

## THE VAUDOIS (WALDENSES) AND THEIR VALLEYS

From J. A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism*, originally published in 1878

Beginning in Vol. I, Book I Ch 6

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. [i] 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." [iii] 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 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 coreligionists 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 favor of their high antiquity. Their traditions invariably point to an unbroken descent from the earliest times, as regards their religious belief. The Nobla Leycon, which dates

from the year 1100, [iii] 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 Leycon, 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 stigmatized 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 Waldensian documents in the ducal archives, and being their bitter enemy he may be presumed to have made his report not more favorable 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 defense 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 defense 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 theater of His marvels, and the bulwark of His ark, has, by natural means, most marvelously 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 pasturelands, 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 equaled 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? [\[iv\]](#)

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### **THE WALDENSES - THEIR MISSIONS AND MARTYRDOMS Ch 7**

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 its; 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 labor 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 Leycon and other ancient documents abundantly testify. The Nobla Leycon 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, [\[v\]](#) 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. [\[vi\]](#) 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 Vaude. [\[vii\]](#) 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. [\[viii\]](#) 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 Version* [\[ix\]](#) *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 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 splendor 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 catechized 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-girdled 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 reconquer 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 peddlers. They carried silks, jewelry, 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 laborers 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 Poland [x] 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 woolen 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. [xi] 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 labors 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. [\[xii\]](#)  
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## **ANTIQUITY AND FIRST PERSECUTIONS OF THE WALDENSES**

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THE Waldenes stand apart and alone in the Christian world. Their place on the surface of Europe is unique; their position in history is not less unique; and the end appointed them to fulfill is one which has been assigned to them alone, no other people being permitted to share it with them. The Waldenses bear a twofold testimony. Like the snow clad peaks amid which their dwelling is placed, which look down upon the plains of Italy on the one side, and the provinces of France on the other, this people stand equally related to primitive ages and modern times, and give by no means equivocal testimony respecting both Rome and the Reformation. If they are old, then Rome is new; if they are pure, then Rome is corrupt; and if they have retained the faith of the apostles, it follows incontestably that Rome has departed from it. That the Waldensian faith and worship existed many centuries before Protestantism arose is undeniable; the proofs and monuments of this fact lie scattered over all the histories and all the lands of mediaeval Europe; but the antiquity of the Waldenses is the antiquity of Protestantism. The Church of the Reformation was in the loins of the Waldensian Church ages before the birth of Luther; her first cradle was placed amid those terrors and sublimities, those ice clad peaks and great bulwarks of rock. In their dispersions over so many lands, over France, the Low Countries, Germany, Poland, Bohemia, Moravia, England, Calabria, Naples, the Waldenses sowed the seeds of that great spiritual revival which, beginning in the days of Wicliffe, and advancing in the times of Luther and Calvin, awaits its full consummation in the ages to come. In the place which the Church of the Alps has held, and the office she has discharged, we see the reason of that peculiar and bitter hostility which Rome has ever borne this holy and venerable community. It was natural that Rome should wish to efface so conclusive a proof of her apostasy, and silence a witness whose testimony so emphatically corroborates the position of Protestantism. The great bulwark of the Reformed Church is the Word of God; but next to this is the pre existence of a community spread throughout Western Christendom, with doctrines and worship substantially one with those of the Reformation. The Persecutions of this remarkable people form one of the most heroic pages of the Church's history. These persecutions, protracted through many centuries, were endured with a patience, a constancy, a bravery honorable to the Gospel, as well as to those simple people, whom the Gospel converted into heroes and martyrs. Their resplendent virtues illumined the darkness of their age; and we turn with no little relief from a Christendom sunk in barbarism and superstition to this remnant of an ancient people, who here in their mountain engirdled territory practiced the simplicity, the piety, and the heroism of a better age. It is mainly those persecutions of the Waldenses which connect themselves with the Reformation, and which were, in fact, part of the mighty effort made by Rome to extinguish Protestantism, on which we shall dwell. But we must introduce ourselves to the



great tragedy by a brief notice of the attacks which led up to it.

That part of the great Alpine chain that extends between Turin on the east and Grenoble on the west is known as the Cottian Alps. This is the dwelling place of the Waldenses, the land of ancient Protestantism. On the west the mountains slope towards the plains of France, and on the east they run down to those of Piedmont. That line of glittering summits, conspicuous among which is the lofty snow clad peak of Monte Viso on the west, and the craggy escarpments of Genevre on the east, forms the boundary between the Albigenes and the Waldenses, the two bodies of these early witnesses. On the western slope were the dwellings of the former people, and on the eastern those of the latter. Not entirely so, however, for the Waldenses, crossing the summits, had taken possession of the more elevated portion of the western declivities, and scarcely was there a valley in which their villages and sanctuaries were not to be found. But in the lower valleys, and more particularly in the vast and fertile plains of Dauphine and Provence, spread out at the foot of the Alps, the inhabitants were mainly of cis Alpine or Gallic extraction, and are known in history as the Albigenes. How flourishing they were, how numerous and opulent their towns, how rich their corn fields and vineyards, and how polished the manners and cultured the genius of the people, we have already said. We have also described the terrible expiation Innocent III exacted of them for their attachment to a purer Christianity than that of Rome. He launched his bull; he sent forth his inquisitors; and soon the fertility and beauty of the region were swept away; city and sanctuary sank in ruins; and the plains so recently covered with smiling fields were converted into a desert. The work of destruction had been done with tolerable completeness on the west of the Alps; and after a short pause it was commenced on the east, it being resolved to pursue these confessors of a pure faith across the mountains, and attack them in those grand valleys which open into Italy, where they lay entrenched, as in a fastness formed of massy chestnut forests and mighty pinnacles of rock. We place ourselves at the foot of the eastern declivity, about thirty miles to the west of Turin. Behind us is the vast sweep of the plain of Piedmont. Above us in front tower the Alps, here forming a crescent of grand mountains, extending from the escarped summit that leans over Pinerolo on the right, to the pyramidal peak of Monte Viso, which cleaves the ebon like a horn of silver, and marks the furthest limit of the Waldensian territory on the left. In the bosom of that mountain crescent, shaded by its chestnut forests, and encircled by its glittering peaks, are hung the famous valleys of that people whose martyrdoms we are now to narrate.

In the center of the picture, right before us, rises the pillar like Castelluzzo; behind it is the towering mass of the Vandalin; and in front, as if to bar the way against the entrance of any hostile force into this sacred territory, is drawn the long, low hill of Bricherasio, feathery with woods, bristling with great rocks, and leaving open, between its rugged mass and the spurs of Monte Friolante on the west, only a narrow avenue, shaded by walnut and acacia trees, which leads up to the point where the valleys, spreading out fan like, bury themselves in the mountains that open their stony arms to receive them. Historians have enumerated some thirty persecutions enacted on this little spot.

One of the earliest dates in the martyr history of this people is 1332, or thereabouts, for the time is not distinctly marked. The reigning Pope was John XXII. Desirous of resuming the work of Innocent III, he ordered the inquisitors to repair to the Valleys of Lucerne and Perosa, and execute the laws of the Vatican against the heretics that peopled them. What

success attended the expedition is not known, and we instance it chiefly on this account, that the bull commanding it bears undesigned testimony to the then flourishing condition of the Waldensian Church, inasmuch as it complains that synods, which the Pope calls chapters, were used to assemble in the Valley of Angrogna, attended by 500 delegates. [xiii] This was before Wicliffe had begun his career in England. After this date scarcely was there a Pope who did not bear unintentional testimony to their great numbers and wide diffusion. In 1352 we find Pope Clement VI charging the Bishop of Embrun, with whom he associates a Franciscan friar and inquisitor, to essay the purification of those parts adjoining his diocese which were known to be infected with heresy. The territorial lords and city After this date scarcely was there a Pope who did not bear unintentional testimony to their great numbers and wide diffusion. In 1352 we find Pope Clement VI charging the Bishop of Embrun, with whom he associates a Franciscan friar and inquisitor, to essay the purification of those parts adjoining his diocese which were known to be infected with heresy. The territorial lords and city syndics were invited to aid him. While providing for the heretics of the Valleys, the Pope did not overlook those farther off. He urged the Dauphin, Charles of France, and Louis, King of Naples, to seek out and punish those of their subjects who had strayed from the faith. Clement referred doubtless to the Vaudois colonies, which are known to have existed in that age at Naples. The fact that the heresy of the Waldensian mountains extended to the plains at their feet, is attested by the letter of the Pope to Joanna, wife of the King of Naples, who owned lands in the Marquisate [xiv] of Saluzzo, near the Valleys, urging her to purge her territory of the heretics that lived in it. The zeal of the Pope, however, was but indifferently seconded by that of the secular lords. The men they were enjoined to exterminate were the most industrious and peaceable of their subjects; and willing as they no doubt were to oblige the Pope, they were naturally averse to incur so great a loss as would be caused by the destruction of the flower of their populations. Besides, the princes of that age were often at war among themselves, and had not much leisure or inclination to make war on the Pope's behalf. Therefore the Papal thunder sometimes rolled harmlessly over the Valleys, and the mountain home of these confessors was wonderfully shielded till very nearly the era of the Reformation, We find Gregory XI, in 1373, writing to Charles V of France, to complain that his officers thwarted his inquisitors in Dauphine; that the Papal judges were not permitted to institute proceedings against the suspected without the consent of the civil judge; and that the disrespect to the spiritual tribunal was sometimes carried so far as to release condemned heretics from prison. [xv] Notwithstanding this leniency (so culpable in the eyes of Rome) on the part of princes and magistrates, the inquisitors were able to make not a few victims. These acts of violence provoked reprisals at times on the part of the Waldenses. On one occasion (1375) the Popish city of Susa was attacked, the Dominican convent forced, and the inquisitor put to death. Other Dominicans were called to expiate their rigor against the Vaudois with the penalty of their lives. An obnoxious inquisitor of Turin is said to have been slain on the highway near Bricherasio. [xvi] There came evil days to the Popes themselves. First, they were chased to Avignon; next, the yet greater calamity of the "schism" befell them; but their own afflictions had not the effect of softening their hearts towards the confessors of the Alps. During the clouded era of their "captivity," and the tempestuous days of the schism, they pursued with the same inflexible rigor their policy of extermination. They were ever and anon fulminating their persecuting

edicts, and their inquisitors were scouring the Valleys in pursuit of victims. An inquisitor of the name of Borelli had 150 Vaudois men, besides a great number of women, girls, and even young children, brought to Grenoble and burned alive. [\[xvii\]](#) The closing days of the year 1400 witnessed a terrible tragedy, the memory of which has not been obliterated by the many greater which have followed it. The scene of this catastrophe was the Valley of Pragelas, one of the higher reaches of Perosa, which opens near Pinerolo, and is watered by the Clusone. It was the Christmas of 1400, and the inhabitants dreaded no attack, believing themselves sufficiently protected by the snows which then lay deep on their mountains. They were destined to experience the bitter fact that the rigors of the season had not quenched the fire of their persecutor's malice. The man named above, Borelli, at the head of an armed troop, broke suddenly into Pragelas, meditating the entire extinction of its population. The miserable inhabitants fled in haste to the mountains, carrying on their shoulders their old men, their sick, and their infants, knowing what fate awaited them should they leave them behind. In their flight a great many were overtaken and slain. Nightfall brought them deliverance from the pursuit, but no deliverance from horrors not less dreadful. The main body of the fugitives wandered in the direction of Macel, in the storm swept and now ice clad valley of San Martino, where they encamped on a summit which has ever since, in memory of the event, borne the name of the Alberge or Refuge. Without shelter, without food, the frozen snow around them, the winter's sky overhead, their sufferings were inexpressibly great. When morning broke what a heart rending spectacle did day disclose! Of the miserable group the hands and feet of many were frozen; while others were stretched out on the snow, stiffened corpses. Fifty young children, some say eighty, were found dead with cold, some lying on the bare ice, others locked in the frozen arms of their mothers, who had perished on that dreadful night along with their babes. [\[xviii\]](#) In the Valley of Pragelas, to this day, sire recites to son the tale of that Christmas tragedy.

The century, the opening of which had been so fearfully marked, passed on amid continuous executions of the Waldenses. In the absence of such catastrophes as that of Christmas, 1400, individual Vaudois were kidnapped by the inquisitors, ever on the track for them, or waylaid, whenever they ventured down into the plain of Piedmont, were carried to Turin and other towns, and burned alive. But Rome saw that she was making no progress in the extermination of a heresy which had found a seat amid these hills, as firm as it was ancient. The numbers of the Waldenses were not thinned; their constancy was not shaken, they still refused to enter the Roman Church, and they met all the edicts and inquisitors, all the torturings and burnings of their great persecutor with a resistance as unyielding as that which their rocks offer to the tempests of hail and snow, which the whirlwinds of winter hurl against them. It was the year 1487. A great blow was meditated. The process of purging the Valleys languished. Pope Innocent VIII, who then filled the Papal chair, remembered how his renowned namesake, Innocent III, by an act of summary vengeance, had swept the Albigensian heresy from the south of France. Imitating the rigor of his predecessor, he would purge the Valleys as effectually and as speedily as Innocent III had done the plains of Dauphine and Provence.

The first step of the Pope was to issue a bull, denouncing as heretical those whom he delivered over to slaughter. This bull, after the manner of all such documents, was expressed in terms as sanctimonious as its spirit was inexorably cruel. It brings no charge

against these men, as lawless, idle, dishonest, or disorderly; their fault was that they did not worship as Innocent worshipped, and that they practiced a "simulated sanctity," which had the effect of seducing the sheep of the true fold, therefore he orders "that malicious and abominable sect of malignants," if they "refuse to abjure, to be crushed like venomous snakes." [xix] To carry out his bull, Innocent VIII appointed Albert Cataneo, Archdeacon of Cremona, his legate, devolving upon him the chief conduct of the enterprise. He fortified him, moreover, with Papal missives to all princes, dukes, and powers within whose dominions any Vaudois were to be found. The Pope especially accredited him to Charles VIII of France, and Charles II of Savoy, commanding them to support him with the whole power of their arms. The bull invited all Catholics to take up the cross against the heretics; and to stimulate them in this pious work, it "absolved from all ecclesiastical pains and penalties, general and particular; it released all who joined the crusade from any oaths they might have taken; it legitimized their title to any property they might have illegally acquired, and promised remission of all their sins to such as should kill any heretic. It annulled all contracts made in favor of Vaudois, ordered their domestics to abandon them, forbade all persons to give them any aid whatever, and empowered all persons to take possession of their property." These were powerful incentives, plenary pardon and unrestrained licence. They were hardly needed to awaken the zeal of the neighboring populations, always too ready to show their devotion to Rome by spilling the blood and harrying the lands and goods of the Waldenses. The King of France and the Duke of Savoy lent a willing ear to the summons from the Vatican. They made haste to unfurl their banners, and enlist soldiers in this holy cause, and soon a numerous army was on its march to sweep from the mountains where they had dwelt from immemorial time, these confessors of the Gospel faith pure and undefiled. In the train of this armed host came a motley crowd of volunteers, "vagabond adventurers," says Muston, "ambitious fanatics, reckless pillagers, merciless assassins, assembled from all parts of Italy," [xx] a horde of brigands in short, the worthy tools of the man whose bloody work they were assembled to do. Before all these arrangements were finished, it was the June of 1488. The Pope's bull was talked of in all countries; and the din of preparation rung far and near, for it was not only on the Waldensian mountains, but on the Waldensian race, wherever dispersed, in Germany, in Calabria, and in other cottatrics, that this terrible blow was to fall. [xxi] All kings were invited to gird on the sword, and come to the help of the Church in the execution of so total and complete an extermination of her enemies as should never need to be repeated. Wherever a Vaudois foot trod, the soil was polluted, and had to be cleansed; wherever a Vaudois breathed, the air was tainted, and must be purified; wherever Vaudois psalm or prayer ascended, there was the infection of heresy; and around the spot a cordon must be drawn to protect the spiritual health of the district. The Pope's bull was thus very universal in its application, and almost the only people left ignorant of the commotion it had excited, and the bustle of preparation it had called forth, were those poor men on whom this terrible tempest was about to burst. The joint army numbered about 18,000 regular soldiers. This force was swelled by the thousands of ruffians, already mentioned, drawn together by the spiritual and temporal rewards to be earned in this work of combined piety and pillage. The Piedmontese division of this host directed their course towards the "Valleys" proper, on the Italian side of the Alps. The French division, marching from the north, advanced to attack the inhabitants of the Dauphinese Alps,

where the Albigensian heresy, recovering somewhat its terrible excision by Innocent III, had begun again to take root. Two storms, from opposite points, or rather from all points, were approaching those mighty mountains, the sanctuary and citadel of the primitive faith. That lamp is about to be extinguished at last, which has burned here during so many ages, and survived so many tempests. The mailed band of the Pope is uplifted, and we wait to see the blow fall.

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## **Chapter 2**

### **CATANEO'S EXPEDITION (1488) AGAINST THE DAUPHINESE AND PIEDMONTESE CONFESSORS**

WE see at this moment two armies on the march to attack the Christians inhabiting the Cottian and Dauphinese Alps. The sword now unsheathed is to be returned to its scabbard only when there breathes no longer in these mountains a single confessor of the faith condemned in the bull of Innocent VIII. The plan of the campaign was to attack at the same time on two opposite points of the great mountain chain; and advancing, the one army from the south east, and the other from the north west, to meet in the Valley of Angrogna, the center of the territory, and there strike the final blow. Let us attend first to the French division of this host, that which is advancing from the north against the Alps of Dauphine. This portion of the crusaders was led by a daring and cruel man, skilled in such adventures, the Lord of La Palu. He ascended the mountains with his fanatics, and entered the Vale of Loyse, a deep gorge overhung by towering mountains. The inhabitants, seeing an armed force, twenty times their own number, enter their valley, despaired of being able to resist them, and prepared for flight. They placed their old people and children in rustic carts, together with their domestic utensils, and such store of victuals as the urgency of the occasion permitted them to collect, and driving their herds before them, they began to climb the rugged slopes of Mount Pelvoux, which rises some six thousand feet over the level of the valley. They sang canticles as they climbed the steeps, which served at once to smooth their rugged path, and to dispel their terrors. Not a few were overtaken and slaughtered, and theirs was perhaps the happier lot. About halfway up there is an immense cavern, called Aigue Froid, from the cold springs that gush out from its rocky walls. In front of the cavern is a platform of rock, where the spectator sees beneath him only fearful precipices, which must be clambered over before one can reach the entrance of the grotto. The roof of the cave forms a magnificent arch, which gradually subsides and contracts into a narrow passage, or throat, and then widens once more, and forms a roomy hall of irregular form. Into this grotto, as into an impregnable castle, did the Vaudois enter. Their women, infants, and old men they placed in the inner hall; their cattle and sheep they distributed along the lateral cavities of the grotto. The able bodied men posted themselves at the entrance. Having barricaded with huge stones both the doorway of the cave and the path that led to it, they deemed themselves secure. They had provisions to last, Cataneo says in his Memoirs, "two years;" and it would cost them little effort to hurl headlong down the precipices, any one who should attempt to scale them in order to reach the entrance of the cavern.

But a device of their pursuer rendered all these precautions and defences vain. La Palu ascended the mountain on the other side, and approaching the cave from above, let down

his soldiers by ropes from the precipice that overhangs the entrance of the grotto. The platform in front was thus secured by his soldiers. The Vaudois might have cut the ropes, and dispatched their foes as they were being lowered one by one, but the boldness of the maneuver would seem to have paralyzed them. They retreated into the cavern to find in it their grave. La Palu saw the danger of permitting his men to follow them into the depths of their hiding place. He adopted the easier and safer method of piling up at its entrance all the wood he could collect and setting fire to it. A huge volume of black smoke began to roll into the cave, leaving to the unhappy inmates the miserable alternative of rushing out and falling by the sword that waited for them, or of remaining in the interior to be stifled by the murky vapor. [xxii] Some rushed out, and were massacred; but the greater part remained till death slowly approached them by suffocation. "When the cavern was afterwards examined," says Muston, "there were found in it 400 infants, suffocated in their cradles, or in the arms of their dead mothers. Altogether there perished in this cavern more than 3,000 Vaudois, including the entire population of Val Loyse. Cataneo distributed the property of these unfortunates among the vagabonds who accompanied him, and never again did the Vaudois Church raise its head in these bloodstained valleys." [xxiii] The terrible stroke that fell on the Vale of Loyse was the shielding of the neighboring valleys of Argentiere and Fraissiniere. Their inhabitants had been destined to destruction also, but the fate of their coreligionists taught them that their only chance of safety lay in resistance. Accordingly barricading the passes of their valleys, they showed such a front to the foe when he advanced, that he deemed it prudent to turn away and leave them in peace. This devastating tempest now swept along to discharge its violence on other valleys. "One would have thought," to use the words of Muston, "that the plague had passed along the track over which its march lay: it was only the inquisitors."

A detachment of the French army struck across the Alps in a southeast direction, holding their course toward the Waldensian Valleys, there to unite with the main body of the crusaders under Cataneo. They slaughtered, pillaged, and burned as they went onward, and at last arrived with dripping swords in the Valley of Pragelas.

The Valley of Pragelas, where we now see these assassins, sweeps along, from almost the summit of the Alps, to the south, watered by the rivers Chinone and Dora, and opens on the great plain of Piedmont, having Pinerolo on the one side and Susa on the other. It was then and long after under the dominion of France. "Prior to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes," says Muston, "the Vaudois of these valleys [that is, Pragelas, and the lateral vales branching out from it] possessed eleven parishes, eighteen churches, and sixty four centers of religious assembling, where worship was celebrated morning and evening, in as many hamlets. It was in Laus, in Pragelas, that was held the famous synod where, 200 years before the Protestant Reformation, 140 Protestant pastors assembled, each accompanied by two or three lay deputies; and it was from the Val di Pragelas that the Gospel of God made its way into France prior to the fifteenth century." [xxiv]

This was the Valley of Pragelas which had been the scene of the terrible tragedy of Christmas, 1400. Again terror, mourning, and death were carried into it. The peaceful inhabitants, who were expecting no such invasion, were busy reaping their harvests, when this horde of assassins burst upon them. In the first panic they abandoned their dwellings and fled. Many were overtaken and slain; hamlets and whole villages were given to the flames; nor could the caves in which multitudes sought refuge afford any protection. The

horrible barbarity of the Val Loyse was repeated in the Valley of Pragelas. Combustible materials were piled up and fires kindled at the mouths of these hiding places; and when extinguished, all was silent within. Folded together in one motionless heap lay mother and babe, patriarch and stripling; while the fatal smoke, which had cast them into that deep sleep, was eddying along the roof, and slowly making its exit into the clear sunlit summer sky. But the course of this destruction was stayed. After the first surprise the inhabitants took heart, and turning upon their murderers drove them from their valley, exacting a heavy penalty in the pursuit for the ravages they had committed in it. We now turn to the Piedmontese portion of this army. It was led by the Papal legate, Cataneo, in person. It was destined to operate against those valleys in Piedmont which were the most ancient seat of these religionists, and were deemed the stronghold of the Vaudois heresy. Cataneo repaired to Pinerolo, which adjoins the frontier of the doomed territory. Thence he dispatched a band of preaching monks to convert the men of the Valleys. These missionaries returned without having, so far as appears, made a single convert. The legate now put his soldiers in motion. Traversing the glorious plain, the Clusone gleaming out through rich corn fields and vineyards on their left, and the mighty rampart of the hills, with their chestnut forests, their pasturages, and snows, rising grandly on their right, and turning round the shoulder of the copse clad Bricherasio, this army, with another army of pillagers and cutthroats in its rear, advanced up the long avenue that leads to La Torre, the capital of the Valleys, and sat down before it. They had come against a simple, unarmed people, who knew to tend their vines, and lead their herds to pasture, but were ignorant of the art of war. It seemed as if the last hour of the Waldensian race had struck. Seeing this mighty host before their Valleys, the Waldenses sent two of their patriarchs to request an interview with Cataneo, and turn, if possible, his heart to peace. John Campo and John Besiderio were dispatched on this embassy. "Do not condemn us without hearing us," said they, "for we are Christians and faithful subjects; and our Barbes are prepared to prove, in public or in private, that our doctrines are conformable to the Word of God...Our hope in God is greater than our desire to please men; beware how you draw down upon yourselves this anger by persecuting us; for remember that, if God so wills it, all the forces you have assembled against us will nothing avail."

These were weighty words, and they were meekly spoken, but as to changing Cataneo's purpose, or softening the hearts of the ruffian host which he led, they might as well have been addressed to the rocks which rose around the speakers. Nevertheless, they fell not to the ground. Cataneo, believing that the Vaudois herdsmen would not stand an hour before his men at arms, and desirous of striking a finishing blow, divided his army into a number of attacking parties, which were to begin the battle on various points at the same time. The folly of extending his line so as to embrace the whole territory led to Cataneo's destruction; but his strategy was rewarded with a few small successes at first. One troop was stationed at the entrance of the Val Lucerna; we shall follow its march till it disappears on the mountains it hopes to conquer, and then we shall return and narrate the more decisive operations of the campaign under Cataneo in the Val Angrogna.

The first step of the invaders was to occupy the town of La Torre, situated on the angle formed by the junction of the Val Lucerna and the Val Angrogna, the silver Pelice at its feet and the shadow of the Castelluzzo covering it. The soldiers were probably spared the necessity or denied the pleasure of slaughter, the inhabitants having fled to the mountains.

The valley beyond La Torre is too open to admit of being defended, and the troop advanced along it unopposed. Than this theater of war nothing in ordinary times is more peaceful, nothing more grand. A carpet of rich meadows clothes it from side to side; fruitful trees fleck it with their shadows; the Pelice waters it; and on either hand is a wall of mountains, whose sides display successive zones of festooned vines, golden grain, dark chestnut forests, and rich pasturages. Over these are hung stupendous battlements of rock; and above all, towering high in air, are the everlasting peaks in their robes of ice and snow. But the sublimities of nature were nothing to men whose thoughts were only of blood. Pursuing their march up the valley, the soldiers next came to Villaro. It is situated about midway between the entrance and head of Lucerna, on a ledge of turf in the side of the great mountains, raised some 200 feet above the Pelice, which flows past at about a quarter mile's distance. The troop had little difficulty in taking possession. Most of the inhabitants, warned of the approach of danger, had fled to the Alps. What Cataneo's troop inflicted on those who had been unable to make their escape, no history records. The half of Lucerna, with the towns of La Torre and Villaro and their hamlets, was in the occupation of Cataneo's soldiers, their march so far had been a victorious one, though certainly not a glorious one, such victories as they had gained being only over unarmed peasants and bed-ridden women.

Resuming their march the troop came next to Bobbio. The name of Bobbio is not unknown in classic story. It nestles at the base of gigantic cliffs, where the lofty summit of the Col la Croix points the way to France, and overhangs a path which apostolic feet may have trodden. The Pelice is seen forcing its way through the dark gorges of the mountains in a thundering torrent, and meandering in a flood of silver along the valley. At this point the grandeur of the Val Lucerna attains its height. Let us pause to survey the scene that must here have met the eyes of Cataneo's soldiers, and which, one would suppose, might have turned them from their cruel purpose. Immediately behind Bobbio shoots up the "Barion," symmetrical as Egyptian obelisk, but far taller and massier. Its summit rises 3,000 feet above the roofs of the little town. Compared with this majestic monolith the proudest monument of Europe's proudest capital is a mere toy. Yet even the Barion is but an item in this assemblage of glories. Overtopping it behind, and sweeping round the extremity of the valley, is a glorious amphitheatre of crags and precipices, enclosed by a background of great mountains, some rounded like domes, others sharp as needles; and rising out of this sea of hills, are the grander and loftier forms of the Alp des Rousses and the Col de Malaure, which guard the gloomy pass that winds its way through splintered rocks and under overhanging precipices, till it opens into the valleys of the French Protestants, and lands the traveler on the plains of Dauphine. In this unrivalled amphitheatre sits Bobbio, in summer buried in blossoms and fruit, and in winter wrapped in the shadows of its great mountains, and the mists of their tempests. What a contrast between the still repose and grand sublimity of nature and the dreadful errand on which the men now pressing forward to the little town are bent! To them, nature speaks in vain; they are engrossed with but one thought.

The capture of Bobbio, an easy task, put the soldiers in possession of the entire Valley of Lucerna: its inhabitants had been chased to the Alps, or their blood mingled with the waters of their own Pelice. Other and remoter expeditions were now projected. Their plan was to traverse the Col Julten, sweep down on the Valley of Prali, which lies on the north



of it, chastise its inhabitants, pass on to the Valleys of San Martino and Perosa, and pursuing the circuit of the Valleys, and clearing the ground as they went onward of its inveterate heresy, at least of its heretics, join the main body of crusaders, who, they expected, would by this time have finished their work in the Valley of Angrogna, and unitedly celebrate their victory. They would then be able to say that they had gone the round of the Waldensian territory, and had at last effected the long meditated work, so often attempted, but hitherto in vain, of the utter extirpation of its heresy. But the war was destined to have a very different termination. The expedition across the Col Julten was immediately commenced. A corps of 700 men was detached from the army in Lucerna for this service. [xxv] The ascent of the mountain opens immediately on the north side of Bobbio. We see the soldiers toiling upwards on the track, which is a mere footpath formed by the herdsmen. At every short distance they pass the thick planted chalets and hamlets sweetly embowered amid man fling vines, or the branches of the apple and cherry tree, or the goodlier chestnut, but the inhabitants have fled. They have now reached a great height on the mountainside. Beneath is Bobbio, a speck of brown. There is the Valley of Lucerna, a ribbon of green, with a thread of silver woven into it, and lying along amid masses of mighty rocks. There, across Lucerna, are the great mountains that enclose the Valley of Rora, standing up in the silent sky; on the right are the spiky crags that bristle along the Pass of Mirabouc, that leads to France, and yonder in the east is a glimpse of the far extending plains of Piedmont.

But the summit is yet a long way off, and the soldiers of the Papal legate, bearing their weapons, to be employed, not in venturesome battle, but in cowardly massacre, toil up the ascent. As they gain on the; mountain, they look down on pinnacles which half an hour before had looked down on them. Other heights, tall as the former, still rise above them; they climb to these airy spires, which in their turn sink beneath their feet. This process they repeat; again and again, and at last they come out upon the downs that clothe the shoulders of the mountain. Now it is that the scene around them becomes one of stupendous and inexpressible grandeur. Away to the east, now fully under the eye, is the plain of Piedmont, green as garden, and level as the ocean. At their feet yawn gorges and abysses, while spiky pinnacles peer up from below as if to buttress the mountain. The horizon is filled with Alps, conspicuous among which, in the east, is the Col la Verchera, whose snow clad summit draws the eye to the more than classic valley over which it towers, where the Barbes in ancient days were wont to assemble in synod, and whence their missionaries went forth, at the peril of life, to distribute the Scriptures and sow the seed of the Kingdom. It was not unmarked, doubtless, by this corps, forming, as they meant it should do, the terminating point of their expedition in the Val di Angrogna. On the west, the crowning glory of the scene was Monte Viso, standing up in bold relief in the ebon vault, in a robe of silver. But in vain had Nature spread out her magnificence before men who had neither eyes to see nor hearts to feel her glory.

Climbing on their hands and knees the steep grassy slope in which the pass terminates, they looked down from the summit on the Valley of Prali, at that moment a scene of peace. Its great snow clad hills, conspicuous among which is the Col d'Abries, kept guard around it. Down their sides rolled foaming torrents, which, uniting in the valley, flowed along in a full and rapid river. Over the bosom of the plain were scattered numerous hamlets. The peasants were at work in the meadows and corn fields; their children were at

play; their herds were browsing in their pastures. Suddenly on the mountains above had gathered this flock of vultures that with greedy eyes were looking down upon their prey. A few hours, and these dwellings would be in flames, their inmates slaughtered, and their herds and goods carried off as booty. Impatient to begin their work, these 700 assassins rushed down on the plain.

The troop had reckoned that, no tidings of their approach having reached this secluded valley, they would fall upon its unarmed peasants as falls the avalanche, and crush them. But it was not to be so. Instead of fleeing, panic struck, as the invaders expected, the men of Prali hastily assembled, and stood to their defense. Battle was joined at the hamlet of Pommiers. The weapons of the Vaudois were rude, but their trust in God, and their indignation at the cowardly and bloody assault, gave them strength and courage. The Piedmontese soldiers, wearied with the rugged, slippery tracks they had traversed, fell beneath the blows of their opponents. Every man of them was cut down with the exception of one ensign. Of all the 700, he alone survived. During the carnage, he made his escape, and ascending the banks of a mountain torrent, he crept into a cavity which the summer heats had formed in a mass of snow. There he remained hid for some days; at last, cold and hunger drove him forth to cast himself upon the mercy of the men of Prali. They were generous enough to pardon this solitary survivor of the host that had come to massacre them. They sent him back across the Col Julien, to tell those from whom he had come that the Vaudois had courage to fight for their hearths and altars, and that of the army of 700 which they had sent to slay them, he only had escaped to carry tidings of the fate which had befallen his companions.

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### **Chapter 3**

#### **FAILURE OF CATANEO'S EXPEDITION**

THE camp of Cataneo was pitched almost at the gates of La Torre, beneath the shadow of the Casteluzzo. The Papal legate is about to try to force his way into the Val di Angrogna. This valley opens hard by the spot where the legate had established his camp, and runs on for a dozen miles into the Alps, a magnificent succession of narrow gorges and open dells, walled throughout by majestic mountains, and terminating in a noble circular basin, the Pra del Tor, which is set round with snowy peaks, and forms the most venerated spot in all the Waldensian territory, inasmuch as it was the seat of their college, and the meeting place of their Barbes. In the Pra del Tor, or Meadow of the Tower, Cataneo expected to surprise the mass of the Waldensan people, now gathered into it as being the strongest refuge which their hills afforded. There, too, he expected to be joined by the corps which he had sent round by Lucerna to make the circuit of the Valleys, and after devastating Prali and San Martino, to climb the mountain barrier and join their companions in the "Pra," little imagining that the soldiers he had dispatched on that errand of massacre were now enriching with their corpses the Valleys they had been sent to subdue. In that same spot where the Barbes had so often met in synod, and enacted rules for the government of their Church and the spread of their faith, the Papal legate would reunite his victorious host, and finish the campaign by proclaiming that now the Waldensian heresy, root and branch, was extinct.

The Waldenses, their humble supplication for peace having been contemptuously rejected,

as we have already said, had three courses in their choice: to go to mass, to be butchered as sheep, or to fight for their lives. They chose the last, and made ready for battle. But first they must remove to a place of safety all who were unable to bear arms. Packing up their kneading troughs, their ovens, and other culinary utensils, laying their aged on their shoulders, and their sick in couches, and leading their children by the hand, they began to climb the hills, in the direction of the Pra del Tor, at the head of the Val di Angrogna. Transporting their household stuff, they could be seen traversing the rugged paths, and making the mountains resound with psalms, which they sweetly sung as they journeyed up the ascent. Those who remained busied themselves in manufacturing pikes and other weapons of defense and attack, in repairing the barricades, in arranging themselves into fighting parties, and assigning to the various corps the posts they were to defend. Cataaneo now put his soldiers in motion. Advancing to near the town of La Torre, they made a sharp turn to the right, and entered the Val di Angrogna. Its opening offers no obstruction, being soft and even as any meadow in all England. By and by it begins to swell into the heights of Roccomaneot, where the Vaudois had resolved to make a stand. Their fighting men were posted along its ridge. Their armor was of the simplest. The bow was almost their only weapon of attack. They wore bucklers of skin, covered with the bark of the chestnut tree, the better to resist thrust of pike or cut of sword. In the hollow behind, protected by the rising ground on which their fathers, husbands, and brothers were posted, were a number of women and children, gathered there for shelter. The Piedmontese host pressed up the activity, discharging a shower of arrows as they advanced, and the Waldensian line on which these missiles fell, seemed to waver, and to be on the point of giving way. Those behind, espying the danger, fell on their knees and, extending their hands in supplication to the God of battles, cried aloud, "O God of our fathers, help us! O God, deliver us!" That cry was heard by the attacking host, and especially by one of its captains, Le Noir of Mondovi, or the Black Mondovi, a proud, bigoted, bloodthirsty man. He instantly shouted out that his soldiers would give the answer, accompanying his threat with horrible blasphemies. The Black Mondovi raised his visor as he spoke. At the instant an arrow from the bow of Pierre Revel, of Angrogna, entering between his eyes, transfixed his skull, and he fell on the earth a corpse. The fall of this daring leader disheartened the Papal army. The soldiers began to fall back. They were chased down the slopes by the Vaudois, who now descended upon them like one of their own mountain torrents. Having driven their invaders to the plain, cutting off not a few in their flight, they returned as the evening began to fall, to celebrate with songs, on the heights where they had won it, the victory with which it had pleased the God of their fathers to crown their arms. Cataaneo burned with rage and shame at being defeated by these herdsmen. In a few days, reassembling his host, he made a second attempt to enter the Angrogna. This promised to be successful. He passed the height of Roccomaneot, where he had encountered his first defeat, without meeting any resistance. He led his soldiers into the narrow defiles beyond. Here great rocks overhang the path: mighty chestnut trees fling their branches across the way, veiling it in gloom, and far down thunders the torrent that waters the valley. Still advancing, he found himself, without fighting, in possession of the ample and fruitful expanse into which, these defiles passed, the valley opens. He was now master so far of the Val di Angrogna, comprehending the numerous hamlets, with their finely cultivated fields and vineyards, on the left of the torrent. But he had seen none of the inhabitants.

These, he knew, were with the men of Lucerna in the Pra del Tor. Between him and his prey rose the "Barricade," a steep unscaleable mountain, which runs like a wall across the valley, and forms a rampart to the famous "Meadow," which combines the solemnity of sanctuary with the strength of citadel.

Must the advance of the Papal legate and his army here end! It seemed as if it must. Cataneo was in a vast cul de sac. He could see the white peaks round the Pra, but between him and the Pra itself rose, in Cyclopean strength and height, the Barricade. He searched and, unhappily for himself, found all entrance. Some convulsion of nature has here rent the mountains, and through the long, narrow, and dark chasm thus formed lies the one only path that leads to the head of Angrogna. The leader of the Papal host boldly ordered his men to enter and traverse this frightful gorge, not knowing how few of them he should ever lead back. The only pathway through this chasm is a rocky ledge on the side of the mountain, so narrow that not more than two abreast can advance along it. If assailed either in front, or in rear, or from above, there is absolutely no retreat. Nor is there room for the party attacked to fight. The pathway is hung midway between the bottom of the gorge, along which rolls the stream, and the summit of the mountain. Here the naked cliff runs sheer up for at least one thousand feet; there it leans over the path in stupendous masses, which look as if about to fall. Here lateral fissures admit the golden beams of the sun, which relieve the darkness of the pass, and make it visible. There a half acre or so of level space gives standing room on the mountain's side to a clump of birches, with their tall silvery trunks, or a chalet, with its bit of bright close shaven meadow. But these only partially relieve the terrors of the chasm, which runs on from one to two miles, when, with a burst of light, and a sudden flashing of white peaks on the eye, it opens into an amphitheatre of meadow of dimensions so goodly, that an entire nation might find room to encamp in it.

It was into this terrible defile that the soldiers of the Papal legate now marched. They kept advancing, as best they could, along the narrow ledge. They were now nearing the Pra. It seemed impossible for their prey to escape them. Assembled on this spot the Waldensian people had but one neck, and the Papal soldiers, so Cataneo believed, were to sever that neck at a blow. But God was watching over the Vaudois. He had said of the Papal legate and his army, as of another tyrant of former days, "I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will cause thee to return by the way by which thou camest." But by what agency was the advance of that host to be stayed? Will some mighty angel smite Cataneo's army, as he did Sennacherib's? No angel blockaded the pass. Will thunder bolts and hailstones be rained upon Cataneo's soldiers, as of old on Sisera's? The thunders slept; the hail fell not. Will earthquake and whirlwind discomfit them? No earthquake rocked the ground; no whirlwinds rent the mountains. The instrumentality now put in motion to shield the Vaudois from destruction was one of the lightest and frailest in all nature; yet no bars of adamant could have more effectually shut the pass, and brought the march of the host to an instant halt.

A white cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, unobserved by the Piedmontese, but keenly watched by the Vandois, was seen to gather on the mountain's summit, about the time the army would be entering the defile. That cloud grew rapidly bigger and blacker. It began to descend. It came rolling down the mountain's side, wave on wave, like an ocean tumbling out of heaven, a sea of murky vapor. It fell right into the chasm in which was the Papal

army, sealing it up, and filling it from top to bottom with a thick black fog. In a moment the host were in night; they were bewildered, stupefied, and could see neither before nor behind, could neither advance nor retreat. They halted in a state bordering on terror.

[\[xxvi\]](#)

The Waldenses interpreted this as an interposition of Providence in their behalf. It had given them the power of repelling the invader. Climbing the slopes of the Pra, and issuing from all their hiding places in its environs, they spread themselves over the mountains, the paths of which were familiar to them, and while the host stood riveted beneath them, caught in the double toils of the defile and the mist, they tore up the great stones and rocks, and sent them thundering down into the ravine. The Papal soldiers were crushed where they stood. Nor was this all. Some of the Waldenses boldly entered the chasm, sword in hand, and attacked them in front. Consternation seized the Piedmontese host. Panic impelled them to flee, but their effort to escape was more fatal than the sword of the Vaudois, or the rocks that, swift as arrow, came bounding down the mountain. They jostled one another; they threw each other down in the struggle; some were trodden to death; others were rolled over the precipice, and crushed on the rocks below, or drowned in the torrent, and so perished miserably. [\[xxvii\]](#)

The fate of one of these invaders has been preserved in stone. He was a certain Captain Saquet, a man, it is said, of gigantic stature, from Polonghera, in Piedmont. He began, like his Philistine prototype, to vent curses on the Waldensian dogs. The words were yet in his mouth when his foot slipped. Rolling over the precipice, and tumbling into the torrent of the Angrogna, he was carried away by the stream, and his body finally deposited in a deep eddy or whirlpool, called in the patois of the country a "tompie," from the noise made by its waters. It bears to this day the name of the Tompie de Saquet, or Gulf of Saquet.

[\[xxviii\]](#)

This war hung above the Valleys, like a cloud of tempest, for a whole year. It inflicted much suffering and loss upon the Waldenses; their homes were burned, their fields devastated, their goods carried off, and their persons slain; but the invaders suffered greatly more than they inflicted. Of the 18,000 regular troops, to which we may add about an equal number of desperadoes, with which the campaign opened, few ever returned to their homes. They left their bones on the mountains they had come to subdue. They were cut off mostly in detail. They were led weary chases from valley to mountain and from mountain to valley. The rocks rolled upon them gave them at once death and burial. They were met in narrow defiles and cut to pieces. Flying parties of Waldenses would suddenly issue from the mist, or from some cave known only to themselves, attack and discomfit the foe, and then as suddenly retreat into the friendly vapor or the sheltering rock. Thus it came to pass that, in the words of Muston, "this army of invaders vanished from the Vaudois mountains as rain in the sands of the desert." [\[xxix\]](#) "God," says Leger, "turned the heart of their prince toward this poor people." He sent a prelate to their Valleys, to assure them of his good will, and to intimate his wish to receive their deputies. They sent twelve of their more venerable men to Turin, who being admitted into the duke's presence, gave him such an account of their faith, that he candidly confessed that he had been misled in what he had done against them, and would not again suffer such wrongs to be inflicted upon them. He several times said that he "had not so virtuous, so faithful, and so obedient subjects as the Vaudois." [\[xxx\]](#) He caused the deputies a little surprise by expressing a

wish to see some of the Vaudois children. Twelve infants, with their mothers, were straightway sent for from the Valley of Angrogna, and presented before the prince. He examined them narrowly. He found them well formed, and testified his admiration of their healthy faces, clear eyes, and lively prattle. He had been told, he said, that "the Vaudois children were monsters, with only one eye placed in the middle of the forehead, four rows of black teeth, and other similar deformities." [xxxix] He expressed himself as not a little angry at having been made to believe such fables.

The prince, Charles II, [xxxix] a youth of only twenty years, but humane and wise, confirmed the privileges and immunities of the Vaudois, and dismissed them with his promise that they should be unmolested in the future. The Churches of the Valleys now enjoyed a short respite from persecution.

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## **Chapter 4**

### **SYNOD IN THE WALDENSIAN VALLEYS**

THE DUKE OF SAVOY was sincere in his promise that the Vaudois should not be disturbed, but fully to make it good was not altogether in his power. He could take care that such armies of crusaders as that which mustered under the standard of Cataneo should not invade their Valleys, but he could not guard them from the secret machinations of the priesthood. In the absence of the armed crusader, the missionary and the inquisitor assailed them. Some were seduced, others were kidnapped, and carried of to the Holy Office. To these annoyances was added the yet greater evil of a decaying piety. A desire for repose made many conform outwardly to the Romish Church. "In order to be shielded from all interruption in their journeys on business, they obtained from the priests, who were settled in the Valleys, certificates or testimonials of their being Papists." To obtain this credential it was necessary to attend the Romish chapel, to confess, to go to mass, and to have their children baptised by the priests. For this shameful and criminal dissimulation they fancied that they made amends by muttering to themselves when they entered the Romish temples, "Cave of robbers, may God confound thee!" At the same time they continued to attend the preaching of the Vaudois pastors, and to submit themselves to their censures. But beyond all question the men who practiced these deceits, and the Church that tolerated them, had greatly declined. That old vine seemed to be dying. A little while and it would disappear from off those mountains which it had so long covered with the shadow of its boughs.

But He who had planted it "looked down from heaven and visited it." It was now that the Reformation broke out. The river of the Water of Life was opened a second time, and began to flow through Christendom. The old and dying stock in the Alps, drinking of the celestial stream, lived anew; its boughs began to be covered with blossoms and fruit as of old. The Reformation had begun its career, and had already stirred most of the countries of Europe to their depths before tidings of the mighty changes reached these secluded mountains. When at last the great news was announced, the Vaudois "were as men who dreamed." Eager to have them confirmed, and to know to what extent the yoke of Rome had been cast off by the nations of Europe, they sent forth Pastor Martin, of the Valley of Lucrena, on a mission of inquiry. In 1526 he returned with the amazing intelligence that the light of the old Evangel had broken on Germany, on Switzerland, on France, and that

every day was adding to the number of those who openly professed the same doctrines to which the Vaudois had borne witness from ancient times. To attest what he said, he produced the books he had received in Germany containing the views of the Reformers. [\[xxxiii\]](#) The remnant of the Vaudois on the north of the Alps also sent out men to collect information respecting that great spiritual revolution which had so surprised and gladdened them. In 1530 the Churches of Provence and Dauphine commissioned George Morel, of Merindol, and Pierre Masson, of Burgundy, to visit the Reformers of Switzerland and Germany, and bring them word touching their doctrine and manner of life. The deputies met in conference with the members of the Protestant Churches of Neuchatel, Morat, and Bern. They had also interviews with Berthold Haller and William Farel. Going on to Basle they presented to Oecolampadius, in October, 1530, a document in Latin, containing a complete account of their ecclesiastical discipline, worship, doctrine, and manners. They begged in return that Oecolampadius would say whether he approved of the order and doctrine of their Church, and if he held it to be defective, to specify in what points and to what extent. The elder Church submitted itself to the younger. The visit of these two pastors of this ancient Church gave unspeakable joy to the Reformer of Basle. He heard in them the voice of the Church primitive and apostolic speaking to the Christians of the sixteenth century, and bidding them welcome within the gates of the City of God. What a miracle was before him! For ages had this Church been in the fires, yet she had not been consumed. Was not this encouragement to those who were just entering into persecutions not less terrific? "We render thanks," said Oecolampadius in his letter, October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1530, to the Churches of Provence, "to our most gracious Father that he has called you into such marvellous light, during ages in which such thick darkness has covered almost the whole world under the empire of Antichrist. We love you as brethren."

But his affection for them did not blind him to their declensions, nor make him withhold those admonitions which he saw to be needed. "As we approve of many things among you," he wrote, "so there are several which we wish to see amended. We are informed that the fear of persecution has caused you to dissemble and to conceal your faith...There is no concord between Christ and Belial. You commune with unbelievers; you take part in their abominable masses, in which the death and passion of Christ are blasphemed...

I know your weakness, but it becomes those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ to be more courageous. It is better for us to die than to be overcome by temptation." It was thus that Oecolampadius, speaking in the name of the Church of the Reformation, repaid the Church of the Alps for the services she had rendered to the world in former ages. By sharp, faithful, brotherly rebuke, he sought to restore to her the purity and glory which she had lost.

Having finished with Oecolampadius, the deputies went on to Strasburg. There they had interviews with Bucer and Capito. A similar statement of their faith to the Reformers of that city drew forth similar congratulations and counsels. In the clear light of her morning the Reformation Church saw many things which had grown dim in the evening of the Vaudois Church; and the Reformers willingly permitted their elder sister the benefit of their own wider views. If the men of the sixteenth century recognised the voice of primitive Christianity speaking in the Vaudois, the latter heard the voice of the Bible, or rather of God himself, speaking in the Reformers, and submitted themselves with modesty

and docility to their reproofs. The last had become first.

A manifold interest belongs to the meeting of these the two Churches. Each is a miracle to the other. The preservation of the Vaudois Church for so many ages, amid the fires of persecution, made her a wonder to the Church of the sixteenth century. The bringing up of the latter from the dead made her a yet greater wonder to the Church of the first century. These two Churches compare their respective beliefs: they find that their creeds are not twain, but one. They compare the sources of their knowledge: they find that they have both of them drawn their doctrine from the Word of God; they are not two Churches, they are one. They are the elder and younger members of the same glorious family, the children of the same Father. What a magnificent monument of the true antiquity and genuine catholicity of Protestantism!

Only one of the two Provence deputies returned from their visit to the Reformers of Switzerland. On their way back, at Dijon, suspicion, from some cause or other, fell on Pierre Masson. He was thrown into prison, and ultimately condemned and burned. His fellow deputy was allowed to go on his way. George Morel, bearing the answers of the Reformers, and especially the letters of Oecolampadius, happily arrived in safety in Provence.

The documents he brought with him were much canvassed. Their contents caused these two ancient Churches mingled joy and sorrow; the former, however, greatly predominating. The news touching the numerous body of Christians, now appearing in many lands, so full of knowledge, and faith, and courage, was literally astounding. The confessors of the Alps thought that they were alone in the world; every successive century saw their numbers thinning, and their spirit growing less resolute; their ancient enemy, on the other hand, was steadfastly widening her dominion and strengthening her sway. A little longer, they imagined, and all public faithful profession of the Gospel would cease. It was at that moment they were told that a new army of champions had arisen to maintain the old battle. This announcement explained and justified the past to them, for now they beheld the fruits of their fathers' blood. They who had fought the battle were not to have the honor of the victory. That was reserved for combatants who had come newly into the field. They had forfeited this reward, they painfully felt, by their defections; hence the regret that mingled with their joy.

They proceeded to discuss the answers that should be made to the Churches of the Protestant faith, considering especially whether they should adopt the reforms urged upon them in the communications which their deputies had brought back from the Swiss and German Reforming. The great majority of the Vaudois barbes were of opinion that they ought. A small minority, however, were opposed to this, because they thought that it did not become the new disciples to dictate to the old, or because they themselves were secretly inclined to the Roman superstitions. They went back again to the Reformers for advice; and, after repeated interchange of views, it was finally resolved to convene a synod in the Valleys, at which all the questions between the two Churches might be debated, and the relations which they were to sustain towards each other in time to come, determined. If the Church of the Alps was to continue apart, as before the Reformation, she felt that she must justify her position by proving the existence of great and substantial differences in doctrine between herself and the newly arisen Church. But if no such differences existed, she would not, and dared not, remain separate and alone; she must unite with the



Church of the Reformation. It was resolved that the coming synod should be a truly oecumenical one, a general assembly of all the children of the Protestant faith. A hearty invitation was sent forth, and it was cordially and generally responded to. All the Waldensian Churches in the bosom of the Alps were represented in this synod. The Albigenian communities on the north of the chain, and the Vaudois Churches in Calabria, sent deputies to it. The Churches of French Switzerland chose William Farel and Anthony Saunier to attend it. [\[xxxiv\]](#) From even more distant lands, as Bohemia, came men to deliberate and vote in this famous convention.

The representatives assembled on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October, 1532. Two years earlier the Augsburg Confession had been given to the world, marking the culmination of the German Reformation. A year before, Zwingli had died on the field of Cappel. In France, the Reformation was beginning to be illustrated by the heroic deaths of its children. Calvin had not taken his prominent place at Geneva, but he was already enrolled under the Protestant banner. The princes of the Schmalkald League were standing at bay in the presence of Charles V. It was a critical yet glorious era in the annals of Protestantism which saw this assembly convened. It met at the town of Chamforans, in the heart of the Valley of Angrogna. There are few grander or stronger positions in all that valley than the site occupied by this little town. The approach to it was defended by the heights of Roccomaneot and La Serre, and by defiles which now contract, now widen, but are everywhere overhung by great rocks and mighty chestnut trees, behind and above which rise the taller peaks, some of them snow clad. A little beyond La Serre is the plateau on which the town stood, overlooking the grassy bosom of the valley, which is watered by the crystal torrent, dotted by numerous chalets, and runs on for about two miles, till shut in by the steep, naked precipices of the Barricade, which, stretching from side to side of Angrogna, leaves only the long, dark chasm we have already described, as the pathway to the Pra del Tor, whose majestic mountains here rise on the sight and suggest to the traveler the idea that he is drawing nigh some city of celestial magnificence. The town of Chamforans does not now exist; its only representative at this day is a solitary farmhouse. The synod sat for six consecutive days. All the points raised in the communications received from the Protestant Churches were freely ventilated by the assembled barbes and elders. Their findings were embodied in a "Short Confession of Faith," which Monastier says "may be considered as a supplement to the ancient Confession of Faith of the year 1120, which it does not contradict in any point." [\[xxxv\]](#) It consists of seventeen articles, [\[xxxvi\]](#) the chief of which are the Moral inability of man; election to eternal life; the will of God, as made known in the Bible, the only rule of duty; and the doctrine of two Sacraments only, baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The lamp which had been on the point of expiring began, after this synod, to burn with its former brightness. The ancient spirit of the Waldenses revived. They no longer practiced those dissimulations and cowardly concealments to which they had had recourse to avoid persecution. They no longer feared to confess their faith. Henceforward they were never seen at mass, or in the Popish churches. They refused to recognize the priests of Rome as ministers of Christ, and under no circumstances would they receive any spiritual benefit or service at their hands. Another sign of the new life that now animated the Vaudois was their setting about the work of rebuilding their churches. For fifty years previous public worship may be said to have ceased in their Valleys. Their churches had been razed by the

persecutor, and the Vaudois feared to rebuild them lest they should draw down upon themselves a new storm of violence and blood. A cave would serve at times as a place of meeting. In more peaceful years the house of their barbe, or of some of their chief men, would be converted into a church; and when the weather was fine, they would assemble on the mountain side, under the great boughs of their ancestral trees. But their old sanctuaries they dared not raise from the ruins into which the persecutor had cast them. They might say with the ancient Jews, "The holy and beautiful house in which our fathers praised thee is burned with fire, and all our pleasant things are laid waste." But now, strengthened by the fellowship and counsels of their Protestant brethren, churches arose, and the worship of God was reinstated. Hard by the place where the synod met, at Lorenzo namely, was the first of these post Reformation churches set up; others speedily followed in the other valleys; pastors were multiplied; crowds flocked to their preaching, and not a few came from the plains of Piedmont, and from remote parts of their valleys, to drink of these living waters again flowing in their land. Yet another token did this old Church give of the vigorous life that was now flowing in her veins. This was a translation of the Scriptures into the French tongue. At the synod, the resolution was taken to translate and print both the Old and New Testaments, and, as this was to be done at the sole charge of the Vaudois, it was considered as their gift to the Churches of the Reformation. A most appropriate and noble gift! That Book which the Waldenses had received from the primitive Church, which their fathers had preserved with their blood, which their barbes had laboriously transcribed and circulated, they now put into the hands of the Reformers, constituting them along with themselves the custodians of this the ark of the world's hopes. Robert Olivetan, a near relative of Calvin, was asked to undertake the translation, and he executed it, with the help of his great kinsman, it is believed. It was printed in folio, in black letter, at Neuchatel, in the year 1535, by Pierre de Wingle, commonly called Picard. The entire expense was defrayed by the Waldenses, who collected for this object 1,500 crowns of gold, a large sum for so poor a people. Thus did the Waldensian Church emphatically proclaim, at the commencement of this new era in her existence, that the Word of God was her one sole foundation.

As has been already mentioned, a commission to attend the synod had been given by the Churches of French Switzerland to Farel and Saunter. Its fulfillment necessarily involved great toil and peril. One crosses the Alps at this day so easily, that it is difficult to conceive the toil and danger that attended the journey then. The deputies could not take the ordinary tracks across the mountains for fear of pursuit; they were compelled to travel by unfrequented paths. The way often led by the edge of precipices and abysses, up steep and dangerous ascents, and across fields of frozen snow. Nor were their pursuers the only dangers they had to fear; they were exposed to death from the blinding drifts and tempests of the hills. Nevertheless, they arrived in safety in the Valleys, and added by their presence and their counsels to the dignity of this the first great ecclesiastical assembly of modern times. Of this we have a somewhat remarkable proof. Three years thereafter, a Vaudois, Jean Peyrel, of Angrogna, being cast into prison, deposed on his trial that "he had kept guard for the ministers who taught the good law, who were assembled in the town of Chamforans, in the center of Angrogna; and that amongst others present there was one called Farel, who had a red beard, and a beautiful white horse; and two others accompanied him, one of whom had a horse, almost black, and the other was very tall, and

rather lame."

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## Chapter 5

### PERSECUTIONS AND MARTYRDOMS

THE Church of the Alps had peace for twenty eight years. This was a time of great spiritual prosperity. Sanctuaries arose in all her Valleys; her pastors and teachers were found too few, and men of learning and zeal, some of them from foreign lands, pressed into her service. Individuals and families in the cities on the plain of Piedmont embraced her faith; and the crowds that attended her worship were continually growing. [\[xxxvii\]](#) In short, this venerable Church had a second youth. Her lamp, retrimmed, burned with a brightness that justified her time honored motto, "A light shining in darkness." The darkness was not now so deep as it had been; the hours of night were drawing to a close. Nor was the Vaudois community the only light that now shone in Christendom. It was one of a constellation of lights, whose brilliance was beginning to irradiate the skies of the Church with an effulgence which no former age had known. The exemption from persecution, which the Waldenses enjoyed during this period, was not absolute, but comparative. The lukewarm are seldom molested; and the quickened zeal of the Vaudois brought with it a revival of the persecutor's malignity, though it did not find vent in violences so dreadful as the tempests that had lately smitten them. Only two years after the synod, that is, in 1534, wholesale destruction fell upon the Vaudois Churches of Provence; but the sad story of their extinction will more appropriately be told elsewhere. In the valleys of Piedmont events were from time to time occurring that showed that the inquisitor's vengeance had been scotched, not killed. While the Vaudois as a race were prosperous, their churches multiplying, and their faith extending its geographical area from one area to another, individual Vaudois were being at times seized, and put to death, at the stake, on the rack, or by the cord. Three years after, the persecution broke out anew, and raged for a short time. Charles III. of Savoy, a prince of mild manners, but under the rule of the priests, being solicited by the Archbishop of Turin and the inquisitor of the same city, gave his consent to "hunting down" the heretics of the Valleys [\[xxxviii\]](#). The commission was given to a nobleman of the name of Bersour, whose residence was at Pinerolo, near the entrance of the Valley of Perosa. Bersour, a man of savage disposition, collected a troop of 500 horse and foot, and attacked the Valley of Angrogna. He was repulsed, but the storm which had rolled away from the mountains fell upon the plains. Turning to the Vaudois who resided around his own residence, he seized a great number of persons, whom he threw into prisons and convents of Pinerolo and the Inquisition of Turin. Many of them suffered in the flames. One of these martyrs, Catalan Girard, quaintly taught the spectators a parabolic lesson, standing at the pile. From amid the flames he asked for two stones, which were instantly brought him. The crowd looked on in silence, curious to know what he meant to do with them. Rubbing them against each other, he said, "You think to extinguish our poor Churches by your persecutions. You can no more do so than I with my feeble hands can crush these stones." [\[xxxix\]](#) Heavier tempests seemed about to descend, when suddenly the sky cleared above the confessors of the Alps. It was a change in the politics of Europe in this instance, as in many others, that stayed the arm of persecution. Francis I of France demanded of Charles, Duke of Savoy, permission

to march an army through his dominions. The object of the French king was the recovery of the Duchy of Milan, a long contested prize between himself and Charles V. The Duke of Savoy refused the request of his brother monarch; but reflecting that the passes of the Alps were in the hands of the men whom he was persecuting, and that should he continue his oppressions, the Vaudois might open the gates of his kingdom to the enemy, he sent orders to Bersour to stop the persecution in the Valleys.

In 1536, the Waldensian Church had to mourn the loss of one of the more distinguished of her pastors. Martin Gonin, of Angrogna, a man of public spirit and rare gifts, who had gone to Geneva on ecclesiastical affairs, was returning through Dauphine, when he was apprehended on suspicion of being a spy. He cleared himself on that charge, but the gaoler searching his person, and discovering certain papers upon him, he was convicted of what the Parliament of Grenoble accounted a much greater crime: heresy. Condemned to die, he was led forth at night, and drowned in the river Isere. He would have suffered at the stake had not his persecutors feared the effect of his dying words upon the spectators. [x1] There were others, also called to ascend the martyr pile, whose names we must not pass over in silence. Two pastors returning from Geneva to their flocks in the Valleys, in company of three French Protestants, were seized at the Col de Tamiers, in Savoy, and carried to Chambery. There all five were tried, condemned, and burned. The fate of Nicolas Sartoire is yet more touching. He was a student of theology at Geneva, and held one of those bursaries which the Lords of Bern had allotted for the training of young men as pastors in the Churches of the Valleys. He set out to spend his holiday with his family in Piedmont. We know how Vaudois heart yearns for its native mountains; nor would the conting of the youth awaken less lively anticipations on the part of his friends. The paternal threshold, alas! he was never to cross; his native Valleys he was to tread no more. Travelling by the pass of St. Bernard, and the grand Valley of Aosta, he had just passed the Italian frontier, when he was apprehended on the suspicion of heresy. It was the month of May, when all was life and beauty in the vales and mountains around him; he himself was in the spring time of existence; it was hard to lay down life at such a moment; but the great captain from whose feet he had just come, had taught him that the first duty of a soldier of Christ is obedience. He confessed his Lord, nor could promises or threats (and both were tried) make him waver. He continued steadfast unto the end, and on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, 1557, he was brought forth from his dungeon at Aosta, and burned alive. [xii] The martyr who died thus heroically at Aosta was a youth, the one we are now to contemplate was a man of fifty. Geofroi Varaile was a native of the town of Busco, in Piedmont. His father had been a captain in that army of murderers who, in 1488, ravaged the Valleys of Lucerna and Angrogna.

The son in 1520 became a monk, and possessing the gift of a rare eloquence, he was sent on a preaching tour, in company with another cowed ecclesiastic, yet more famous, Bernardo Ochino of Sienna, the founder of the order of the Capuchins. The arguments of the men he was sent to convert staggered Varaile. He fled to Geneva, and in the city of the Reformers he was taught more fully the "way of life." Ordained as a pastor, he returned to the Valleys, where "like another Paul," says Leger, "he preached the faith he once destroyed." After a ministry of some months, he set out to pay a visit of a few days to his native town of Busco. He was apprehended by the monks who were lying in wait for him. He was condemned to death by the Inquisition of Turin. His execution took place in the

castle piazza of the same city, March 29 th , 1558. He walked to the place where he was to die with a firm step and a serene countenance; he addressed the vast multitude around his pile in a way that drew tears from many eyes; after this, he began to sing with a loud voice, and so continued till he sank amid the flames. [\[xlii\]](#) Two years before this, the same piazza, the castle yard at Turin, had witnessed a similar spectacle. Barthelemy Hector was a bookseller in Poitiers. A man of warm but well tempered zeal, he traveled as far as the Valleys, diffusing that knowledge that maketh wise, unto salvation. In the assemblage of white peaks that look down on the Pra del Tor is one named La Vechera, so called because the cows love the rich grass that clothes its sides in summer time. Barthelemy Hector would take his seat on the slopes of the mountain, and gathering the herdsmen and agriculturists of the Pra round him, would induce them to buy his books, by reading passages to them. Portions of the Scriptures also would he recite to the grandames and maidens as they watched their goats, or plied the distaff. His steps were tracked by the inquisitor, even amid these wild solitudes. He was dragged to Turin, to answer for the crime of selling Genevese books. His defense before his judges discovered an admirable courage and wisdom.

"You have been caught in the act," said his judge, "of selling books that contain heresy. What say you?"

"If the Bible is heresy to you, it is truth to me," replied the prisoner.

"But you use the Bible to deter men from going to mass," urged the judge.

"If the Bible deters men from going to mass," responded Barthelemy, "it is a proof that God disapproves of it, and that the mass is idolatry."

The judge, deeming it expedient to make short shrift with such a heretic, exclaimed, "Retract."

"I have spoken only truth," said the bookseller, "can I change truth as I would a garment?"

His judges kept him some months in prison, in the hope that his recantation would save them the necessity of burning him. This unwillingness to have resort to the last penalty was owing to no feeling of pity for the prisoner, but entirely to the conviction that these repeated executions were endangering the cause of their Church. "The smoke of these martyr piles," as was said with reference to the death of Patrick Hamilton, "was infecting those on whom it blew." But the constancy of Barthelemy compelled his persecutors to disregard these prudential considerations. At last, despairing of his abjuration, they brought him forth and consigned him to the flames. His behavior at the stake "drew rivers of tears," says Leger, "from the eyes of many in the Popish crowd around his stake, while others vented reproaches and invectives against the cruelty of the monks and the inquisitors." [\[xliii\]](#) These are only a few of the many martyrs by whom, even during this period of comparative peace and prosperity, the Church of the Valleys was called to testify against Rome. Some of these martyrs perished by cruel, barbarous, and most horrible methods. To recite all these cases would be beyond our purpose, and to depict the revolting and infamous details would be to narrate what no reader could peruse. We shall only quote part of the brief summary of Muston. "There is no town in Piedmont," says he, "under a Vandois pastor, where some of our brethren have not been put to death..Hugo Chiamps of Finestrelle had his entrails torn from his living body, at Turin. Peter Geymarali of Bobbio, in like manner, had his entrails taken out at Luzerna, and a fierce cat thrust in their place to torture him further; Maria Romano was buried alive at Roccopatia;

Magdalen Foulano underwent the same fate at San Giovanni; Susan Michelini was bound hand and foot, and left to perish of cold and hunger at Saracena. Bartholomew Fache, gashed with sabres, had the wounds filled up with quicklime, and perished thus in agony at Fenile; Daniel Michelini had his tongue torn out at Bobbio for having praised God. James Baridari perished covered with sulphurous matches, which had been forced into his flesh under the nails, between the fingers, in the nostrils, in the lips, and over all his body, and then lighted. Daniel Revelli had his mouth filled with gunpowder, which, being lighted, blew his head to pieces. Maria Monnen, taken at Liouisa, had the flesh cut from her cheek and chin bones, so that her jaw was left bare, and she was thus left to perish. Paul Garnier was slowly sliced to pieces at Rora. Thomas Margueti was mutilated in an indescribable manner at Miraboco, and Susan Jaquin cut in bits at La Torre. Sara Rostagnol was slit open from the legs to the bosom, and so left to perish on the road between Eyrat and Luzerna. Anne Charbonnier was impaled and carried thus on a pike, as a standard, from San Giovanni to La Torre. Daniel Rambaud, at Paesano, had his nails torn off, then his fingers chopped off, then his feet and his hands, then his arms and his legs, with each successive refusal on his part to abjure the Gospel." [\[xliv\]](#) Thus the roll of martyrs runs on, and with each new sufferer comes a new, a more excruciating and more horrible mode of torture and death.

We have already mentioned the demand which the King of France made upon the Duke of Savoy, Charles III, that he would permit him to march an army through his territories. The reply was a refusal; but Francis I must needs have a road into Italy. Accordingly he seized upon Piedmont, and held possession of it, together with the Waldensian Valleys, for twenty three years. The Waldenses had found the sway of Francis I more tolerant than that of their own princes; for though Francis hated Lutheranism, the necessities of his policy often compelled him to court the Lutherans, and so it came to pass that while he was burning heretics at Paris he spared them in the Valleys. But the general peace of Chateau Cambresis, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1559, restored Piedmont, with the exception of Turin, to its former rulers of the House of Savoy. [\[xlv\]](#) Charles III had been succeeded in 1553 by Emmanuel Philibert. Philibert was a prince of superior talents and humane disposition, and the Vaudois cherished the hope that under him they would be permitted to live in peace, and to worship as their fathers had done. What strengthened these just expectations was the fact that Philibert had married a sister of the King of France, Henry II, who had been carefully instructed in the Protestant faith by her illustrious relations, Margaret, Queen of Navarre, and Renee of France, daughter of Louis XII. But, alas! the treaty that restored Emmanuel Philibert to the throne of his ancestors, contained a clause binding the contracting parties to extinguish heresy. This was to send him back to his subjects with a dagger in his hand.

Whatever the king might incline (and we dare say, strengthened by the counsels of his Protestant queen, he intended dealing humanely by his faithful subjects the Vaudois) his intentions were overborne by men of stronger wills and more determined resolves. The inquisitors of his kingdom, the nuncio of the Pope, and the ambassadors of Spain and France, united in urging upon him the purgation of his dominions, in terms of the agreement in the treaty of peace. The unhappy monarch, unable to resist these powerful solicitations, issued on the 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1560, an edict forbidding his subjects to hear

the Protestant preachers in the Valley of Lucerna, or anywhere else, under pain of a fine of 100 dollars of gold for the first offense, and of the galleys for life for the second. This edict had reference mainly to the Protestants on the plain of Piedmont, who resorted in crowds to hear sermon in the Valleys. There followed, however, in a short time a yet severer edict, commanding attendance at mass under pain of death. To carry out this cruel decree a commission was given to a prince of the blood, Philip of Savoy, Count de Raconis, and with him was associated George Costa, Count de la Trinita, and Thomas Jacomel, the Inquisitor General, a man as cruel in disposition as he was licentious in manners. To these was added a certain Councillor Corbis, but he was not of the stuff which the business required, and so, after witnessing a few initial scenes of barbarity and horror, he resigned his commission. [xlvi] The first burst of the tempest fell on Carignano. This town reposes sweetly on one of the spurs of the Apennines, about twenty miles to the south west of Turin. It contained many Protestants, some of whom were of good position. The wealthiest were selected and dragged to the burning pile, in order to strike terror into the rest. The blow had not fallen in vain; the professors of the Protestant creed in Carignano were scattered; some fled to Turin, then under the domination of France, some to other places, and some, alas! frightened by the tempest in front, turned back and sought refuge in the darkness behind them. They had desired the "better country," but could not enter in at the cost of exile and death. Having done its work in Carignano, this desolating tempest held its way across the plain of Piedmont, towards those great mountains which were the ancient fortress of the truth, marking its track through the villages and country communes in terror, in pillage and blood. It moved like one of those thunder clouds which the traveler on the Alps may often descry beneath him, traversing the same plain, and shooting its lightnings earthwards as it advances. Wherever it was known that there was a Vaudois congregation, thither did the cloud turn. And now we behold it at the foot of the Waldensian Alps at the entrance of the Valleys, within whose mighty natural bulwarks crowds of fugitives from the towns and villages on the plain have already found asylum. Rumors of the confiscations, arrests, cruel tortures, and horrible deaths which had befallen the Churches at the foot of their mountains, had preceded the appearance of the crusaders at the entrance of the Valleys. The same devastation which had befallen the flourishing Churches on the plain of Piedmont, seemed to impend over the Churches in the bosom of the Alps. At this juncture the pastors and leading laymen assembled to deliberate on the steps to be taken. Having fasted and humbled themselves before God, they sought by earnest prayer the direction of his Holy Spirit. [xlvii] They resolved to approach the throne of their prince, and by humble remonstrance and petition, set forth the state of their affairs and the justice of their cause. Their first claim was to be heard before being condemned, a right denied to no one accused, however criminal. They next solemnly disclaimed the main offense laid to their charge, that of departing from the true faith, and of adopting doctrines unknown to the Scriptures, and the early ages of the Church. Their faith was that which Christ himself had taught; which the apostles, following their Great Master, had preached; which the Fathers had vindicated with their pens, and the martyrs with their blood, and which the first four Councils had ratified, and proclaimed to be the faith of the Christian world. From the "old paths," the Bible and all antiquity being witnesses, they had never turned aside; from father to son they had continued these 1,500 years to walk therein. Their mountains shielded no novelties; they had bowed the knee to no strange gods, and,

if they were heretics, so too were the first four Councils; and so too were the apostles themselves. If they erred, it was in the company of the confessors and martyrs of the early ages. They were willing any moment to appeal their cause to a General Council, provided that Council were willing to decide the question by the only infallible standard they knew, the Word of God. If on this evidence they should be convicted of even one heresy, most willingly would they surrender it. On this, the main point of their indictment, what more could they promise? Show us, they said, what the errors are which you ask us to renounce under the penalty of death, and you shall not need to ask a second time. [xlvi] Their duty to God did not weaken their allegiance to their prince. To piety they added loyalty. The throne before which they now stood had not more faithful and devoted subjects than they. When had they plotted treason, or disputed lawful command of their sovereign? Nay, the more they feared God, the more they honored the king. Their services, their substance, their life, were all at the disposal of their prince; they were willing to lay them all down in defense of his lawful prerogative; one thing only they could not surrender: their conscience. As regarded their Romanist fellow subjects of Piedmont, they had lived in good neighborhood with them. Whose person had they injured, whose property had they robbed, whom had they overreached in their bargains? Had they not been kind, courteous, honest? If their hills had vied in fertility with the naturally richer plains at their feet, and if their mountain homes had been filled with store of corn and oil and wine, not always found in Piedmontese dwellings, to what was this owing, save to their superior industry, frugality, and skill? Never had marauding expedition descended from their hills to carry off the goods of their neighbors, or to inflict retaliation for the many murders and robberies to which they had had to submit. Why, then, should their neighbors rise against them to exterminate them, as if they were a horde of evil doers, in whose neighborhood no man could live in peace; and why should their sovereign unsheathe the sword against those who had never been found disturbers of his kingdom, nor plotters against his government, but who, on the contrary, had ever striven to maintain the authority of his law and the honor of his throne?

"One thing is certain, most serene prince," say they, in conclusion, "that the Word of God will not perish, but will abide for ever. If, then, our religion is the pure Word of God, as we are persuaded it is, and not a human invention, no human power will be able to abolish it." [xlvii] Never was there a more solemn, or a more just, or a more respectful remonstrance presented to any throne. The wrong about to be done them was enormous, yet not an angry word, nor a single accusatory sentence, do the Vaudois permit themselves to utter. But to what avail this solemn protest, this triumphant vindication? The more complete and conclusive it is, the more manifest does it make the immense injustice and the flagrant criminality of the House of Savoy. The more the Vaudois put themselves in the right, the more they put the Church of Rome in the wrong; and they who have already doomed them to perish are but the more resolutely determined to carry out their purpose.

This document was accompanied by two others: one to the queen, and one to the Council. The one to the queen is differently conceived from that to the duke. They offer no apology for their faith: the queen herself was of it. They allude in a few touching terms to the sufferings they had already been subjected to, and to the yet greater that appeared to impend. This was enough, they knew, to awaken all her sympathies, and enlist her as their



advocate with the king, after the example of Esther, and other noble women in former times, who valued their lofty station less for its dazzling honors, than for the opportunities it gave them of shielding the persecuted confessors of the truth. [1] The remonstrance presented to the Council was couched in terms more plain and direct, yet still respectful. They bade the counselors of the king beware what they did; they warned them that every drop of innocent blood they should spill they would one day have to account for; that if the blood of Abel, though only that of one man, cried with a voice so loud that God heard it in heaven, and came down to call its shedder to a reckoning, how much mightier the cry that would arise from the blood of a whole nation, and how much more terrible the vengeance with which it would be visited! In fine, they reminded the Council that what they asked was not an unknown privilege in Piedmont, nor would they be the first or the only persons who had enjoyed that indulgence if it should be extended to them. Did not the Jew and the Saracen live unmolested in their cities? Did they not permit the Israelite to build his synagogue, and the Moor to read his Koran, without annoyance or restraint? Was it a great thing that the faith of the Bible should be placed on the same level in this respect with that of the Crescent, and that the descendants of the men who for generations had been the subjects of the House of Savoy, and who had enriched the dominions with their virtues, and defended them with their blood, should be treated with the same humanity that was shown to the alien and the unbeliever?

These petitions the confessors of the Alps dispatched to the proper quarter, and having done so, they waited an answer with eyes lifted up to heaven. If that answer should be peace, with what gratitude to God and to their prince would they hail it! should it be otherwise, they were ready to accept that alternative too; they were prepared to die.

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## **Chapter 6**

### **PREPARATIONS FOR A WAR OF EXTERMINATION**

WHERE was the Vaudois who would put his life in his hand, and carry this remonstrance to the duke? The dangerous service was undertaken by M. Gilles, Pastor of Bricherasio, a devoted and courageous man. A companion was associated with him, but wearied out with the rebuffs and insults he met with, he abandoned the mission, and left its conduct to Gilles alone.

The duke then lived at Nice, for Turin, his capital, was still in the hands of the French, and the length of the journey very considerably increased its risks. Gilles reached Nice in safety, however, and after many difficulties and delays he had an interview with Queen Margaret, who undertook to place the representations of which he was the bearer in the hands of her husband, the duke. The deputy had an interview also with Philip of Savoy, the Duke's brother, and one of the commissioners under the Act for the purgation of the Valleys. The Waldensian pastor was, on the whole, well received by him. Unequally yoked with the cruel and bigoted Count La Trinita, Philip of Savoy soon became disgusted, and left the bloody business wholly in the hands of his fellow commissioner. [1] As regarded the queen, her heart was in the Valleys; the cause of the poor Vaudois was her cause also. But she stood alone as their intercessor with the duke; her voice was drowned by the solicitations and threats of the prelates, the King of Spain, and the Pope. [2]

For three months there came neither letter nor edict from the court at Nice. If the men of

the Valleys were impatient to know the fate that awaited them, their enemies, athirst for plunder and blood, were still more so. The latter, unable longer to restrain their passions, began the persecution on their own account. They thought they knew their sovereign's intentions, and made bold to anticipate them.

The tocsin was rung out from the Monastery of Pinerolo. Perched on the frontier of the Valleys, the monks of this establishment kept their eyes fixed upon the heretics of the mountains, as vultures watch their prey, ever ready to sweep down upon hamlet or valley when they found it unguarded. They hired a troop of marauders, whom they sent forth to pillage. The band returned, driving before them a wretched company of captives whom they had dragged from their homes and vineyards in the mountains. The poorer sort they burned alive, or sent to the galleys; the rich they imprisoned till they had paid the ransom to which they were held. [\[liii\]](#) The example of the monks was followed by certain Popish landlords in the Valley of San Martino. The two seigneurs of Perrier attacked, before day break of April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1560, the villagers of Rioclaroto, with an armed band. Some they slaughtered, the rest they drove out, without clothes or food, to perish on the snow clad hills. The ruffians who had expelled them, took possession of their dwellings, protesting that no one should enter them unless he were willing to go to Mass. They kept possession only three days, for the Protestants of the Valley of Clusone, to the number of 400, hearing of the outrage, crossed the mountains, drove out the invaders, and reinstated their brethren. [\[liv\]](#) Next appeared in the Valleys, Philip of Savoy, Count de Raconis, and Chief Commissioner. He was an earnest Roman Catholic, but a humane and upright man. He attended sermon one day in the Protestant church of Angrogna, and was so much pleased with what he heard, that he obtained from the pastor an outline of the Vaudois faith, so as to send it to Rome, in the hope that the Pope would cease to persecute a creed that seemed so little heretical. A sanguine hope truly! Where the honest count had seen very little heresy, the Pope, Pius IV, saw a great deal; and would not even permit a disputation with the Waldensian pastors, as the count had proposed. He would stretch his benignity no farther than to absolve "from their past crimes" all who were willing to enter the Church of Rome. This was not very encouraging, still the count did not abandon his idea of conciliation. In June, 1560, he came a second time to the Valley of Lucerna, accompanied by his colleague La Trinita, and assembling the pastors and heads of families, he told them that the persecution would cease immediately, provided they would consent to hear the preachers he had brought with him, Brothers of the Christian Doctrine. He further proposed that they should silence their own ministers while they were making trial of his. The Vaudois expressed their willingness to consent, provided the count's ministers preached the pure Gospel; but if they preached human traditions, they (the Vaudois) would be under the necessity of withholding their consent; and, as regarded silencing their own ministers, it was only reasonable that they should be permitted first to make trial of the count's preachers. A few days after, they had a taste of the new expositors. Selecting the ablest among them, they made him ascend the pulpit and hold forth to a Vaudois congregation. He took a very effectual way to make them listen. "I will demonstrate to you," said he, "that the mass is found in Scripture. The word massah signifies 'sent,' does it not?" "Not precisely," replied his hearers, who knew more about Hebrew than was convenient for the preacher. "The primitive expression," continued he, "Ite missa est, was employed to dismiss the auditory, was it not?" "That is quite true," replied his hearers,

without very clearly seeing how it bore on his argument. "Well, then, you see, gentlemen, that the mass is found in the Holy Scripture. [lv] The congregation were unable to determine whether the preacher was arguing with them or simply laughing at them. Finding the Waldenses obdurate, as he deemed them, the Duke of Savoy, in October, 1560, declared war against them. Early in that month a dreadful rumor reached the Valleys, namely, that the duke was levying an army to exterminate them. The news was but too true. The duke offered a free pardon to all "outlaws, convicts, and vagabonds" who would enroll as volunteers to serve against the Vaudois. Soon an army of a truly dreadful character was assembled. The Vaudois seemed doomed to total and inevitable destruction. The pastors and chief persons assembled to deliberate on the measures to be taken at this terrible crisis. Feeling that their refuge was in God alone, they resolved that they would take no means for deliverance which might be offensive to him, or dishonorable to themselves. The pastors were to exhort every one to apply to God, with true faith, sincere repentance, and ardent prayer; and as to defensive measures, they recommended that each family should collect their provisions, clothes, utensils, and herds, and be ready at a moment's notice to convey them, together with all infirm persons, to their strongholds in the mountabra. Meanwhile, the duke's army, if the collected ruffianism of Piedmont could be so called, came nearer every day. [lvi] On the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, a proclamation was posted throughout the Valley of Angrogna, calling on the inhabitants to return within the Roman pale, under penalty of extermination by fire and sword. On the day following, the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, the Papal army appeared at Bubiana, on the right bank of the Pelice, at the entrance to the Waldensian Valley. The host numbered 4,000 infantry and 200 horse; [lvii] comprising, besides the desperadoes that formed its main body, a few veterans, who had seen a great deal of service in the wars with France. The Vaudois, the enemy being now in sight, humbled themselves, in a public fast, before God. Next, they partook together of the Lord's Supper. Refreshed in soul by these services, they proceeded to put in execution the measures previously resolved on. The old men and the women climbed the mountains, awakening the echoes with the psalms which they sung on their way to the Pra del Tor, within whose natural ramparts of rock and snow clad peaks they sought asylum. The Vaudois population of the Valleys at that time was not more than 18,000; their armed men did not exceed 1,200; [lviii] these were distributed at various passes and barricades to oppose the enemy, who was now near. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November the Piedmontese army, putting itself in motion, crossed the Pelice, and advanced along the narrow defile that leads up to the Valiants, having the heights of Bricherasio on the right, and the spurs of Monte Friolante on the left, with the towering masses of the Vandalin and Castelluzzo in front. The Piedmontese encamped in the meadows of San Giovanni, within a stone's throw of the point where the Val di Lucerna and the Val di Angrogna divide, the former to expand into a noble breadth of meadow and vineyard, running on between magnificent mountains, with their rich clothing of pastures, chestnut groves, and chalets, till it ends in the savage Pass of Mirabouc; and the latter, to wind and climb in a grand succession of precipice, and gorge, and grassy dell, till it issues in the funnel shaped valley around which the ice crowned mountains stand the everlasting sentinels. It was the latter of these two valleys (Angrogna) that La Trinita first essayed to enter. He marched 1,200 men into it, the wings of his army deploying over its bordering heights of La Cotiere. His soldiers were opposed by only a small body of

Vaudois, some of whom were armed solely with the sling and the cross bow. Skirmishing with the foe, the Vaudois retired, fighting, to the higher grounds. When the evening set in, neither side could claim a decided advantage. Wearied with skirmishing, both armies encamped for the night, the Vaudois on the heights of Roccomaneot, and the Piedmontese, their camp fires lighted, on the lower hills of La Cotiere. Suddenly the silence of the evening was startled by a derisive shout that rose from the Piedmontese host. What had happened to evoke these sounds of contempt? They had descried, between them and the sky, on the heights above them, the bending figures of the Vaudois. On their knees the Waldensian warriors were supplicating the God of battles. Hardly had the scoffs with which the Piedmontese hailed the act died away, when a drum was heard to beat in a side valley. A child had got hold of the instrument, and was amusing itself with it. The soldiers of La Trinita saw in imagination a fresh body of Waldensians advancing from this lateral defile to rush upon them. They seized their arms in no little disorder. The Vaudois, seeing the movement of the foe, seized theirs also, and rushed downhill to anticipate the attack. The Piedmontese threw away their arms and fled, chased by the Waldenses, thus losing in half an hour the ground it had cost them a day's fighting to gain. The weapons abandoned by the fugitives formed a much needed and most opportune supply to the Vaudois. As the result of the combats of the day, La Trinita had sixty seven men slain; of the Vaudois three only had fallen. [\[lix\]](#) Opening on the left of La Trinita was the corn clad, vine clad, and mountain ramparted Valley of Lucerna, with its towns, La Torre, Villaro, Bobbio, and others, forming the noblest of the Waldensian Valleys. La Trinita now occupied this valley with his soldiers. This was comparatively an easy achievement, almost all its inhabitants having fled to the Ira del Tor. Those that remained were mostly Romanists, who were, at that time, mixed with the Waldensian population, and even they, committing their wives and daughters to the keeping of their Vaudois neighbors, had sent them with them to the Pra del Tor, to escape the brutal outrages of the Papal army. On the following days La Trinita fought some small affairs with the Vaudois, in all of which he was repulsed with considerable slaughter. The arduous nature of the task he had in hand now began to dawn upon him.

The mountaineers, he saw, were courageous, and determined to die rather than submit their conscience to the Pope, and their families to the passions of his soldiers. He discovered, moreover, that they were a simple and confiding people, utterly unversed in the ways of intrigue. He was delighted to find these qualities in them, because he thought he saw how he could turn them to account. He had tools with him as cunning and vile as himself: Jacomel, the inquisitor; and Gastaud, his secretary; the latter feigned a love for the Gospel. These men he set to work. When they had prepared matters, he assembled the leading men of the Waldenses, and recited to them some flattering words, which he had heard or professed to have heard the duke and duchess make use of towards them; he protested that this was no pleasant business in which he was engaged, and that he would be glad to have it off his hands; peace, he thought, could easily be arranged, if they would only make a few small concessions to show that they were reasonable men; he would propose that they should deposit their arms in the house of one of their syndics, and permit him, for form's sake, to go with a small train, and celebrate mass in the Church of St. Lorenzo, in Angrogna, and afterwards pay a visit to the Pra del Tor. La Trinita's proposal proved the correctness of the estimate he had formed of Vaudois confidingness.

The people spent a whole night in deliberation over the count's proposition, and, contrary to the opinion of their pastors and some of their laymen, agreed to accept of it. [lx] The Papal general said his mass in the Protestant church. After this he traversed the gloomy defiles that lead up to the famous Pra, on whose green slopes, with their snowy battlements, he was so desirous to feast his eyes, though, it is said, he showed evident trepidation when he passed the black pool of Tompie, with its memories of retribution. Having accomplished these feats in safety, he returned to wear the mask a little longer. He resumed the efforts on which he professed to be so earnestly and laudably bent, of effecting peace. The duke had now come nearer, and was living at Vercelli, on the plain of Piedmont; La Trinita thought that the Vaudois ought by all means to send deputies thither. It would strengthen their supplication indeed, all but insure its success, if they would raise a sum of 20,000 crowns. On payment of this sum he would withdraw his army, and leave them to practice their religion in peace. [lxi] The Vaudois, unable to conceive of dissimulation like La Trinita's, made concession after concession. They had previously laid down their arms; they now sent deputies to the duke; next, they taxed themselves to buy off his soldiers; and last and worst of all, at the demand of La Trinita, they sent away their pastors. It was dreadful to think of a journey across the Col Julien at that season; yet it had to be gone. Over its snowy summits, where the winter drifts were continually obliterating the track, and piling up fresh wreaths across the Valleys of Prali and San Martino, and over the ice clad mountains beyond, had this sorrowful band of pastors to pursue their way, to find refuge among the Protestants in the French Valley of Pragelas. This difficult and dangerous route was forced upon them, the more direct road through the Valley of Perosa being closed by the marauders and assassins that infested it, and especially by those in the pay of the monks of Pinerolo.

The count believed that the poor people were now entirely in his power. His soldiers did their pleasure in the Valley of Lucerna. They pillaged the houses abandoned by the Vaudois. The few inhabitants who had remained, as well as those who had returned, thinking that during the negotiations for peace hostilities would be suspended, were fain to make their escape a second time, and to seek refuge in the woods and caves of the higher reaches of the Valleys. The outrages committed by the ruffians to whom the Valley of Lucerna was now given over were of a kind that cannot be told. The historian Gilles has recorded a touching instance. A helpless man, who had lived a hundred and three years, was placed in a cave, and his granddaughter, a girl of seventeen, was left to take care of him. The soldiers found out his hiding place; the old man was murdered, and outrage was offered to his granddaughter. She fled from the brutal pursuit of the soldiers, leaped over a precipice, and died. In another instance, an old man was pursued to the brink of a precipice by one of La Trinita's soldiers. The Vaudois had no alternative but to throw himself over the brink or die by the sword of his pursuer. He stopped, turned round, and dropped on his knees, as if to supplicate for his life. The trooper was raising his sword to strike him dead, when the Vaudois, clasping him tightly round the legs, and swaying himself backward with all his might, rolled over the precipice, dragging the soldier with him into the abyss.

Part of the sum agreed on between La Trinita and the Waldenses had now been paid to him. To raise this money the poor people were under the necessity of selling their herds. The count now withdrew his army into winter quarters at Cavour, a point so near the

Valleys that a few hours' march would enable him to re enter them at any moment. The corn and oil and wine which he had not been able to carry away he destroyed. Even the mills he broke in pieces. His design appeared to be to leave the Vaudois only the alternative of submission, or of dying of hunger on their mountains. To afflict them yet more he placed garrisons here and there in the Valleys; and, in the very wantonness of tyranny, required those who themselves were without bread to provide food for his soldiers. These soldiers were continually prowling about in search of victims on whom to gratify their cruelty and their lust. Those who had the unspeakable misfortune to be dragged into their den, had to undergo, if men, excruciating torture; if women, revolting outrage. [\[lxii\]](#)

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## **Chapter 7**

### **THE GREAT CAMPAIGN OF 1561.**

THESE frightful inflictions the Waldenses had submitted to in the hope that the deputies whom they had sent to the duke would bring back with them an honorable peace. The impatience with which they waited their return may well be conceived. At last, after an absence of six weeks, the commissioners reappeared in the Valleys; but their dejected faces, even before they had uttered a word, told that they had not succeeded. They had been sent back with an order, enjoining on the Vaudois unconditional submission to the Church of Rome on pain of extermination. To enforce that order to the uttermost a more numerous army was at that moment being raised. The mass or universal slaughter: such was the alternative now presented to them.

The spirit of the people woke up. Rather than thus disgrace their ancestors, imperil their own souls, and entail a heritage of slavery on their children, they would die a thousand times. Their depression was gone; they were as men who had awakened from heavy sleep; they had found their arms. Their first care was to recall their pastors, their next to raise up their fallen churches, and their third to resume public service in them. Daily their courage grew, and once more joy lighted up their faces. There came letters of sympathy and promises of help from their fellow Protestants of Geneva, Dauphine, and France. Over the two latter countries persecution at that hour impended, but their own dangers made them all the more ready to succor their brethren of the Valleys. "Thereupon," says an historian, "took place one of those grand and solemn scenes which, at once heroic and religious, seem rather adapted for an epic poem than for grave history." [\[lxiii\]](#) The Waldenses of Lucerna sent deputies across the mountains, then covered to a great depth with snow, to propose an alliance with the Protestants of the Valley of Pragelas, who were at that time threatened by their sovereign Francis I. The proposed alliance was joyfully accepted. Assembling on a plateau of snow facing the mountains of Sestrieres, and the chain of the Guinevert, the deputies swore to stand by each other and render mutual support in the coming struggle. [\[lxiv\]](#) It was agreed that this oath of alliance should be sworn with a like solemnity in the Waldensian Valleys.

The deputies from Pragelas, crossing the Mount Julien, arrived at Bobbio on the 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1561. Their coming was singularly opportune. On the evening before a ducal proclamation had been published in the Valleys, commanding the Vaudois, within twenty four hours, to give attendance at mass, or abide the consequences: "fire, sword, the cord:

the three arguments of Romanism," says Muston. This was the first news with which the Pragelese deputies were met on their arrival. With all the more enthusiasm they proceeded to renew their oath. Ascending a low hill behind Bobbio, the deputies from Prageles, and those from Lucerna, standing erect in the midst of the assembled heads of families, who kneeled around, pronounced these words: " In the name of the Vaudois Churches of the Alps, of Dauphine and of Piedmont, which have ever been united, and of which we are the representatives, we here promise, our hands on our Bible, and in the presence of God, that all our Valleys shall courageously sustain each other in matters of religion, without prejudice to the obedience due to their legitimate superiors.

"We promise to maintain the Bible, whole and without admixture, according to the usage of the true Apostlic Church, persevering in this holy religion, though it be at the peril of our lives, in order that we may transmit it to our children, intact and pure, as we received it from our fathers.

"We promise aid and succor to our persecuted brothers, not regarding our individual interests, but the common cause; and not relying upon man, but upon God." [lxv] The physical grandeurs of the spot were in meet accordance with the moral sublimity of the transaction. Immediately beneath was spread out the green bosom of the valley, with here and there the silver of the Pelice gleaming out amid vineyards and acacia groves. Filling the horizon on all sides save one stood up an array of magnificent mountains, white with the snows of winter. Conspicuous among them were the grand peaks of the Col de Malaure and the Col de la Croix. They looked the silent and majestic witnesses of the oath, in which a heroic people bound themselves to die rather than permit the defilement of their hearths, and the profanation of their altars, by the hordes of an idolatrous tyranny. It was in this grand fashion that the Waldenses opened one of the most brilliant campaigns ever waged by their arms.

The next morning, according to the duke's order, they must choose between the mass and the penalty annexed to refusal. A neighboring church, one of those which had been taken from them, stood ready, with altar decked and tapers lighted, for the Vaudois to hear their first mass. Hardly had the day dawned when the expected penitents were at the church door. They would show the duke in what fashion they meant to read their recantation. They entered the building. A moment they stood surveying the strange transformation their church had undergone, and then they set to work. To extinguish the tapers, pull down the images, and sweep into the street rosary and crucifix and all the other paraphernalia of the Popish worship, was but the work of a few minutes. The minister, Humbert Artus, then ascended the pulpit, and reading out as his text Isaiah 45:20, "Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a God that cannot save," preached a sermon which struck the key note of the campaign then opening. The inhabitants of the hamlets and chalets in the mountains rushed down like their own winter torrents into Lucerna, and the army of the Vaudois reinforced set out to purge the temple at Villaro. On their way they encountered the Piedmontese garrison. They attacked and drove them back; the monks, seigneurs, and magistrates, who had come to receive the abjuration of the heretics, accompanying the troops in their ignominious flight. The whole band of fugitives, soldiers, priests, and judges, shut themselves up in the town of Villaro, which was now besieged by the Vaudois. Thrice did

the garrison from La Torre attempt to raise the siege, and thrice were they repulsed. At last, on the tenth day, the garrison surrendered, and had their lives spared, two Waldensian pastors accompanying them to La Torre, the soldiers expressing greater confidence in them than in any other escort.

The Count La Trinita, seeing his garrison driven out, struck his encampment at Carour, and moved his army into the Valleys. He again essayed to sow dissension amongst the Vaudois by entangling them in negotiations for peace, but by this time they had learned too well the value of his promises to pay the least attention to them, or to intermit for an hour their preparations for defense. It was now the beginning of February, 1561.

The Vaudois labored with the zeal of men who feel that their cause is a great and a righteous one, and are prepared to sacrifice all for it. They erected barricades; they planted ambushes; they appointed signals, to telegraph the movements of the enemy from post to post. "Every house," says Muston, "became a manufactory of pikes, bullets, and other weapons." They selected the best marksmen their Valleys could furnish, and formed them into the "Flying Company," whose duty it was to hasten to the point where danger pressed the most. To each body of fighting men they attached two pastors, to maintain the morale of their army. The pastors, morning and evening, led the public devotions; they prayed with the soldiers before going into battle; and when the fighting was over, and the Vaudois were chasing the enemy down their great mountains, and through their dark gorges, they exerted themselves to prevent the victory being stained by any unnecessary effusion of blood. La Trinita knew well that if he would subjugate the Valleys, and bring the campaign to a successful end, he must make himself master of the Pra del Tor. Into that vast natural citadel was now gathered the main body of the Waldensian people. What of their herds and provisions remained to them had been transported thither; there they had constructed mills and baking ovens; there, too, sat their council, and thence directed the whole operations of the defense. A blow struck there would crush the Vaudois' heart, and convert what the Waldenses regarded as their impregnable castle into their tomb.

Deferring the chastisement of the other valleys meanwhile, La Trinita directed all his efforts against Angrogna. His first attempt to enter it with his army was made on the 4<sup>th</sup> February. The fighting lasted till night, and ended in his repulse. His second attempt, three days after, carried him some considerable way into Angrogna, burning and ravaging, but his partial success cost him dear, and the ground won had ultimately to be abandoned.

[lxvi] The 14<sup>th</sup> of February saw the severest struggle. Employing all his strategy to make himself master of the much coveted Pra, with all in it, he divided his army into three corps, and advanced against it from three points. One body of troops, marching along the gorges of the Angrogna, and traversing the narrow chasm that leads up to the Pra, attacked it on the south. Another body, climbing the heights from Pramol, and crossing the snowy flanks of La Vechera, tried to force an entrance on the east; while a third, ascending from San Martino, and crossing the lofty summits that wall in the Pra on the north, descended upon it from that quarter. The count's confident expectation was that if his men should be unable to force an entrance at one point they were sure to do so at another. No scout had given warning of what was approaching. While three armies were marching to attack them, the Waldenses, in their grand valley, with its rampart of ice crowned peaks, were engaged in their morning devotions. Suddenly the cries of fugitives, and the shouts of assailants, issuing from the narrow chasm on the south, broke upon their ear, together



with the smoke of burning hamlets. Of the three points of attack this was the easiest to be defended. Six brave Waldensian youths strode down the valley, to stop the way against La Trinita's soldiers. They were six against an army.

The road by which the soldiers were advancing is long and gloomy, and overhung by great rocks, and so narrow that only two men can march abreast. On this side rises the mountain: on that, far down, thunders the torrent; a ledge in the steep face of the cliff running here in the darkness, there in the sunshine, serves as a pathway. It leads to what is termed the gate of the Pra. That gateway is formed by an angle of the mountain, which obtrudes upon the narrow ledge on the one side, while a huge rock rises on the other and still further narrows the point of ingress into the Pra del Tor. Access into the famous Pra, of which La Trinita was now striving to make himself master, there is not on this side save through this narrow opening; seeing that on the right rises the mountain; on the left yawns the gulf, into which, if one steps aside but in the least, he tumbles headlong. To friend and foe alike the only entrance into the Pra del Tor on the south is by this gate of Nature's own erecting. It was here that the six Waldensian warriors took their stand. [lxvii] Immovable as their own Alps, they not only checked the advance of the host, but drove it back in a panic stricken mass, which made the precipices of the defile doubly fatal. Others would have hastened to their aid, had not danger suddenly presented itself in another quarter. On the heights of La Vechera, crossing the snow, was descried an armed troop, making their entrance into the valley on the east. Before they had time to descend they were met by the Waldenses, who dispersed them, and made them flee. Two of the attacking parties of the count have failed: will the third have better success? As the Waldenses were pursuing the routed enemy on La Vechera, they saw yet another armed troop, which had crossed the mountains that separate the Val San Marring from the Pra del Tor on the north, descending upon them. Instantly the alarm was raised. A few men only could they dispatch to meet the invaders. These lay in ambush at the mouth of a defile through which the attacking party was making its way down into the Pra. Emerging from the defile, and looking down into the valley beneath them, they exclaimed, "Haste, haste! Angrogna is ours." The Vaudois, starting up, and crying out, "It is you that are ours," rushed upon them sword in hand. Trusting in their superior numbers, the Piedmontese soldiers fought desperately. But a few minutes sufficed for the men of the Valleys to hurry from the points where they were now victorious, to the assistance of their brethren. The invaders, seeing themselves attacked on all sides, turned and fled up the slopes they had just descended. Many were slain, nor would a man of them have recrossed the mountains but for the pastor of the Flying Company, who, raising his voice to the utmost pitch, entreated the pursuers to spare the lives of those who were no longer able to resist. Among the slain was Charles Truchet, who so cruelly ravaged the commune of Rioclaret a few months before. A stone from a sling laid him prostrate on the ground, and his head was cut off with his own sword. Louis de Monteuil, another noted persecutor of the Vaudois, perished in the same action. Furious at his repulse, the Count La Trinita turned his arms against the almost defenceless Valley of Rora. He ravaged it, burning its little town, and chasing away its population of eighty families, who escaped over the snows of the mountains to Villaro, in the Valley of Lucerna. That valley he next entered with his soldiers, and though it was for the moment almost depopulated, the Popish general received so warm a welcome from those peasants who remained that, after being again

and again beaten, he was fain to draw off his men at arms, and retreat to his old quarters at Cavour, there to chew the cud over his misfortunes, and hatch new stratagems and plan new attacks, which he fondly hoped would retrieve his disgraces. La Trinita spent a month in reinforcing his army, greatly weakened by the losses it had sustained. The King of France sent him ten companies of foot, and some other choice soldiers. [lxviii] There came a regiment from Spain; and numerous volunteers from Piedmont, comprising many of the nobility. From 4,000, the original number of his army, it was now raised to 7,000. [lxix] He thought himself strong enough to begin a third campaign. He was confident that this time he would wipe out the disgrace which had befallen his arms, and sweep from the earth at once and for ever the great scandal of the Waldenses. He again directed all his efforts against Angrogna, the heart and bulwark of the Valleys.

It was Sunday, the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, 1561. The whole of the Vaudois assembled in the Pra del Tor had met on the morning of that day, soon after dawn, as was their wont, to unite in public devotion. The first rays of the rising sun were beginning to light up the white hills around them, and the last cadences of their morning psalm were dying away on the grassy slopes of the Pra, when a sudden alarm was raised. The enemy was approaching by three routes. On the ridges of the eastern summits appeared one body of armed men; another was defiling up the chasm, and in a few minutes would pour itself, through the gateway already described, into the Pra; while a third was forcing itself over the rocks by a path intermediate between the two. Instantly the enemy was met on all the points of approach. A handful of Waldensians sufficed to thrust back: along the narrow gorge the line of glittering cuirassed men, who were defiling through it. At the other two points, where bastions of rock and earth had been erected, the fighting was severe, and the dead lay thick, but the day at both places went against the invaders. Some of the ablest captains were among the slain. The number of the soldiers killed was so great that Count La Trinita is said to have sat down and wept when he beheld the heaps of the dead. [lxx] It was matter of astonishment at the time that the Waldenses did not pursue the invaders, for had they done so, being so much better acquainted with the mountain paths, not one of all that host would have been left alive to carry tidings of its discomfiture to the inhabitants of Piedmont. Their pastors restrained the victorious Vaudois, having laid it down as a maxim at the beginning of the campaign, that they would use with moderation and clemency whatever victories the "God of battles" might be pleased to give them, and that they would spill no blood unless when absolutely necessary to prevent their own being shed. The Piedmontese dead was again out of all proportion to those who had fallen on the other side; so much so, that it was currently said in the cities of Piedmont that "God was fighting for the barbers." [lxxi] More deeply humiliated and disgraced than ever, La Trinita led back the remains of his army to its old quarters. Well had it been for him if he had never set foot within the Waldensian territory, and not less so for many of those who followed him, including not a few of the nobles of Piedmont, whose bones were now bleaching on the mountains of the Vaudois. But the Popish general was slow to see the lesson of these events. Even yet he harbored the design of returning to assail that fatal valley where he had lost so many laurels, and buried so many soldiers; but he covered his purpose with craft. Negotiations had been opened between the men of the Valleys and the Duke of Savoy, and as they were proceeding satisfactorily, the Vaudois were without suspicions of evil. This was the moment that La Trinita chose to attack them. He hastily assembled his

troops, and on the night of the 16<sup>th</sup> April he marched them against the Pra del Tor, hoping to enter it unopposed, and give the Vaudois "as sheep to the slaughter." The snows around the Pra were beginning to burn in the light of morning when the attention of the people, who had just ended their united worship, was attracted by unusual sounds which were heard to issue from the gorge that led into the valley. On the instant six brave mountaineers rushed to the gateway that opens from the gorge. The long line of La Trinita's soldiers was seen advancing two abreast, their helmets and cuirasses glittering in the light. The six Vaudois made their arrangements, and calmly waited till the enemy was near. The first two Vaudois, holding loaded muskets, knelt down. The second two stood erect, ready to fire over the heads of the first two. The third two undertook the loading of the weapons as they were discharged. The invaders came on. As the first two of the enemy turned the rock they were shot down by the two foremost Vaudois. The next two of the attacking force fell in like manner by the shot of the Vaudois in the rear. The third rank of the enemy presented themselves only to be laid by the side of their comrades. In a few minutes a little heap of dead bodies blocked the pass, rendering impossible the advance of the accumulating force of the enemy in the chasm. Meantime, other Vaudois climbed the mountains that overhang the gorge in which the Piedmontese army was imprisoned. Tearing up the great stones with which the hill side was strewn, the Vaudois sent them rolling down upon the host. Unable to advance from the wall of dead in front, and unable to flee from the ever accumulating masses behind, the soldiers were crushed in dozens by the falling rocks. Panic set in and panic in such a position how dreadful! Wedged together on the narrow ledge, with a murderous rain of rocks falling on them, their struggle to escape was frightful. They jostled one another, and trod each other under foot, while vast numbers fell over the precipice, and were dashed on the rocks or drowned in the torrent. [lxxii] When those at the entrance of the valley, who were watching the result, saw the crystal of the Angrogna begin about midday to be changed into blood, "Ah!" said they, "the Pra del Tor has been taken; La Trinita has triumphed; there flows the blood of the Vaudois." And, indeed, the count on beginning his march that morning is said to have boasted that by noon the torrent of the Angrogna would be seen to change color; and so in truth it did. Instead of a pellucid stream, rolling along on a white gravelly bed, which is its usual appearance at the mouth of the valley, it was now deeply dyed from recent slaughter. But when the few who had escaped the catastrophe returned to tell what had that day passed within the defiles of the Angrogna, it was seen that it was not the blood of the Vaudois, but the blood of their ruthless invaders, which dyed the waters of the Angrogna. The count withdrew on that same night with his army, to return no more to the Valleys. Negotiations were again resumed, not this time through the Count La Trinita, but through Philip of Savoy, Count of Raconis, and were speedily brought to a satisfactory issue. The Duke of Savoy had but small merit in making peace with the men whom he found he could not conquer. The capitulation was signed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June, 1561, and its first clause granted an indemnity for all offenses. It is open to remark that this indemnity was given to those who had suffered, not to those who had committed the offenses it condoned. The articles that followed permitted the Vaudois to erect churches in their Valleys, with the exception of two or three of their towns, to hold public worship, in short, to celebrate all the offices of their religion. All the "ancient franchises, immunities, and privileges, whether conceded by his Highness, or by his Highness's predecessors,"

were renewed, provided they were vouched by public documents. [\[lxxiii\]](#) Such was the arrangement that closed this war of fifteen months. The Vaudois ascribed it in great part to the influence of the good Duchess Margaret. The Pope designated it a "pernicious example," which he feared would not want imitators in those times when the love of many to the Roman See was waxing cold. It stank in the no perils of the prelates and monks of Piedmont, to whom the heretics had been a free booty. Nevertheless, Duke Emmanuel Philibert faithfully maintained its stipulations, the duchess being by his side to counteract any pressure in the contrary direction. This peace, together with the summer that was now opening, began to slowly efface the deep scars the persecution had left on the Valleys; and what further helped to console and reanimate this brave but afflicted people, was the sympathy and aid universally tendered them by Protestants abroad, in particular by Calvin and the Elector Palatine, the latter addressing a spirited letter to the duke on behalf of his persecuted subjects. [\[lxxiv\]](#) Nothing was more admirable than the spirit of devotion which the Vaudois exhibited all through these terrible conflicts. Their Valleys resounded not less with the voice of prayer and praise, than with the din of arms. Their opponents came from carousing, from blaspheming, from murdering, to engage in battle; the Waldenses rose from their knees to unsheathe the sword, and wield it in a cause which they firmly believed to be that of Him to whom they had bent in supplication. When their little army went afield their barbes always accompanied it, to inspirit the soldiers by suitable exhortations before joining battle, and to moderate in the hour of victory a vengeance which, however excusable, would yet have lowered the glory of the triumph. When the fighting men hastened to the bastion or to the defile, the pastors betook them to the mountain's slope, or to its summit, and there with uplifted hands supplicated help from the "Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." When the battle had ceased, and the enemy were in flight, and the victors had returned from chasing their invaders from their Valleys, the grey haired pastor, the lion hearted man of battle, the matron, the maiden, the stripling, and the little child, would assemble in the Pra del Tor, and while the setting sun was kindling into glory the mountain tops of their once more ransomed land, they would raise their voices together, and sing the old war song of Judah, in strains so heroic that the great rocks around them would send back the thunder of their praise in louder echoes than those of the battle whose triumphant issue they were celebrating.

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#### **End Notes**

[\[i\]](#) Baronius, *Annal* ., ann. 1059, tom. 11, cols. 276, 277.

[\[ii\]](#) Petrus Damianus, *Opusc* ., p. 5. Allix, *Churches of Piedmont* , p. 113.

M'Crie, *Hist . of Reform . in Italy* , p. 2.

[\[iii\]](#) Recent German criticism refers the *Nobla Leycon* to a more recent date, but still one anterior to the Reformation

[\[iv\]](#) 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 the past thirty five years, traveled 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.

[\[v\]](#) This disproves the charge of Manicheism brought against them by their enemies.

[vi] Sir Samuel Morland gives the *Nobla Leycon* in full in his *History of the Churches of the Waldenses* . Allix (chap. 18) gives a summary of it.

[vii] *The Nobla Leycon* 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."

[viii] 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).

[ix] *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.

[x] 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. 1, p. 53; Lond., 1838. Illyricus Flaccins, 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 Generale des Eglises Evangeliques des Vallees du Piedmont ou Vaudois* . vol. 2, pp. 336, 337; 1669.)

[xi] M'Crie, *Hist . Ref . in Italy* , p. 4.

[xii] Those who wish to know more of this interesting people than is contained in the above rapid sketch may consult Leger, *Des Eglises Evangeliques* ; Perrin, *Hist . De Vaudois* ; Reynerius, *Cont . Waldens .* ; Sir. S. Morland, *History of the Evangelical Churches of Piedmont* ; Jones, *Hist . Waldenses* ; Rorengo, *Narative* ; besides a host of more modern writers: Gilly, *Waldensian Researches* ; Muston, *Israed of the Alps* ; Monastier, etc. etc.

[xiii] Compare Antoine Monastier, *History of the Vaudois Church* , p. 121 (Lond., 1848), with Alexis Muston, *Israel of the Alps* , p. 8 (Lond., 1852).

[xiv] Monastier, p. 123.

[xv] Ibid.

[xvi] Ibid.

[xvii] *Histoire Generale des Eglises Evangeliques des Vallees de Piedmont, ou Vaudoises* . Par Jean Leger. Part 2, pp. 6,7. Leyden, 1669. Monastier, pp. 123,124.

[xviii] The bull is given in full in Leger, who also says that he had made a faithful copy of it, and lodged it with other documents in the University Library of Cambridge. [ *Hist. Gen. des Eglises Vaud .* , part 2, pp. 7 to 15.)

[xix] Muston, *Israel of the Alps* , p. 10.

[xx] Leger, livr. 2, p. 7.

[xxi] Ibid., livr. 2., p. 26.

[xxii] Monastier, p. 128.

[xxiii] Muston, p. 20.

[xxiv] Ibid., part 2, p. 234.

[xxv] Monastier, p. 129.

[xxvi] Monastier, pp. 133,134.

[xxvii] Monastier, p. 134.

[xxviii] The Author was shown this pool when he visited the chasm. No one of the Valleys of the Waldenses is more illustrated by the sad, yet glorious, scenes of their martyrdom than this Valley of Angrogna. Every rock in it has its story. As you pass through it you are shown the spot where young children were dashed against the stones, the spot where men and women, stripped naked, were rolled up as balls, and precipitated down the mountain, and where caught by the stump of a tree, or projecting angle of rock, they hung transfixed, enduring for days the agony of a living death. You are shown the entrance of caves, into which some hundreds of the Vaudois having fled, their enemies, lighting a fire at the mouth of their hiding place, ruthlessly killed them all. Time would fail to tell even a tithe of what has been done and suffered in this famous pass.

[xxix] Muston, p. 11.

[xxx] Leger livr. 2, p. 26.

[xxxii] Leger, livr. 2, p. 26.

[xxxii] Leger and Gilles say that it was Philip VII who put an end to this war. Monastier says they "are mistaken, for this prince was then in France, and did not begin to reign till 1496." This peace was granted in 1489.

[xxxiii] Monastier, *Hist. of the Vaudois* , p. 138.

[xxxiv] Ibid.

[xxxv] Gilles, p. 80. Monastier, p. 141.

[xxxvi] Ruchat, tom. 3, pp. 176, 557.

[xxxvii] George Morel states, in his *Memoirs* , that at this time there were more than 800,000 persons of the religion of the Vaudois. (Leger, *Hist. Des Vaudois* , livr. 2, p. 27.) He includes, of course, in this estimate the Vaudois in the Valleys, on the plain of Piedmont, in Naples and Calabria, in the south of France, and in the countries of Germany.

[xxxviii] Gilles, p. 40. Monastier, p. 146.

[xxxix] Leger, livr. 2, p. 27.

[xl] Monastier, p. 153.

[xli] Leger, livr. 2, p. 29.

[xlii] Leger, livr. 2, p. 29. Monastier, p. 168.

[xliii] Leger, livr. 2, p. 28.

[xliv] Muston, *Israel of the Alps* , chapter 8.

[xlv] Leger, livr. 2, p. 29.

[xlvi] Monastier, chapter 19, p. 172. Muston, chapter 10, p. 52.

[xlvii] Leger, livr. 2, p. 29.

[xlviii] First, we do protest before the Almighty and All just God, before whose tribunal we must all one day appear, that we intend to live and die in the holy faith, piety, and religion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that we do abhor all heresies that have been, and are, condemned by the Word of God. We do embrace the most holy doctrine of the prophets and apostles, as likewise of the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds; we do subscribe to the four Councils, and to all the ancient Fathers, in all such things as are not repugnant to the analogy of faith." (Leger, livr. 2, pp. 30,31.)

[xlix] See in Leger (livr. 2, pp. 30,31) the petition of the Vaudois presented "Au Serenissime et tres Puissant Prince, Philibert Emanuel, Duc de Saveye, Prince de Piemont, notre tres Clement Seigneur" (To the

Serene and most Mighty Prince, Philibert Emmanuel, Duke of Savoy, Prince of Piedmont, our most Gracious Lord).

[i] See in Leger. (livr. 2, p. 32), "A la tres Vertueuse et tres Excellente Dame, Madame Marguerite de France, Duchesse de Savoye et de Berry" : "the petition of her poor and humble subjects, the inhabitants of the Valleys of Lucerna and Angrogna, and Perosa and San Martino, and all those of the plain who call purely upon the name of the Lord Jesus."

[ii] Muston p. 68.

[iii] Muston, p. 72.

[iiii] Muston, p. 69. Monastier, p. 178.

[lv] Muston, p. 70. Monastier, pp. 176,177.

[lv] Muston, p. 71. Monastier, pp. 177,178

[lvi] Muston, p. 72. Monastier, p. 182.

[lvii] Letter of Scipio Lentullus, Pastor of San Giovanni, (Leger, *Hist. Des Eglises Vaud* ., livr. 2, p. 35).

[lviii] So says the Pastor of Giovanni, Scipio Lentullus, in the letter already referred to. (Leger livr. 2, p. 35.)

[lix] Letter of Scipio Lentullus. (Leger, livr. 2, p. 35.) Muston, pp. 73,74.

[lx] Leger livr. 2, p. 35. Monastier, pp. 184,185.

[lxi] Leger, livr. 2, p. 35.

[lxii] Muston, p. 77. Monastier, pp. 186,187.

[lxiii] Muston, p. 78.

[lxiv] Monastier, p. 188. Muston, p. 78.

[lxv] Muston, pp. 78,79.

[lxvi] Monastier, p. 190. Muston, p. 80.

[lxvii] Monastier, p. 191.

[lxviii] Leger, part 2, p. 36. Gilles, chapter 25.

[lxix] Ibid., part 2, p. 37.

[lxx] Muston, p. 83.

[lxxi] Ibid. Monastier, p. 194.

[lxxii] Leger, part 2, p. 37. Muston, p. 85.

[lxxiii] The Articles of Capitulation are given in full in Leger, part 2, pp. 38 to 40.

[lxxiv] Leger, part 2, p. 41.