

221-5-6

# Northern Messenger

Mr W Branscombe 55-28-02

VOLUME XXXVII. No. 3.

MONTREAL, JANUARY 17, 1902.

KILLAMS MILLS  
30 Cts. Per An. NR

## In Valdese.

(By Mabel Nelson Thurston, in 'Forward.')

Travellers from the north on the way to Asheville may happen to notice, as the train begins to climb among the Carolina mountains, a beautiful white church that stands high upon a hilltop and keeps shining guard over a few low, unpainted houses. Its white beauty against the green background of the pines, and the something quaint and foreign in its architecture, win the attention at once. It is no ordinary story, one is sure, which that church is telling to those who see and listen.

If the train chances to stop for a moment, giving glimpses of little women with short skirts and heavy sabots, their wrinkled but singularly bright and vivid faces gleaming under the kerchiefs tied about their dark hair, or of sturdy children who call to each other in an unknown tongue, then one is sure that a strange people have found a home among the green hillsides and valleys, and the musical name on the signboard—'Valdese'—lingers in the mind a memory and a question.

It is, in truth, a brave and a pathetic story—that of the beautiful church and the little band who have labored for it; and North Carolina may well be proud to hold this bit of Italy within her borders.

One must go back more than two hundred years for the beginning of it—back to the time when the Waldenses of Italy, like the Huguenots of France, were fighting, suffering, dying for the sake of the religion they loved. Again and again they were driven from their homes, having endured thirty-three persecutions since 1680; many of their members even suffered martyrdom. At the times of greatest tolerance they were merely allowed to live in the Waldensian valleys; they were forbidden schools for their children, forbidden the practice of the professions, forbidden everything except the barest, poorest living. Yet, in the very land of the popes, the little handful of Protestants persisted; more than that, secretly, but perseveringly, they sent out their missionaries, facing, unflinchingly, danger of exile or death. Surely, a people like this any nation might be proud to welcome.

Some five years ago a little band of them—sixteen families in all—made the long, hard journey from Italy to Carolina, hoping in the great new country of which they had heard so much, to gain better homes for themselves and better opportunities for their children. But oh, the suffering of that terrible first year! The soil was poor, the language strange, the very sky seemed cold and unfriendly after the deep, sunny blue of their beloved Piedmont. The women, crowding back the pain of their homesickness, hushed the hungry crying of the children, and worked side by side with their husbands in the fields. That was the time when they had not even a penny to buy salt for their soup, and strong men staggered for want of food. Is it strange that little children slipped away from so sorrowful a world? Of the nineteen graves in the colony, seventeen tell where children sleep.

But, gradually, through the tireless perseverance and industry of the people, cottages

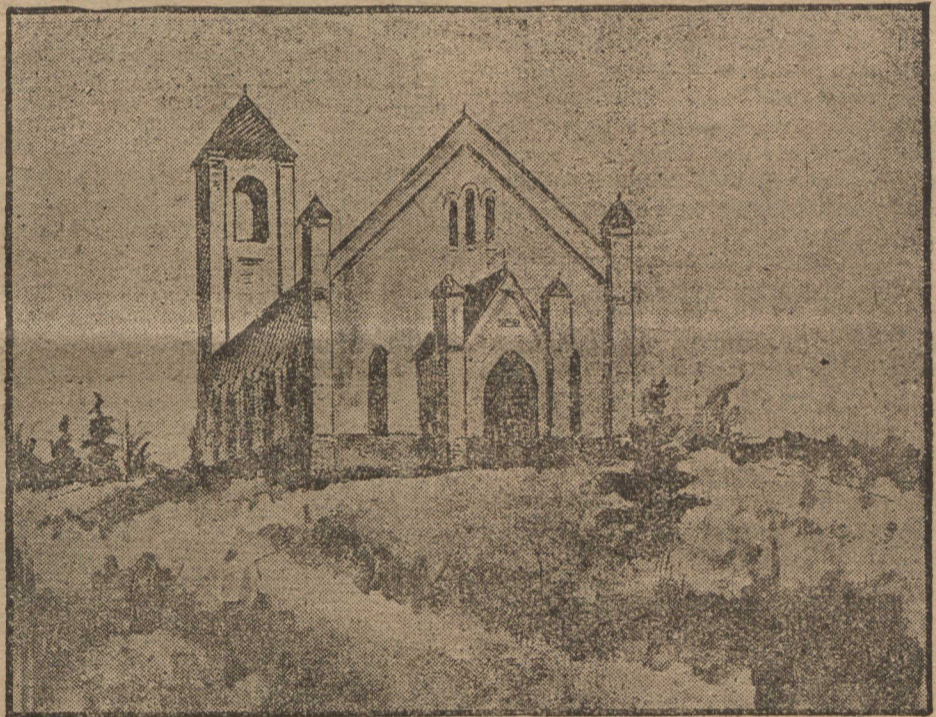
were built and vineyards set out and fruit-trees blossomed pink and white about their doors; and, as they began to make the payments on their little farms, the terrible homesickness lessened. A stocking factory in the place gave employment to many of the children, who carried home their wages to help pay the debts; and money for the crops began to come in.

Then came another blow—the factory was closed; and boys—little fellows we should think them—of thirteen and fourteen, went away to the neighboring factory towns to get work. Some of the people left their farms and the green, sweet hills and went into the whirring world of machinery to toil patiently that they might at last own their homes free from debt.

But through all their hard times, God's house was not forgotten. The people themselves had no money to give, but they could

from the porches have a quaint old-world look. Inside they are no less quaint. A few dishes stand on shelves at the sides of the big fireplace. There will be one table with a big drawer (full perhaps of loaves of bread as hard as bricks) and a couple of benches, no chairs at all. At the other end of the room, or in a separate room if the people are a little better off, will be the clumsy four-post bedsteads, big wooden chests, and a row of clothes hanging along the walls. That is all the furniture that any of these people possess.

But poor as they are, they have a fine and graceful hospitality. The visitor to their homes is always thanked for the call, even though she cannot speak a word of their patois, or of the French which most of them speak as well. The women will break a spray of fruit blossoms for her, or offer her bread or coffee or milk; the men will leave



A WHITE CHURCH THAT STANDS HIGH UPON A HILLTOP.

work, and with loving zeal they cleared the land and brought the stone. Friends who knew of their poverty sent in contributions of money, but all the patient work of the more than two years that it took to build the church was their own.

During the five years many changes have come to the colony, one of the greatest being the mission school which was started two years ago. The children are quick and bright, and learn English readily, and never miss a day, if they can help it. The great difficulty is that so many of them have to leave as soon as spring comes, in order to help with the farm work. Yet so anxious are they to learn, that the older boys, after working in the fields from sunrise to dark, will hurry to the teacher's, without stopping for supper, and study there till nine or ten o'clock.

There are, in the little colony, many sights strange to American eyes. The houses themselves with their low roofs and big stone chimneys and long grape arbors extending

their ploughing to come and give a welcome in broken English, while the children stand about speaking only in shy, friendly smiles that belong to the world-language.

They are such happy children, though all unknowing of the childish delights of toys and candy. All the bounty of nature is theirs, freely; their little feet keep even step with the procession of the flowers, and never a bird nests in woods or meadows that their eager eyes do not discover and watch the tiny house. No wonder that 'store' games seem dull to them. Dolls—strange it may sound, but it is no less true—seem to hold no charm for these little Waldensian maids. Perhaps the babies in their own homes, whom they begin to care for when they are scarcely more than babies themselves, make dolls seem stiff and unlovely to them.

Perhaps to a stranger the most curious sight is the bread making in the colony. In the first place it is always done by the men, never by women. Not far from the church is a small wooden house containing a table