

THE HISTORY
OF
PROTESTANTISM

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ILLUSTRATED

"PROTESTANTISM, THE SACRED CAUSE OF GOD'S LIGHT AND TRUTH AGAINST THE DEVIL'S
FALSITY AND DARKNESS."—*Carlyle*

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CHAPTER VI.

THE WALDENSES—THEIR VALLEYS.

Submission of the Churches of Lombardy to Rome—The Old Faith maintained in the Mountains—The Waldensian Churches—Question of their Antiquity—Approach to their Mountains—Arrangement of their Valleys—Picture of blended Beauty and Grandeur.

WHEN Claude died it can hardly be said that his mantle was taken up by any one. The battle, although not altogether dropped, was henceforward languidly maintained. Before this time not a few Churches beyond the Alps had submitted to the yoke of Rome, and that arrogant power must have felt it not a little humiliating to find her authority withstood on what she might regard as her own territory. She was venerated abroad but contemned at home. Attempts were renewed to induce the Bishops of Milan to accept the episcopal pall, the badge of spiritual vassalage, from the Pope; but it was not till the middle of the eleventh century (1059), under Nicholas II., that these attempts were successful.¹ Petrus Damianus, Bishop of Ostia, and Anselm, Bishop of Lucca, were dispatched by the Pontiff to receive the submission of the Lombard Churches, and the popular tumults amid which that submission was extorted sufficiently show that the spirit of Claude still lingered at the foot of the Alps. Nor did the clergy conceal the regret with which they laid their ancient liberties at the feet of a power before which the whole earth was then bowing down; for the Papal legate, Damianus, informs us that the clergy of Milan maintained in his presence, "That the Ambrosian Church, according to the ancient institutions of the Fathers, was always free, without being subject to the laws of Rome, and that the Pope of Rome had no jurisdiction over their Church as to the government or constitution of it."²

But if the plains were conquered, not so the mountains. A considerable body of Protesters stood out against this deed of submission. Of these some crossed the Alps, descended the Rhine, and raised the standard of opposition in the diocese of Cologne, where they were branded as Manicheans, and rewarded with the stake. Others retired into the valleys of the Piedmontese Alps, and there maintained their scriptural faith and their ancient independence. What we have just related respecting the dioceses of Milan and Turin settles the question, in our opinion, of the apostolicity of the Churches of the

¹ Baronius, *Annal.*, ann. 1059, tom. xi., cols. 276, 277.

² Petrus Damianus, *Opusc.*, p. 5. Allix, *Churches of Piedmont*, p. 113. M'Crie, *Hist. of Reform. in Italy*, p. 2.

Waldensian valleys. It is not necessary to show that missionaries were sent from Rome in the first age to plant Christianity in these valleys, nor is it necessary to show that these Churches have existed as distinct and separate communities from early days; enough that they formed a part, as unquestionably they did, of the great evangelical Church of the north of Italy. This is the proof at once of their apostolicity and their independence. It attests their descent from apostolic men, if doctrine be the life of Churches. When their co-religionists on the plains entered within the pale of the Roman jurisdiction, they retired within the mountains, and, spurning alike the tyrannical yoke and the corrupt tenets of the Church of the Seven Hills, they preserved in its purity and simplicity the faith their fathers had handed down to them. Rome manifestly was the schismatic, she it was that had abandoned what was once the common faith of Christendom, leaving by that step to all who remained on the old ground the indisputably valid title of the True Church.

Behind this rampart of mountains, which Providence, foreseeing the approach of evil days, would almost seem to have reared on purpose, did the remnant of the early apostolic Church of Italy kindle their lamp, and here did that lamp continue to burn all through the long night which descended on Christendom. There is a singular concurrence of evidence in favour of their high antiquity. Their traditions invariably point to an unbroken descent from the earliest times, as regards their religious belief. The *Nobla Leyçon*, which dates from the year 1100,¹ goes to prove that the Waldenses of Piedmont did not owe their rise to Peter Waldo of Lyons, who did not appear till the latter half of that century (1160). The *Nobla Leyçon*, though a poem, is in reality a confession of faith, and could have been composed only after some considerable study of the system of Christianity, in contradistinction to the errors of Rome. How could a Church have arisen with such a document in her hands? Or how could these herdsmen and vine-dressers, shut up in their mountains, have detected the errors against which they bore testimony, and found their way to the truths of which they made open profession in times of darkness like these? If we grant that their religious beliefs were the heritage of former ages, handed down from an evangelical ancestry, all is plain; but if we maintain that they were the discovery of the men of those days, we assert what approaches almost to a miracle. Their greatest enemies, Claude Seyssel of Turin (1517), and Reynerius the Inquisitor (1250), have admitted their antiquity, and stigmatised them as “the most dangerous of all heretics, because the most ancient.”

Rorengo, Prior of St. Roch, Turin (1640), was employed to investigate the origin and antiquity of the Waldenses, and of course had access to all the

¹ Recent German criticism refers the *Nobla Leyçon* to a more recent date, but still one anterior to the Reformation.

Waldensian documents in the ducal archives, and being their bitter enemy he may be presumed to have made his report not more favourable than he could help. Yet he states that “they were not a new sect in the ninth and tenth centuries, and that Claude of Turin must have detached them from the Church in the ninth century.”

Within the limits of her own land did God provide a dwelling for this venerable Church. Let us bestow a glance upon the region. As one comes from the south, across the level plain of Piedmont, while yet nearly a hundred miles off, he sees the Alps rise before him, stretching like a great wall along the horizon. From the gates of the morning to those of the setting sun, the mountains run on in a line of towering magnificence. Pasturages and chestnut-forests clothe their base; eternal snows crown their summits. How varied are their forms! Some rise strong and massy as castles; others shoot up tall and tapering like needles; while others again run along in serrated lines, their summits torn and cleft by the storms of many thousand winters. At the hour of sunrise, what a glory kindles along the crest of that snowy rampart! At sunset the spectacle is again renewed, and a line of pyres is seen to burn in the evening sky.

Drawing nearer the hills, on a line about thirty miles west of Turin, there opens before one what seems a great mountain portal. This is the entrance to the Waldensian territory. A low hill drawn along in front serves as a defence against all who may come with hostile intent, as but too frequently happened in times gone by, while a stupendous monolith—the Castelluzzo—shoots up to the clouds, and stands sentinel at the gate of this renowned region. As one approaches La Torre the Castelluzzo rises higher and higher, and irresistibly fixes the eye by the perfect beauty of its pillar-like form. But to this mountain a higher interest belongs than any that mere symmetry can give it. It is indissolubly linked with martyr-memories, and borrows a halo from the achievements of the past. How often, in days of old, was the confessor hurled sheer down its awful steep and dashed on the rocks at its foot! And there, commingled in one ghastly heap, growing ever the bigger and ghastlier as another and yet another victim was added to it, lay the mangled bodies of pastor and peasant, of mother and child! It was the tragedies connected with this mountain mainly that called forth Milton’s well-known sonnet:—

“Avenge, O Lord, Thy slaughter’d saints, whose bones
Lie scatter’d on the Alpine mountains cold.
* * * in Thy book record their groans
Who were Thy sheep, and in their ancient fold,
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese, that roll’d
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To heaven.”

The elegant temple of the Waldenses rises near the foot of the Castelluzzo.

The Waldensian valleys are seven in number; they were more in ancient times, but the limits of the Vaudois territory have undergone repeated curtailment, and now only the number we have stated remain, lying between Pinerolo on the east and Monte Viso on the west—that pyramidal hill which forms so prominent an object from every part of the plain of Piedmont, towering as it does above the surrounding mountains, and, like a horn of silver, cutting the ebon of the firmament.

The first three valleys run out somewhat like the spokes of a wheel, the spot on which we stand—the gateway, namely—being the nave. The first is *Luserna*, or Valley of Light. It runs right out in a grand gorge of some twelve miles in length by about two in width. It wears a carpeting of meadows, which the waters of the Pelice keep ever fresh and bright. A profusion of vines, acacias, and mulberry-trees fleck it with their shadows; and a wall of lofty mountains encloses it on either hand. The second is *Rora*, or Valley of Dews. It is a vast cup, some fifty miles in circumference, its sides luxuriantly clothed with meadow and corn-field, with fruit and forest trees, and its rim formed of craggy and spiky mountains, many of them snow-clad. The third is *Angrogna*, or Valley of Groans. Of it we shall speak more particularly afterwards. Beyond the extremity of the first three valleys are the remaining four, forming, as it were, the rim of the wheel. These last are enclosed in their turn by a line of lofty and craggy mountains, which form a wall of defence around the entire territory. Each valley is a fortress, having its own gate of ingress and egress, with its caves, and rocks, and mighty chestnut-trees, forming places of retreat and shelter, so that the highest engineering skill could not have better adapted each several valley to its end. It is not less remarkable that, taking all these valleys together, each is so related to each, and the one opens so into the other, that they may be said to form one fortress of amazing and matchless strength—wholly impregnable, in fact. All the fortresses of Europe, though combined, would not form a citadel so enormously strong, and so dazzlingly magnificent, as the mountain dwelling of the Vaudois. “The Eternal, our God,” says Leger, “having destined this land to be the theatre of His marvels, and the bulwark of His ark, has, by natural means, most marvellously fortified it.” The battle begun in one valley could be continued in another, and carried round the entire territory, till at last the invading foe, overpowered by the rocks rolled upon him from the mountains, or assailed by enemies which would start suddenly out of the mist or issue from some unsuspected cave, found retreat impossible, and, cut off in detail, left his bones to whiten the mountains he had come to subdue.

These valleys are lovely and fertile, as well as strong. They are watered by numerous torrents, which descend from the snows of the summits. The grassy carpet of their bottom; the mantling vine and the golden grain of their lower slopes; the chalets that dot their sides, sweetly embowered amid fruit-trees; and, higher up, the great chestnut forests and the pasture-lands, where the herdsmen keep watch over their flocks all through the summer days and the starlit nights: the nodding crags, from which the torrent leaps into the light; the rivulet, singing with quiet gladness in the shady nook; the mists, moving grandly among the mountains, now veiling, now revealing their majesty; and the far-off summits, tipped with silver, to be changed at eve into gleaming gold—make up a picture of blended beauty and grandeur, not equalled perhaps, and certainly not surpassed, in any other region of the earth.

In the heart of their mountains is situated the most interesting, perhaps, of all their valleys. It was in this retreat, walled round by “hills whose heads touch heaven,” that their *barbes* or pastors, from all their several parishes, were wont to meet in annual synod. It was here that their college stood, and it was here that their missionaries were trained, and, after ordination, were sent forth to sow the good seed, as opportunity offered, in other lands. Let us visit this valley. We ascend to it by the long, narrow, and winding Angrogna. Bright meadows enliven its entrance. The mountains on either hand are clothed with the vine, the mulberry, and the chestnut. Anon the valley contracts. It becomes rough with projecting rocks, and shady with great trees. A few paces farther, and it expands into a circular basin, feathery with birches, musical with falling waters, environed atop by naked crags, fringed with dark pines, while the white peak looks down upon one out of heaven. A little in advance the valley seems shut in by a mountainous wall, drawn right across it; and beyond, towering sublimely upward, is seen an assemblage of snow-clad Alps, amid which is placed the valley we are in quest of, where burned of old the candle of the Waldenses. Some terrible convulsion has rent this mountain from top to bottom, opening a path through it to the valley beyond. We enter the dark chasm, and proceed along on a narrow ledge in the mountain’s side, hung half-way between the torrent, which is heard thundering in the abyss below, and the summits which lean over us above. Journeying thus for about two miles, we find the pass beginning to widen, the light to break in, and now we arrive at the gate of the Pra.

There opens before us a noble circular valley, its grassy bottom watered by torrents, its sides dotted with dwellings and clothed with corn-fields and pasturages, while a ring of white peaks guards it above. This was the inner sanctuary of the Waldensian temple. The rest of Italy had turned aside to idols, the Waldensian territory alone had been reserved for the worship of the true God. And was it not meet that on its native soil a remnant of the

apostolic Church of Italy should be maintained, that Rome and all Christendom might have before their eyes a perpetual monument of what they themselves had once been, and a living witness to testify how far they had departed from their first faith?¹

¹ This short description of the Waldensian valleys is drawn from the author's personal observations. He may here be permitted to state that he has, in successive journeys, continued at intervals during a period of thirty-five years, travelled over Christendom, and visited all the countries, Popish and Protestant, of which he will have occasion particularly to speak in the course of this history.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WALDENSES—THEIR MISSIONS AND MARTYRDOMS.

Their Synod and College—Their Theological Tenets—Romaunt Version of the New Testament—The Constitution of their Church—Their Missionary Labours—Wide Diffusion of their Tenets—The Stone Smiting the Image.

ONE would like to have a near view of the *barbes* or pastors, who presided over the school of early Protestant theology that existed here, and to know how it fared with evangelical Christianity in the ages that preceded the Reformation. But the time is remote, and the events are dim. We can but doubtfully glean from a variety of sources the facts necessary to form a picture of this venerable Church, and even then the picture is not complete. The theology of which this was one of the fountainheads was not the clear, well-defined, and comprehensive system which the sixteenth century gave us; it was only what the faithful men of the Lombard Churches had been able to save from the wreck of primitive Christianity. True religion, being a revelation, was from the beginning complete and perfect; nevertheless, in this as in every other branch of knowledge, it is only by patient labour that man is able to extricate and arrange all its parts, and to come into the full possession of truth. The theology taught in former ages, in the peak-environed valley in which we have in imagination placed ourselves, was drawn from the Bible. The atoning death and justifying righteousness of Christ was its cardinal truth. This, the *Nobla Leyçon* and other ancient documents abundantly testify. The *Nobla Leyçon* sets forth with tolerable clearness the doctrine of the Trinity, the fall of man, the incarnation of the Son, the perpetual authority of the Decalogue as given by God,¹ the need of Divine grace in order to good works, the necessity of holiness, the institution of the ministry, the resurrection of the body, and the eternal bliss of heaven.² This creed, its professors exemplified in lives of evangelical virtue. The blamelessness of the Waldenses passed into a proverb, so that one more than ordinarily exempt from the vices of his time was sure to be suspected of being a Vaudes.³

¹ This disproves the charge of Manicheism brought against them by their enemies.

² Sir Samuel Morland gives the *Nobla Leyçon* in full in his *History of the Churches of the Waldenses*. Alliz (chap. 18) gives a summary of it.

³ The *Nobla Leyçon* has the following passage:—"If there be an honest man, who desires to love God and fear Jesus Christ, who will neither slander, nor swear, nor lie, nor commit adultery, nor kill, nor steal, nor avenge himself of his enemies, they presently say of such a one he is a Vaudes, and worthy of death."

If doubt there were regarding the tenets of the Waldenses, the charges which their enemies have preferred against them would set that doubt at rest, and make it tolerably certain that they held substantially what the apostles before their day, and the Reformers after it, taught. The indictment against the Waldenses included a formidable list of “heresies.” They held that there had been no true Pope since the days of Sylvester; that temporal offices and dignities were not meet for preachers of the Gospel; that the Pope’s pardons were a cheat; that purgatory was a fable; that relics were simply rotten bones which had belonged to no one knew whom; that to go on pilgrimage served no end, save to empty one’s purse; that flesh might be eaten any day if one’s appetite served him; that holy water was not a whit more efficacious than rain water; and that prayer in a barn was just as effectual as if offered in a church. They were accused, moreover, of having scoffed at the doctrine of transubstantiation, and of having spoken blasphemously of Rome, as the harlot of the Apocalypse.¹

There is reason to believe, from recent historical researches, that the Waldenses possessed the New Testament in the vernacular. The “Lingua Romana” or Romaunt tongue was the common language of the south of Europe from the eighth to the fourteenth century. It was the language of the troubadours and of men of letters in the Dark Ages. Into this tongue—the Romaunt—was the first translation of the whole of the New Testament made so early as the twelfth century. This fact Dr. Gilly has been at great pains to prove in his work, *The Romaunt Version² of the Gospel according to John*. The sum of what Dr. Gilly, by a patient investigation into facts, and a great array of historic documents, maintains, is that all the books of the New Testament were translated from the Latin Vulgate into the Romaunt, that this was the first literal version since the fall of the empire, that it was made in the twelfth century, and was the first translation available for popular use. There were numerous earlier translations, but only of parts of the Word of God, and many of these were rather paraphrases or digests of Scripture than translations, and, moreover, they were so bulky, and by consequence so costly, as to be utterly beyond the reach of the common people. This Romaunt version was the first complete and literal translation of the New Testament of Holy Scripture; it was made, as Dr. Gilly, by a chain of proofs, shows, most probably under the superintendence and at the expense of Peter Waldo of Lyons, not later than 1180, and so is older than any complete version in German, French, Italian, Spanish, or English. This version was widely

¹ See a list of numerous heresies and blasphemies charged upon the Waldenses by the Inquisitor Reynerius, who wrote about the year 1250, and extracted by Allix (chap. 22).

² *The Romaunt Version of the Gospel according to John, from MS. preserved in Trinity College, Dublin, and in the Bibliotheque du Roi, Paris*. By William Stephen Gilly, D.D., Canon of Durham, and Vicar of Norham. Lond., 1848.

spread in the south of France, and in the cities of Lombardy. It was in common use among the Waldenses of Piedmont, and it was no small part, doubtless, of the testimony borne to truth by these mountaineers to preserve and circulate it. Of the Romaunt New Testament six copies have come down to our day. A copy is preserved at each of the four following places, Lyons, Grenoble, Zurich, Dublin; and two copies are at Paris. These are plain and portable volumes, contrasting with those splendid and ponderous folios of the Latin Vulgate, penned in characters of gold and silver, richly illuminated, their bindings decorated with gems, inviting admiration rather than study, and unfitted by their size and splendour for the use of the people.

The Church of the Alps, in the simplicity of its constitution, may be held to have been a reflection of the Church of the first centuries. The entire territory included in the Waldensian limits was divided into parishes. In each parish was placed a pastor, who led his flock to the living waters of the Word of God. He preached, he dispensed the Sacraments, he visited the sick, and catechised the young. With him was associated in the government of his congregation a consistory of laymen. The synod met once a year. It was composed of all the pastors, with an equal number of laymen, and its most frequent place of meeting was the secluded mountain-engirdled valley at the head of Angrogna. Sometimes as many as a hundred and fifty *barbes*, with the same number of lay members, would assemble. We can imagine them seated—it may be on the grassy slopes of the valley—a venerable company of humble, learned, earnest men, presided over by a simple moderator (for higher office or authority was unknown amongst them), and intermitting their deliberations respecting the affairs of their Churches, and the condition of their flocks, only to offer their prayers and praises to the Eternal, while the majestic snow-clad peaks looked down upon them from the silent firmament. There needed, verily, no magnificent fane, no blazonry of mystic rites to make their assembly august.

The youth who here sat at the feet of the more venerable and learned of their *barbes* used as their text-book the Holy Scriptures. And not only did they study the sacred volume; they were required to commit to memory, and be able accurately to recite, whole Gospels and Epistles. This was a necessary accomplishment on the part of public instructors, in those ages when printing was unknown, and copies of the Word of God were rare. Part of their time was occupied in transcribing the Holy Scriptures, or portions of them, which they were to distribute when they went forth as missionaries. By this, and by other agencies, the seed of the Divine Word was scattered throughout Europe more widely than is commonly supposed. To this a variety of causes contributed. There was then a general impression that the world was soon to end. Men thought that they saw the prognostications of its dissolution in the disorder into which all things had fallen. The pride, luxury, and profligacy of

the clergy led not a few laymen to ask if better and more certain guides were not to be had. Many of the troubadours were religious men, whose lays were sermons. The hour of deep and universal slumber had passed; the serf was contending with his seigneur for personal freedom, and the city was waging war with the baronial castle for civic and corporate independence. The New Testament—and, as we learn from incidental notices, portions of the Old—coming at this juncture, in a language understood alike in the court as in the camp, in the city as in the rural hamlet, was welcome to many, and its truths obtained a wider promulgation than perhaps had taken place since the publication of the Vulgate by Jerome.

After passing a certain time in the school of the *barbes*, it was not uncommon for the Waldensian youth to proceed to the seminaries in the great cities of Lombardy, or to the Sorbonne at Paris. There they saw other customs, were initiated into other studies, and had a wider horizon around them than in the seclusion of their native valleys. Many of them became expert dialecticians, and often made converts of the rich merchants with whom they traded, and the landlords in whose houses they lodged. The priests seldom cared to meet in argument the Waldensian missionary.

To maintain the truth in their own mountains was not the only object of this people. They felt their relations to the rest of Christendom. They sought to drive back the darkness, and re-conquer the kingdoms which Rome had overwhelmed. They were an evangelistic as well as an evangelical Church. It was an old law among them that all who took orders in their Church should, before being eligible to a home charge, serve three years in the mission field. The youth on whose head the assembled *barbes* laid their hands saw in prospect not a rich benefice, but a possible martyrdom. The ocean they did not cross. Their mission field was the realms that lay outspread at the foot of their own mountains. They went forth two and two, concealing their real character under the guise of a secular profession, most commonly that of merchants or pedlars. They carried silks, jewellery, and other articles, at that time not easily purchasable save at distant marts, and they were welcomed as merchants where they would have been spurned as missionaries. The door of the cottage and the portal of the baron's castle stood equally open to them. But their address was mainly shown in vending, without money and without price, rarer and more valuable merchandise than the gems and silks which had procured them entrance. They took care to carry with them, concealed among their wares or about their persons, portions of the Word of God, their own transcription commonly, and to this they would draw the attention of the inmates. When they saw a desire to possess it, they would freely make a gift of it where the means to purchase were absent.

There was no kingdom of Southern and Central Europe to which these missionaries did not find their way, and where they did not leave traces of

their visit in the disciples whom they made. On the west they penetrated into Spain. In Southern France they found congenial fellow-labourers in the Albigenses, by whom the seeds of truth were plentifully scattered over Dauphine and Languedoc. On the east, descending the Rhine and the Danube, they leavened Germany, Bohemia, and Poland¹ with their doctrines, their track being marked with the edifices for worship and the stakes of martyrdom that arose around their steps. Even the Seven-hilled City they feared not to enter, scattering the seed on ungenial soil, if perchance some of it might take root and grow. Their naked feet and coarse woollen garments made them somewhat marked figures, in the streets of a city that clothed itself in purple and fine linen; and when their real errand was discovered, as sometimes chanced, the rulers of Christendom took care to further, in their own way, the springing of the seed, by watering it with the blood of the men who had sowed it.²

Thus did the Bible in those ages, veiling its majesty and its mission, travel silently through Christendom, entering homes and hearts, and there making its abode. From her lofty seat Rome looked down with contempt upon the Book and its humble bearers. She aimed at bowing the necks of kings, thinking if they were obedient meaner men would not dare revolt, and so she took little heed of a power which, weak as it seemed, was destined at a future day to break in pieces the fabric of her dominion. By-and-by she began to be uneasy, and to have a boding of calamity. The penetrating eye of Innocent III. detected the quarter whence danger was to arise. He saw in the labours of these humble men the beginning of a movement which, if permitted to go on and gather strength, would one day sweep away all that it had taken the toils and intrigues of centuries to achieve. He straightway commenced those terrible crusades which wasted the sowers but watered the seed, and helped to bring on, at its appointed hour, the catastrophe which he sought to avert.³

¹ Stranski, *apud* Lenfant's *Concile de Constance*, quoted by Count Valerian Krasinski in his *History of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of the Reformation in Poland*, vol. i., p. 53; bond., 1838. Illyricus Flaccius, in his *Catalogus Testium Veritatis* (Amstelodami, 1679), says: "Pars Valdensium in Germaniam transiit atque apud Bohemos, in Polonia ac Livonia sedem fixit." Leger says that the Waldenses had, about the year 1210, Churches in Slavonia, Sarmatia, and Livonia. (*Histoire Générale des Eglises Evangéliques des Vallées du Piedmont ou Vaudois*. vol. ii., pp. 336, 337; 1669.)

² M'Crie, *Hist. Ref. in Italy*, p. 4.

³ Those who wish to know more of this interesting people than is contained in the above rapid sketch may consult Leger, *Des Eglises Evangéliques*; Perrin, *Hist. de Vaudois*; Reynerius, *Cont. Waldens.*; Sir S. Morland, *History of the Evangelical Churches of Piedmont*; Jones, *Hist. Waldenses*; Rorencio, *Narrative*; besides a host of more modern writers—Gilly, *Waldensian Researches*; Muston, *Israel of the Alps*; Monastier, &c. &c.