned to Topsham, and there protracted his labors. He still advised those converted under his preaching, to unite with the churches already organized. Notwithstanding this truly liberal course, the anger of one of the ministers was stirred against him, and for once Mr. Phinney was accused of something like sectarianism. "The people," said the complainant, "leaving their pastor, go off after you;" and finally charged him with unchristian conduct. "Have you," said Mr. Phinney, "seen anything in my course that leads you to think I am not a Christian?" "I have seen nothing," the other pettishly replied, "that makes me think you are one." Mr. Phinney proposed to have a season of prayer and then to go into a calm investigation of the complaints. But the other would neither pray, nor stay while Mr. Phinney prayed. The interview closed, and Mr. Phinney continued to labor as before. This is in direct contrast with the treatment he has been accustomed to receive, for the most part, from the preachers of other denominations.

In 1827, he preached in the Christian church, in Portland, their pastor, Elder Rand, being ill at that time. A deep interest among the impenitent was soon manifest; many came forward for prayer, and Christians were revived. The revival that commenced under his labors, reached other churches. The Spirit of Christ being manifestly present, those spirits opposed to him, "Cried out, saying, what have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art

thou come hither to torment us before the time?" But despite the spirit of persecution the good work still went on. He also preached occasionally in an adjoining village, to good purpose. In the latter place, in one of his sermons he dwelt upon the necessity of salvation through Christ, enforcing the truth, that by the deeds of the law no flesh "can be justified." A gentleman of influence being present, who by his good works had been striving many years to cast up a highway to heaven, remarked to the preacher, "Often have I heard that subject dwelt upon, but never till now, understood it,—you have made many sad rents in my mantle of morality." "Bless God for that," responded the preacher, "I am glad, for I want to see you clad in the robe of Christ's righteousness." The preacher's wish was gratified.

He speaks of the conversion of Capt. Stockman, in Portland, with great pleasure. At one of the evening meetings, when the opposers of religion had done their best to create disturbance, the invitation being given for the anxious to present themselves at the altar for prayer, the Capt. and his daughter were the first to press forward. The influence of his example did much in turning the tide of public opinion in the right direction. He became a Christian of that class whose life and property preach the power and excellence of redeeming grace. He has gone to his reward.

Mr. Phinney wishes the following account of Richard Relham, with whom he became acquainted in Portland, preserved. Mr. R. was active in this re-

vival. Years before, he had been noted for crime. He once attempted to escape the penalty due to his crime by fleeing from Portland to Canada. Six men in pursuit overtook him, but he would have proved himself too much for them, and made his escape, had not one of them, taking advantage of him, knocked him down with a club. Being captured, he was, upon trial, sent to the State-Prison. In his lonely cell he gave his thoughts to the subject of religion. He yielded his heart to the truth. His cell became a heavenly place in Christ. But on his release, a trial of his faith awaited him. Suspected, despised and feared, he could find no employment. He was suspected the more for professing religion. He was driven almost to desperation by hunger and cold. But he preserved his integrity. He determined to die, rather than preserve his life in misery by crime. A man who had compassion for a fallen brother, meeting him, gave him five dollars, and, what was more, spoke words of true sympathy and encouragement. The unfortunate man persevered. Providence opened the way before him: he soon won the confidence of all who knew him: he not only obtained, by industry, a competence, but he had something to bestow upon the suffering. Let no one despair of salvation through Christ. It will visit the prisoner in his cell, or the prince in his palace, when sought in sincerity.

Mr. Phinney is one of those, who "have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons." He is debtor to all. In this revival he visited merchants and truckmen, rich and

poor alike, to bear them the precious gospel. "It was wonderful to see," says he, "the truckmen weep, as they expressed to me their desire to receive the Savior's mercy." "One day," says he, "I found a merchant at his counter, weeping for his sins: he invited me home with him to converse with himself and family. All were at length converted, and he is now in the ministry."

By this revival, which, it is computed, resulted in the accession of eight or nine hundred members to the various churches, the Christian church was so much augmented, that their place of worship would no longer suffice. Disposing of it, they built the Casco Street church. It seems that such was the prejudice, or what else you please to call it, against instrumental music, that a solemn covenant was entered into never to introduce it into this church. Of course, some soon wanted an organ, and others were as much opposed to it. This circumstance, and, perhaps the want of Christian charity, resulted in the division of the church. One party built the Temple Street church. The other, ultimately becoming involved in debt, sold the Casco Street church to the F. W. Baptists.

The former has always been an evangelical, useful church, notwithstanding the suspicions of some dogmatists, that it is either too long, or too short, for the iron bedstead of their own orthodoxy. In this church, Mr. Phinney has since labored.

The present pastor of this church, Rev. Mr. Brown, wrote, a few months since, as follows: "Elder Phin-

ney came to Portland Nov. 11th, 1836. On the evening of the 14th, four requested prayer. For eight Sabbaths he preached in the morning, and attended many social meetings. \* \* \* He left the city the 10th of Feb. \* \* \* On the 4th of Jan., I found the number of converts was thirty-seven."

Casco Street church is flourishing, and has every prospect of becoming one of the most efficient churches in the denomination. We shall not soon forget the pleasure afforded us by our visits to that church. This church undoubtedly passed to its present position owing to the acquaintance it cultivated with the Free-will Baptists through Mr. Phinney, in his revival labors. From his labors, too, indirectly sprung a valuable church in Topsham. These are only specimens of what might be named, as fruits in greater or less degree, of his labors.

Mr. Phinney speaks in the highest terms of Elder Rand, who has now gone to his reward. "He was," says he, "a warm-hearted and trust-worthy friend, an humble Christian, and an excellent pastor."

In the Fall of 1827, Mr. Phinney visited Limerick, Me., and commenced preaching with the church in that place, and visiting from house to house. The church was in a very low, tried, and discouraged condition. After preaching with them some three months, during which time the church was greatly revived, and there were signs of reformation among the unconverted, Mr. Phinney left, to fill appointments elsewhere, which he had previously made. The next

evening after he left, a prayer meeting was held by the brethren, which was attended by a young man who had been deeply convicted under Mr. Phinney's preaching. In this meeting, he arose and acknowledged, with much emotion, that he felt the need of religion, and was determined to seek it at the loss of all things. Several other young men, who had also been convicted under Mr. Phinney's preaching, soon united with him in seeking God. These soon found the Savior, and a most glorious and solemn revival followed. One or two of the converts were connected with the office of the Morning Star, which was then published in Limerick; and meetings were held by the young converts in the Star office one evening in a week for some months. These meetings were sometimes attended by as many as twenty-five young men, who had either found the Savior or were seeking him, and they were very solemn, powerful and refreshing seasons. Of these young men, some seven or eight subsequently became preachers of the gospel. Among the converts were William Burr, who was employed as the printer of the Star, S. L. Julian, P. S. Burbank, and M. M. Smart. The three last named are now ordained ministers in the Free-will Baptist denomination. The others who became ministers are connected with the Congregational and Calvinistic Baptist churches. The revival continued for several months, and spread through the town, and into the towns adjoining. Large accessions were made to the Free-will Baptist, Congregationalist, and Calvinistic Baptist churches.

Some time before Mr. Phinney's removal to Buckfield, a revival commenced in Bridgeton, under the labors of Elder Samuel Lewis, at that time a licensed preacher.\* Mr. Phinney went to his help. Some who had passed more than their three score and ten years in sin, were, in this revival, brought into the kingdom of Christ; but, a more marked feature of it was, the conversion of the heads of families in middle life. Among those baptized, was George Whitney, since a useful and acceptable preacher. Subsequently, Mr. Phinney and Elder Joseph White, being appointed by the Quarterly Meeting for the purpose, organized a church in this place.

On their way home, Mr. Phinney heard of his father's death. He hastened to the house of mourning. Elder White on this occasion delivered a very impressive sermon. No sooner were the sad rites, in honor of a beloved parent, over, than Mr. Phinney again entered upon his duties as an evangelist.

He mentions that, not far from this time, he held a series of meetings in Sweden. Many were converted, most of whom joined the Methodist church. He was invited to this place by a gentleman of wealth, who had built a meeting house, and given it to the public, and who did not forget the wants of the preacher.

He also mentions in this connection, a revival that occurred in Otisfield. In one of the social meetings here, he observed near him an impenitent lady, weeping. He requested her to express her wishes. "I

\* Since writing the above, Elder Lewis has gone to his reward.

am a sinner," said she, "I want religion." He proposed a season of prayer in her behalf, and when about to kneel, the husband said, "Pray for me; I want religion too." Their conviction was apparently deep, but they did not at once find peace. Mr. Phinney having been absent a few days, upon his return called upon them. The gentleman met him at the door, in great joy, exclaiming, "I've found Jesus, I've found Jesus." It may serve to indicate the change that religion produced upon this money-lover, for such he emphatically was before his conversion, to observe that he said to his visitor on this occasion: "Since I saw you before, I have found out that the houses, lands, and money that I called mine, are the Lord's; I am only his steward over these: what of them do you need in his service?" "If you are the Lord's steward," said the preacher, "obey your Master." He has never forgotten to heed this instruction. Many deny in practice the religion they profess; but, if you are of those who possess it, you are sure to let your "light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

## CHAPTER X.

SKETCHES OF HIS LABORS FROM 1830 TO 1842.

IN 1830, Mr. Phinney moved to Buckfield, under engagement to preach half the time to the church there; the other part of his time, he was to be at liberty to labor as an evangelist. Under his care, the church at Buckfield, it is said, was greatly refreshed; but no further information concerning him, as connected with that place, has been received.

It is well here to mention that, while Mr. Phinney is able to trace with considerable distinctness, the events of his life up to this time, of those of later years, he is able to give only here and there one, and that not with the same fulness as he can those of earlier years. No one can regret more than the writer, that one of an experience so rich and varied, did not keep some account of his life; but, most men who do hard and faithful service in this world, write their history in *deeds alone*. Both reader and writer, must therefore be content with such scanty accounts as we are able to collect. If we take these as *specimens only*, we may learn the spirit and bearing of the man, from them. Only here and there a date can be afforded, and some of these must be regarded only as approximations to the true. The first incident that he mentions, after his removal to Buckfield, is one that gave him great pain. He was engaged, in 1830, in a series of meetings in Phippsburgh, with two min-