

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### THE WALDENSIAN VALLEYS.

LEAVES FROM A TOURIST'S NOTE-BOOK.

#### VALLEYS OF PEROSE AND ST. MARTIN.

The easiest way to reach the valley of St. Martin from Torre Pellice, is to take the train to Pinerolo, and then go by steam tram-car to Perosa, twelve miles up the valley of Clusone or Perose, by the bank of the Clusone, a large stream which forms the boundary of the Vaudois territory to the north and east. On the way from Pinerolo to Perosa we pass three Vaudois parishes in amongst the hills on the opposite side of the river. These are Prarostino, where Signor D. Gay, junior, is pastor; St. Germano, where Signor Enrico Bosio is pastor; and Pramollo, where Signor G. D. Muston is pastor. We did not visit these parishes, though we heard much regarding them during our stay. They all suffered much during the days of persecution from the monks of the powerful Abbey of Pinerolo, the remains of which were pointed out as we passed. The following regarding St. Germano will suffice as a specimen. In 1560 the monks raised a corps of 300 soldiers who precipitated themselves upon the inhabitants of St. Germain and carried them off to the Abbey where they were imprisoned or burned, amongst the number being Signor Jehan, pastor of the parish. Finding it impossible to make him abjure his religion, they burned him slowly, making poor Vaudois women hold the fuel which consumed him in their hands. Again in 1686 a division of the army of Catinat received orders to hunt the Vaudois of St. Germain. About 1,200 men drove 200 Vaudois to barricades erected in a narrow passage in the valley of Russillard, where were high rocks on one side and an abyss on the other. When there, the small force turned and combatted their assailants for three hours, killing 500 men and driving the others precipitately over the Clusone. We should have liked to visit Pramollo, which lies in a fertile basin near the summit of the mountain, from which a splendid view is had of the valley of the Clusone, and of the plain of Lombardy.

At Perosa we stop, and crossing the river, here joined by the Germanasca, we follow the bank of this latter stream westward and soon reach

#### POMARET.

The first village in the valley of St. Martin, where Dr. P. Lautaret, assisted by Signor G. Marauda, is pastor. Here is situated the Latin school to which come the youth of the valley to prepare themselves for the higher classes at the College of Torre Pellice, going afterwards to the theological college at Florence. This school was founded in 1842 by General Beckwith, and recently a new building has been erected by funds raised by Rev. Dr. Stewart, of Leghorn. It was for the young men studying here under such painful circumstances as I then narrated, that kind readers of the PRESBYTERIAN contributed last year more than £21 sterling to procure substantial meals, and for which the recipients expressed, through Dr. Lautaret, their warmest thanks. There are usually about twenty-five scholars in attendance, who are taught by two preceptors. There is also an hospital here, founded in 1824, into which about 150 patients are admitted in the course of the year. It is in charge of Deaconess Signora Revel. Dr. Lautaret is moderator of the Waldensian Table, and one of the best men of business amongst the Vaudois. He publishes a small weekly paper, and has edited several historical works relating to the Vaudois, such as the history of the old Waldensian Gilles, and the "Glorious Return of Henry Arnaud." He is a man of erudition, has been pastor for forty years and is thoroughly acquainted with the whole history of the Waldensians. He is always glad to receive a visit from strangers who go so far north, and is as hospitable as he is refined and intelligent. His new church here was opened in 1842. Higher up the valley, in the hamlet of Clos, is the church of

#### VILLA-SECCA,

of which Signor G. P. Micoll is pastor. After resting an hour in his comfortable manse, and partaking of his hospitality, he and his wife accompanied us to the old church near the top of the mountain, in which the historian, Gilles, was formerly pastor. The path was certainly a rough one, but they are accustomed to such roads and appeared to think little of the climb. This led Mr. Micoll to tell us something of his work in his extensive parish which includes hamlets on the sides

of two of three lofty hills. To pay a visit to a sick person, to attend a funeral or other service occupies a whole day; and in addition to parish work, the pastors have to attend examinations of schools, colleges, etc., so that their labours are never ended. After our descent to the valley and a look at the new church, we continued our journey up the valley, Mr. Micoll accompanying us to where the valley branches off into two valleys. This division takes place about a mile beyond

#### FERRERO-MANIGLIA,

where Signor Rostau is pastor, on whom we called, but only for a short time, the day being far advanced, and a long journey still before us. One valley here turns to the north-west and leads to the hamlets of Rodoret and Prall. Of course a mountain torrent descends it and here joins the Germanasca. The other valley which continued to bear the name of St. Martin turns to the north-west and leads to the hamlet of Massel called also Campo La Salza—a toilsome walk of two, long hours and a-half being necessary to reach it. Happily we arrived at

#### MASSEL

just as the shades of evening were beginning to fall, and with some difficulty succeeded in making our way through narrow lanes and open cattle sheds, to the so-called manse, where we were warmly welcomed by Signor G. G. Tron, the pastor, and his hospitable wife. This was the highest parish we had yet reached, and when we heard of the difficulties and discomforts incident to a residence in such retired spots, and amongst poor and unlettered peasants, such as compose the flocks we were constrained to admire the self-denial and zeal which are practised by Vaudois pastors. Our hosts made no complaint, however, nor any apology for the humble fare they so willingly offered, nor for the plainness of the only spare bed-room in their house. Late in the evening, our party was joined by Signor C. A. Tron and his wife, who had come from Turin to spend their holidays in this valley in which he had been born. We talked until late at night, and then parted, promising to meet the next morning and all go together to visit the Balsille at the head of the valley. The morning was lovely and the scene delightful as we descended from the manse into the valley, crossed the torrent and skirted its side for an hour by a very uneven path to

#### THE BALSILLE

to see which was the chief object of our visit. The Balsille is really a spur from the Col de Pis, (9,990 feet) which separates the valley on the north from the valley of Pragela—and looks as if up-reared to be a citadel for the oppressed. Two torrents, one from the Col de Pis, and the other from Mont Guinevert, meet here and form the Germanasca. Between these two streams rises the Balsille, a gigantic rampart of rock almost perpendicular. What invests this rock with special interest is the fact that Henry Arnaud and 400 Vaudois, here defended themselves for a whole winter against the united forces of France and Savoy.

About 200 feet from the base is a plateau inaccessible from the west, where it abuts on a precipice and on the north and south are sloping sides covered with grass. We clambered up to the plateau, where was the first fortress, still called the *Chateau*. Above this are three other abrupt crests, on each of which was a small, flat space, in which a sort of barrack had been excavated. Each also possessed a spring near which intrenchments had been constructed, and a large store of stones to hurl on the heads of the assailants, had been provided. Tradition says that in prospect of having this hill as a residence for the winter, the Vaudois hollowed out eighty caverns in the solid rock, to serve as barracks. On the plateau to which we had ascended, a spring was still flowing, and beside its clear waters we sat and discussed the story of the "glorious return," to which I can do little more than allude at present. Louis XIV., to expiate the sins of his profligate life, urged his neighbour, the young Duke of Savoy, to exterminate the Vaudois, and on the last day of January, 1686, Victor Amadeus put forth a terrible edict, giving the Waldenses only fifteen days to become Romanists or to leave the country under pain of death. The united forces of France and Savoy were sent to put the threat into execution. Remonstrances were made in vain. Eleven thousand perished from hunger and disease in prison; two thousand children were carried off to be instructed in the faith of Rome. Only about 3,000 survived, and these were obliged to cross Mont Cenlo in the depth of winter, many of them finding

graves in the snow. Those who reached Switzerland were most warmly received, and here they remained for more than three years. Like all mountaineers, however, they soon began to long after their old homes in the hills. At last they met and chose Henri Arnaud, a Huguenot pastor from Die, in Dauphiny, to be their leader. To procure the means, Arnaud visited Holland, and received encouragement and money from William of Orange, and on the 16th August, 1689, the whole party—800 men in all—crossed the lake of Geneva, and commenced and successfully accomplished one of the most remarkable journeys, all things considered, that was ever made, before or since. On the 27th August they reached the Balsille on which we were seated, and soon after dispersed to Rodoret and Prall, finally reaching Bobbio, where, on the meadow of Sebaud, they made the covenant referred to in a former letter. They did not enjoy peace long, however, for the united armies of France and Savoy were again sent to hunt them on the mountains, and on the Balsille they took refuge, there to resist as long as possible. As a matter of fact, they did defy the united forces until May of the following year, when they escaped in a fog, under the guidance of a native of the place, whose name is still held in grateful remembrance. They were on their way to Pra del Tor, their old fortress, when they were met by envoys from the Duke of Savoy, who himself had got into trouble, to offer them peace. Well might their poet in after days sing:—

Revenus de l'exil pour sauver la patrie,  
C'est là, sur ces rochers, que nos braves aieus  
Pendant tout un hiver ont défendu leur vie  
Contre des ennemis douze fois plus nombreux.

Eu de prodigieux et rares privilèges  
Les faisant succéder au petit peuple élu,  
Là, Dieu leur fit trouver des moissons sous les neiges,  
Et dans le vol de l'aigle un chemin de salut.

Before leaving we took another look at the Col de Pis, one peak of which is called mount Albergo, so called in reference to one of the most terrible events in Vaudois history. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the valley of Pragela, lying beyond, was largely inhabited by Vaudois. On Christmas Day 1400, without any warning, the peaceable Vaudois were attacked by an overwhelming force of Romanists from Susa, and obliged to fly with their wives, infants, old men and sick, and take refuge in the caverns of the mountains. One party made for the Valley of St. Martin, and had arrived at the summit of Col de Pis where they were compelled to pass the night before descending to Massel. The next morning eighty infants, and many of the mothers were found dead amongst the rocks. In vain had the poor mothers enveloped their children in garments taken from themselves. That December night was too long and too bitterly cold for them, and hence the above result. Many of those who did not die were so benumbed with cold as never to recover the use of their limbs. When the news reached the ears of the cruel enemy, the mountain was called in unfeeling jest the "Albergo," or "lodging house" of the heretics.

On returning to the manse we had hardly seated ourselves at the luncheon table, when all of a sudden, without any warning, a violent

#### THUNDER STORM

broke over the hamlet with terrific force, every peal shaking the house from top to bottom. It was certainly grand but did not augur well for our crossing the mountains to Rodoret—there to sleep, intending to make our way the following day over Col Julien, into the Valley of Luserne. The storm, so unexpected, was followed by a deluge of rain, forming streams which descended with fresh force from the hills, carrying stones, earth, etc., and rendering every path impassable. Of course we were detained at the manse until it was too late of thinking to carry out our plans. We therefore decided to return to the Valley of St. Martin, hoping that the weather might clear up, and so enable us to reach Rodoret or Prall by the valley where it bifurcates. After wading through streams of running water copiously mixed with mud and stones and crossing the Germanasca which was roaring along beneath a slender, wooden bridge which had so far been left standing, we succeeded in reaching the lower valley with some difficulty. Here, however, it was still raining, and meeting Signor Romano, of Rodoret, on his way home from Pomaret, we arranged to postpone our visit to his parish and the adjoining one of Prall, to a future time, which, however, to our great regret, we never succeeded in accomplishing.