

THE WALDENSES.

Various accounts are given of the origin of the Waldenses. Even the name is involved in obscurity. And this is a strong presumptive proof of its great age as a Church; reaching back to the dawn of authentic history. Their own historians claim that they have existed as a separate people, holding the true faith from the earliest ages of Christianity. Some date their origin to Claude, Bishop of Turin, in the ninth century. So Peyrani told Napoleon at Turin, in 1805. Some, more ambitious, claim an origin with Vigilantius—in the fourth century—while others contend that they received the gospel from Paul himself.

Whatever origin is assigned them, as a Church, it is certain that from the early ages of the Church there has existed, in the Cottian Alps, a people who held the doctrines of Christianity in a purer form than their papal and persecuting neighbours. These people were variously known as Waldenses, Vaudois, Valdesi, etc., a name given them from the fact that they inhabited valleys (as Vallis or Vaux signifies). But more recent, and probably more trustworthy historians, have derived their name and origin from Peter Waldo, a reformer of the twelfth century, who lived at Lyons, in southern France.

This man, it seems, was blessed with more religion than was tolerated in the Papal Church, which first tried to silence and afterwards excommunicated him, for holding and teaching the truths of Christianity, as he found them in his French Testament. Driven from Lyons, he retired to the mountains, as a place of security, giving his name to a numerous following, known as Leonisti, Sabatati, Waldenses, etc.

Whatever the historic origin of this ancient Church, it is certain it long antedates the Reformation. For, taking the most recent date assigned by modern historians, it is now seven hundred years since Peter Waldo began his preaching at Lyons—and organized the sect that took his name. But I think it not doubtful that the Waldenses of Piedmont had a name and a place long before Peter Waldo lived.

This ancient Church, from the beginning, has occupied three small valleys on the southern slopes of the Cottian Alps, in northern Italy, at the very sources of the River Po, among almost perpetual snows.

This very location has been one great reason why they have so long survived the bloody persecutions they have suffered. The fastnesses of the mountains, with their caves and "munitions of rocks," have furnished them refuge from the fiery hand of priest and prelate when every other human help failed. Lying between France and Italy, they speak the languages of both countries, and publish their papers in both French and Italian.

For seven hundred years the history of this Church has been written in blood. They enumerate not less than thirty-six persecutions by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of the Church of Rome. Their poor valleys have literally fattened on the blood of martyrs. Nearly every rock is a monument of some murdered saint; every meadow witnessed executions, and every village and hamlet has its roll of martyrs.

From A. D. 1198, when Otho commanded the Bishop of Turin to "exterminate the heretic Vaudois," down to the last century—a period of nearly seven hundred years—they have been the victims of the most relentless fury, on account of their religion. Paul seems to have had them in his eye when he wrote the last part of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. In one of these persecutions—in 1685, when Louis XIV. revoked the Edict of Nantes—two hostile armies were sent to exterminate them, and three thousand were put to death, ten thousand imprisoned, and three thousand children taken away to be raised by Catholics. The news of this bloody persecution aroused the civilized world and many nations remonstrated with the papal powers in strong terms of disapproval. Cromwell sent an envoy to protest against it, and raised a large sum to relieve the sufferings of those who were not destroyed, but whose homes were burned and country devastated. It was then that John Milton wrote that immortal ode—a prayer to God—which has at last been most appropriately answered:

"Aver 3, O Lord, Thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lay scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;

Their martyred blood and ashes sow
O'er all the Italian fields where still doth sway
The triple tyrant; that from these may grow
An hundred-fold, who having learned Thy way,
Early may fly the Babylonian woe!"

Since 1826, their condition has been improving, until now, by decree of their king, they enjoy equal rights and liberties with all his Italian subjects.

God has graciously and wonderfully preserved this "remnant" who never "bowed the knee to Baal," until they have seen all temporal power wrested from their bitter persecutors, and religious liberty proclaimed at the very doors of the Vatican. Coming forth from their native valleys, the Vaudois have spread all over the Italian plains, establishing churches and mission stations in almost every part, and are today selling the Bible and preaching the Gospel in the city of Rome. So has God saved this faithful "little flock" for so great and blessed a destiny.

In doctrine, the Waldensian Church is thoroughly Calvinistic, holding the same system of doctrine afterwards so fully and ably expounded by John Calvin, and held to-day not only by the Presbyterian Church, but by a vast majority of all professing Christians. Among the doctrines which this ancient Church has always held and defended with its blood and treasure, we may mention, "God's sovereign, unconditional election, Justification by faith alone, through the imputation of Christ's righteousness, Sanctification by special power of the Holy Spirit, and the final perseverance of the saints."

They have always rejected the Popish doctrines of the mass, purgatory, worship of the Virgin Mary, of saints and images, the holy water, vigils, etc.

Such is a brief outline of this ancient Church of God, whose full history would fill volumes. It lives to-day, the oldest evangelical Church of God on earth, and richly deserves the honour that men and God have put upon it. It is the "burning bush" of the Church, burning through all the centuries, yet unconsumed. When "darkness covered the land and gross darkness the people," the light of its undimmed lamp shone forth amid the universal gloom, beautifully illustrating its own ancient motto, "*lux lucet in tenebris.*"

If martyr spirits receive special honours in heaven, as we are led to believe, this Church will have a larger proportion of honoured dead in the presence of God than any other. In its fidelity to the truth, in its patience in tribulation, in its fortitude under persecution, in its zeal for God's service and its self-sacrificing spirit for the cause of the Gospel, it sets an illustrious example to all Churches of Christendom. These are the virtues God loves, honours and rewards. Would that all of His people were inspired with the spirit of this heroic martyr Church. Then His kingdom would soon come and His will be done in earth as it is in heaven.—*Christian Observer.*

THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL.

When we speak of anything that we cannot explain we call it mysterious. Many things in nature are mysterious. In a sense the whole world and all connected with it, as life, death, birth, growth and decay, however common and familiar they may be, is a mystery. There is no subject we can exhaust, no matter we can fully explain, everything has a *beyond*. It is allied to something else, and that to another, branching out into the infinite. If it is so in nature, we may expect the same in the Gospel. The subject is God, man, and redemption. Though the Gospel be a revelation, and on one side comprehensible, yet the more we study it the deeper we go, the more we cry out, "Oh, the depth!" Everywhere there is a background of mystery. Infinity meets us on every side. Even time itself, which seems so definite, merges into eternity.

St. Paul was very zealous to make known the mystery of the Gospel. To himself it had been a revelation of light and life, and what it had been to him he knew it could be to others. But to many who have heard the Gospel it is still a mystery. It is one thing to hear, and another to know. We speak of the mys-

teries of a trade or profession, and often we know a great deal about them without really knowing them. A mystery is not known till what it conceals is fully revealed.

To know the mystery of Christianity is not then to know some abstruse doctrine. It is not to give consent to some incomprehensible propositions resting on some supposed external authority. It is to know and realize what is plainly taught in the Gospel. It is to feel the truth of what is revealed, to have a sense that we have come out of darkness into light, to know that God is a Being of the greatest perfection, that He is manifested in Christ, the perfect man, that we may be delivered from all sin and conformed to the divine image. And the more earnest we are to learn, the more we shall know, the better we are, and the more the mystery shall be revealed to us. St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says: "We speak of the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before this world to our glory, which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written—eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God."—*Good Words.*

"THIS SEAT IS TAKEN."

We learned to be familiar with the expression during a short trip to the mountains last summer. For nearly fifty miles, two ladies succeeded in warding off travellers who sought the shady side of the car, and the seat in front of them was the convenient receptacle of their baggage, while their attendant gentleman, if, indeed, he was not a myth, must have had convenient accommodations in the smoking car.

Presently, however, an uncouth looking individual, who had been standing and silently making observations, quickly removed the baggage and turned the seat. The astonished ladies paused in their conversation to each other, and raised their hands as if in remonstrance, but it was too late; the thing was quickly and quietly accomplished, and the two foreigners who were seated there *seemed* to understand no words or gestures. Public opinion, in that car at least, sided with them. "I'm glad of it," was the expression in looks, where no words were spoken.

Near by was seated another lady, half of whose seat "was taken" by her own bundles. She took the first opportunity to invite a passing lady to share it with her, evidently fearing that she might be obliged to endure a less desirable companion.

Arriving at one of the mountain hotels, the only signal for meals seemed to be the opening of the dining-room door. The room not being large enough for all, those who were not on hand were obliged to wait. Next day, the new comers were in first; but as some of them were about to be seated around a table designed to accommodate seven, one young lady rushed up, exclaiming: "This seat's taken, and this, and this." She evidently wanted the whole table for her party, but one gentleman was not so easily baffled. "I don't know who has taken it," he quietly remarked, as he seated himself by his wife's side, "the clerk gave it to me yesterday, and we sat here this morning undisturbed." The young lady was speechless, but her withering looks failed to disconcert the gentleman, whose polite attentions to all at the table succeeded at last in drawing even from her puckered lips a reluctant "thank you."

"Cars all ready for Franconia Notch," shouted the conductor; and sure enough, they seemed to be all ready, for as the crowd entered, not a seat was available. One person was guarding four, others one and two; the aisle was uncomfortably crowded. "This way," said the conductor, "room in the palace car for those who are standing." The engaged seats were at a discount (plenty of room now), but the conductor insisted that they should be retained by their occupants, and all were made comfortable.

"Do as you would be done by," is as good a rule when travelling as elsewhere.—*Congregationalist.*