

CHAPTER, IV.

1800.

Until his Ordination.

THIS was to these four young men, indeed, a new epoch in their lives, and most solemn in its character. It is hoped and believed, that they felt the awful responsibility connected with this still wider field than what they formerly occupied, of exhibiting specimens of trial on a more public theatre, which might soon decide on their qualifications for investiture with the sacred office of the holy ministry. They were sensible of their own utter incompetency, but that their sufficiency was in Christ. They knew that they had received no part of the ministerial office, which is one and indivisible, but that they had only been allowed, under competent judges, under whose inspection they had voluntarily placed themselves, to change the scene of operations, and still remain on trials before the people, whose calls upon them to labor among them would intimate their approbation. Every man has a natural right to exercise the gifts and talents which God has bestowed upon him. But he is not likely always to be the most impartial judge of the measure of his own qualifications. The dictates of common sense will put this decision into the hands of another. And who can be supposed more competent, in this first instance, to decide on the

subject, than an Ecclesiastical Court, and the community which may wish to appropriate his services. Thus, it will be seen, that licensure confers no official authority, imparts no part of the gospel ministry. The probationer can, legitimately, exercise no ministerial functions.

At this period, the Reformed Presbyterian Church was in a very scattered condition. The societies and individuals, forming the nuclei of future congregations, were located principally in the States of Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania and South Carolina. These were, of course, to be visited and watered, as ability and opportunity might serve. Mr. Donnelly was remanded to the South, Mr. Black to the middle and Western parts of Pennsylvania, to Conococheague Valley, and Pittsburg with its vicinity. Mr. McLeod, to the Southern parts of New York State, and the city of New York. Mr. Wylie was ordered to the cities of Philadelphia and Baltimore.

The public laborers in our vineyard, now consisted of Messrs. McKinney and Gibson, ministers; and four licentiates, Messrs. McLeod, Black, Donnelly and Wylie. Pastoral settlements and congregational organizations were now loudly called for. At a meeting of Presbytery, in the spring of 1800, it was decreed that a commission should be appointed to meet those exigencies. Reverend James McKinney, and one of the licentiates to be ordained for that special purpose, were fixed upon as the commissioners.

Pursuant to these resolutions, in the following spring, Mr. Wylie was ordered to repair to Ryegate, Caledonia county, Vermont, to be set apart to the office of the holy ministry. At this meeting Messrs. Black and McLeod also attended, and received new appointments. Mr. Wylie was ordained to the ministerial office, on June 25th, 1800, in the meeting-

house of Ryegate, where Mr. Gibson officiated as the pastor. This was the first ordination of a Reformed Presbyterian minister which ever occurred in the United States of America.

In the fall of 1800, a call was made on Mr. McLeod to the pastoral charge of the united congregations of the city of New York, and Coldenham, in Orange county, in the same State. Mr. McLeod demurred, on the plea that there were slaveholders among the subscribers to the call. He urged this fact as reason for rejecting the call. The Presbytery now having this subject regularly brought before them, determined at once to purge our section of the church of the great evil of slavery. They enacted that no slaveholder should be allowed the communion of the church. Thus, at Mr. McLeod's suggestion, the subject was acted upon, even before he became a member of Presbytery, and this inhuman and demoralizing practice was purged from our connection. It is true, it only required to be mentioned, and be regularly brought before the Court. There was no dissenting voice in condemning the nefarious traffic in human flesh. From that period forward, none either practising or abetting slavery in any shape, has been found on the records of our ecclesiastical connection.

The mission then proceeded from Coldenham, in pursuance of the objects of their appointment, on their way to Carolina, as the furthest point of their destination. They crossed the country to Harrisburg, and visited Conococheague Valley; thence to Pittsburg, where a joint call on Messrs. Black and Wylie was made out, to take the pastoral charge of a congregation extending over a range of country more than one hundred miles square. Mr. Wylie was allowed by the committee, to decline giving

a final answer to this call, until his return from Carolina. Mr. Black accepted, and was ordained and installed as the pastor of the Reformed Presbyterian congregation of Pittsburg, and all the other adherent societies, in the State of Pennsylvania, beyond the Alleghany Mountains. The ordination took place in Pittsburg, in the Court-house, in presence of a crowded audience.

The committee then proceeded on their way to Kentucky, which they were instructed to visit on their route. After a very perilous descent of the Ohio, in company with the Reverence David Hume, late from Scotland, of the Associate Church; and the Reverend Mr. Craig, of the Associate Reformed Church, and two other gentlemen whose names are now forgotten; lumbered up with six horses, in a flat-bottomed boat, the river too high to divide ahead the islands, after various detentions and imminent hazards, in the good Providence of God, they arrived in safety at Maysville, Kentucky. After spending a month in the neighborhood of Washington, near the Blue Licks, and also at Lexington, with a number of excellent and intelligent brethren, they prepared to cross over the middle of the State, to Tennessee. Before leaving Kentucky, it would be unpardonable to omit mentioning the kind and hospitable reception met with at the house of John Finney, near Washington, where the mission lodged, preached and baptized. With great pleasure we mention David Mitchell, an Israelite indeed, whose pious wife and amiable daughter adorned the doctrine of God their Saviour. Neither should Aaron Wilson be forgotten, an excellent and intelligent man, of Elkridge, not far from Lexington. His house was the seat of hospitality. There are many more too numerous to mention.

Thence the mission journeyed South, by the Peach Orch-

ard, though at that period, a desolate wilderness, and having swam, at the hazard of their lives, some rivers, and forded others, as Powels, Clinch, and Holstein, they reached the Swanano settlement. In calling accidentally at a farmhouse, they found themselves in the habitation of a Mr. Quin, a Covenanter, with whom they passed the Sabbath, preached and baptized some children. Thence they pushed forward until they reached the settlement in Rocky Creek, Chester district, South Carolina, where they were kindly received, and hospitably entertained.

The congregation here had been, for some time, without a pastor; and, as of course, references for sessional action might be expected, they were not wanting. After examination, ministerial visitations, and numerous meetings of Presbytery and session, a joint call was made on Messrs. Donnelly and Wylie, to become co-pastors of the congregation. Here, again, Mr. Wylie had leave from the committee to postpone, for the present, any determination respecting this call, until the services of the mission should be closed. Mr. Donnelly accepted, and was ordained and installed accordingly. Previously, however, to the dispensation of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which was celebrated after Mr. Donnelly's ordination, the committee stated the decision of Presbytery at the last meeting in Col-denham, respecting slaveholders, declaring that such must either immediately emancipate their slaves, or be refused admission to the Lord's table. The committee were no less surprised than delighted, to find with what alacrity those concerned came forward and complied with the decree of Presbytery. In one day, it is believed, that in the small community of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in South Carolina, not less than three thousand guineas were sacri-

ficed on the altar of principle. The people promptly cleansed their hands from the pollution of the accursed thing. So far as is recollected, only one man, who had been a member of the church, absolutely refused to emancipate his negroes. His name is forgotten; but his location was beyond the line of the State, in North Carolina. A nobler, more generous and magnanimous people, than these South Carolinians, are seldom met with in any community. To name the McMillans, the Kells, the Coopers, the Orrs, the Neils, &c., would be invidious, unless *all, all* were named. We must, therefore, refrain.

The committee returned from Carolina towards the beginning of the following summer, and met the Presbytery at Coldenham, Orange county, State of New York, and reported to the Court the manner in which they had executed the trust committed to them. All was unanimously approved.

Mr. McLeod was now satisfied on the subject of his former difficulties, respecting his acceptance of the call made upon him by the Wallkillians. Slavery, in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, had been annihilated. However, to remove every shadow of objection, a new, unanimous call was made on him, which he now accepted, and was ordained in Coldenham meeting-house, and installed to the charge of the united congregations of New York and Wallkill. At this same meeting of Presbytery, Mr. Wylie declined the acceptance of both the calls made on him, from Pittsburg congregation and from Carolina. The rejection of the Carolina call, on the part of Mr. Wylie, left open a field of special usefulness for a strong man and active laborer in the vineyard of the Lord. There had arisen some difficulties between the Rev. James McKinney and his con-

gregations in Galway and Duaneburgh, which tended to diminish his usefulness in that region. The Carolinians were eager to obtain the settlement of Mr. McKinney among them. They were officially advised of Mr. Wylie having declined the acceptance of their call on him. With all convenient speed, therefore, they invited Mr. McKinney to labor among them as their pastor. A call was forwarded to Presbytery, and was accepted by that gentleman, who forthwith prepared to remove to that portion of the vineyard.