

## Religious Intelligence.

(From a Correspondent of the Watchman.)

## The Vaudois or Waldenses.

Lausanne, October, 1850.

"No people of modern times," says an historian, "presents so much analogy with the ancient Jewish people, as the Vaudois, or Waldenses of the Piedmontese Alps.—No history has so many striking events, no church so many martyrs, as theirs."

No wonder, then, that such a people has enlisted in its favour the sympathies of the Protestant world, and conspicuously among them those of British Christians. In times of their oppression, the great Protector of the English Commonwealth first pleaded their cause before the public at home, and defended their rights at the courts of Louis the Fourteenth and Victor Amédens the Second; while, in more modern times, churches have been built, numerous schools founded, and spiritual help afforded, through the generosity of the people of England.

Our own religious community has also manifested, although in too small a degree, perhaps, its sympathies in favour of this interesting people, so that it may not be uninteresting or unprofitable to give, through the *Watchman*, a sketch of their actual state and prospects, in connexion, especially with the present position of affairs on the Italian continent generally, and in Piedmont more particularly.

Immediately prior to the promulgation of the "Statuto," or Sardinian constitution of 1847, the Waldenses lived in peaceable possession of their native valleys, and in the enjoyment of their recognized religious ordinances. These were however subject to restrictions which reminded them that they were rather a tolerated than a free people; that they were still considered as a community of strangers, rather than as fellow citizens. No Vaudois could, for instance, purchase land out of the limits of the Vallies, under the severest penalties, enforced alike on the vendor and the purchaser. The object of this law was to prevent the influence of the Vaudois, either as landed proprietors, or as Protestants, from spreading beyond the limited territory, but the effect of these restrictions has been, to oblige an overgrown population, to seek other means of subsistence than the produce of their lands. Many young people, therefore emigrated to France, Switzerland, or Germany, engaged in mercantile or other profitable pursuits, and after some years' absence, returned to their native valleys either possessed of a competency, or having acquired considerable intellectual and spiritual development. So that, taken in connection with their Protestant principles, and a good primary education at home,—the state of things just alluded to has tended to elevate them, not only as to outward comforts, but also as to moral and intellectual standing, far above the other portions of the Piedmontese peasantry. Herein is seen the finger of God, as we shall have reason to notice shortly.

As to civil and political rank, the Vaudois enjoyed none whatever: they could command no official appointment in the State, and were excluded even from inferior municipal offices, as well as from the right of exercising the professions connected with law and medicine.

In a religious point of view, their liberties were guaranteed, subject nevertheless to certain vexatious restrictions. The number of parishes were restricted to 15, and a school attached to each. The parishioners had the right, conjointly with the Synod, of electing their own Ministers. Their Synod and Ecclesiastical Committee (*La Classe*) were duly authorized to assemble periodically, under the eye of a Government Commissioner. But, at the same time, no Church could be built, no new parish formed, no stranger allowed to officiate in the valleys, nor any improvement introduced, without the express sanction of the Court of Turin; and what that Court was heretofore disposed to do in such matters, the reader may be left to guess.—Beside that, the Vaudois were obliged to refrain from their ordinary occupations during the numberless Popish festivals, and

required neither to proselytise among the Catholics, or to offend, either in word or deed, against the religion of the State, under the most severe penalties.

Such a state of things was sufficiently hard and degrading, but it was really quite tolerable, compared with what their ancestors had suffered in times long gone by. Besides, it was evidently intended in the order of God's Providence as a training for the better times not then far off.

These better times did come! With the "Statuto" of 1847, the Waldenses received their civil and political emancipation, and since then, and by degrees, their full and religious liberty.

It was the beginning of the year 1848, on one of those beautiful spring mornings peculiar to a southern climate. Scarcely a cloud was to be seen on a spotless Italian sky; the sun shone forth in all its splendour, and the fresh air seemed already fragrant, wafted as it was by gentle breezes from the budding vineyards and orange groves of the distant plains. An immense concourse of people, decked out in holiday costumes of gayest colours, crowded the *Piazza del Castello* of Turin, and rent the air with prolonged and enthusiastic shouts. It was the day appointed to celebrate the promulgation of the constitution of the Sardinian States; and on which the King, Charles Albert, was to receive the congratulations and acknowledgements of a grateful people. An immense and most splendid procession, composed of representatives from all the Provinces, Cities, and Corporations of the realm, was to proceed to the Palace. It was a truly imposing spectacle, and the associations it brought to the mind heightened its charms.

The procession at length appeared, amid bursts of enthusiastic joy. One cry was heard, louder than all the rest. "*Vivano i fratelli Valdesi! Evviva l'emancipazione dei Valdesi!*" "Long life to our brethren the Vaudois; Hurrah for the emancipation of the Vaudois." And there was to be seen, in a post of honour, immediately in the rear of the Metropolitan authorities, and before all the civic corporations,—the little band from the Vallies, preceded by a large silk banner, on which were read in large gold letters: "*Carlo Alberto, i Valdesi riconoscenti!*" "The grateful Waldenses to Charles Albert." It appears that this post of honour in the procession had been assigned them at the unanimous request of the corporations. "Our brethren, the Vaudois," said they, "must have the precedence this time; they have too long been in the rear."

This was a joyous day for all, but for none so much as for the long oppressed and despised mountaineers, now emancipated and honoured. Nor could they forget that in other times, that very *Piazza* where they were now received amid friendly greetings of "*Vivano i fratelli Valdesi!*" their forefathers had ascended the stake amidst cries of, "*Death to the Vaudois; away with the heretics to the stake!*" And while some of them stood on the very spot where, on a similar day, long ago, and amidst a similar concourse, one of their devoted *Barbes* or Pastors met the flames with so much Christian heroism,—they could not but thank God for such altered times, and pray for grace rightly to improve them for His Glory!

Nor has the act of emancipation been a dead letter. It has, on the contrary, been carried out in perfect good faith, as various facts will sufficiently testify.

Already has a Vaudois, Monsieur Joseph Malan, banker at Turin, been elected member of the Chamber of Deputies, for Bricherasio; while municipal and other offices have been freely distributed among other members of the Vaudois community, in their several localities. The priests have not, of course, seen this altered state of things without a pang, and have endeavoured, as they always and everywhere do, to throw obstacles in the way. Under their influence it was that attempts have been made to oblige the Vaudois, when on duty as National Guards, to take part in Popish processions, and other similar religious rites. The Minister of the Interior, on being applied to, gave the following order: "That in no case whatever can a Vaudois militiaman be constrained to attend on the celebra-

tion of Roman Catholic rites; and that unless the public service imperiously requires it, he must not be disturbed from attending his own religious services."

I must here briefly glance at various other facts which are indications of onward progress and improvement in the religious state of the Waldenses. Steps have lately been taken, for instance, either for the extension of the parishes or the improvement of the churches. A beautiful new church is being built, together with a parsonage and a residence for the Professors of the College, near La Tour, in the Val Luserne. This new church is to replace the old structure, built long since in a retired and inconvenient spot, where it was not likely to be an eye-sore to the priests. A new parish has also been formed, and an hospital founded, at Turin, where the Minister is no longer considered, as heretofore, the Chaplain of the Lutheran Ambassadors, but is recognised by law as Pastor of the 16th Waldensian parish. It appears that a building, till lately used for Roman Catholic worship, is to be placed at the disposal of the congregation, by the Government of His Sardinian Majesty. Another improvement is the consecration in the valleys, and by Vaudois Ministers, of the Candidates for the Ministry. It is known that studies for the Vaudois Church have hitherto been made at Geneva, Lausanne, and Berlin, where there are foundations for the purpose. In general the ordinations were made by the Protestant Ministers of those localities. This is now done at home; and while it tends to improve the character of the ministry, by giving to the Synod the examination of Candidates prior to ordination,—it ensures to the Churches a better pastorate, and is a source of edification and encouragement to the people.

Education is in a prosperous state in the Vallies, and the introduction lately made of the study of the Italian language, is a new era, not only as to education itself, but possibly too in the general history of the whole community. The old patois which is used in general conversation, bears a strong affinity to that of the Southern Provinces of France; but French is the language employed in the pulpit, the schools, and by the local press. For now near 220 years it has superseded the use of the Italian tongue. The reasons are obvious. Continued persecutions, and exile, together with a common faith, brought the Waldenses in contact with the Protestants of Geneva, and those parts of Switzerland called Romande, and speaking the French language. On their return to their native valleys, and on the death of their ancient *Barbes*, the tongue of their new Ministers and of their Swiss protectors became their own, as well as their liturgical service, and forms of worship. And so it remains to the present day. The effect of the introduction of French, however inevitable, has been to isolate the Waldenses more than was necessary or desirable, from their Italian fellow countrymen. The gradual introduction of Italian will be, as other circumstances in the state of the people, an advantage to the cause of Evangelical truth in Italy. Already, one of the Vaudois Ministers has been called to take the charge of an infant church in the city of Florence, which has expressed its desire to be connected with the Vaudois community. A history of the Waldenses has also lately been published in Italian by M. Bert, the Pastor of Turin.

Some statistical information may now be acceptable to the reader. The total population of the three principal valleys of Luserne, Perouse, and St. Martin, together with the lateral valleys of Rora, Augrogne, and Pragella, is 22,450; of these about 1,000 may be considered as absent for a time on business. There are besides, 4,468 Roman Catholics mixed up among the Protestants. Perhaps about half are strangers from the plains, and the other half descendants of such who, in times of persecution, or through worldly interest, have embraced the Popish faith. This has taken place at Augrogne especially. There are sixteen parishes, including Turin, and as many Pastors and central schools, besides hamlet schools or *coles de quartiers*, for the greater convenience of the children in winter.—4,790 children attend these schools during the winter months. There is also a Classical

College, to which 6 Professors are attached, and a superior school for girls at La Tour. All these institutions are gratuitous, except I think, the last named. They cost 27,000 francs annually, (£1,116 stg.); this amount proceeds mostly from funds in England, Germany, and Holland; the contributions of the parishes do not amount to more than 9,492 francs, (£380 stg.). The salary of the Schoolmasters varies from £5 to £30; that of the Ministers and Professors is from £60 to £80. The buildings for all these educational establishments, have cost much money; they are in general well erected and kept in good repair. The parishes contribute to this end but in small proportions. They collected some years ago 15,000 francs (£600 stg.) towards the erection of the college; and during the last fifteen years, perhaps as much as 50,000 francs (£2,000 stg.) towards the building and repairing of the school-house. This would have been, however, of no avail without the exertions and liberality of Le General Beckwith, whose name has long been identified with that of the Vaudois of Piedmont. I must also add that there are three Hospitals, supported by foreign help, and that a religious monthly newspaper, the "*Echo des Vallies*," has been lately started in French, by a valuable and pious Minister, at La Tour.

While a stimulus has thus been given to various matters at home, interest is excited in some of the parishes in favour of foreign Missions. A collection is annually made in favour of the Paris Missionary Society, and last year 1,377 francs (£55 stg.) was thus gathered and remitted. On the 17th of February last, being the third anniversary of their emancipation, a public religious service was held in all the Vaudois Churches, and a collection made in favour of the *Hungarian Protestants*. It amounted to 1,000 francs (£40 sterling) This I take to be a very pleasing and characteristic demonstration of sympathy and good will, from a happy and free people towards a now oppressed and helpless church!

Such are some of the signs of improvement in these beautiful valleys, once the theatre of woe, lamentation, and bloodshed. But, however pleasing all this is to the real Christian, he must look beyond the surface, and inquire more deeply into the state of things. Ezekiel beautifully places before us, in his vision of the dry bones, (chap. xxvii.) the bones as brought together, sinews and flesh as coming over them, and the skin as covering them above; and then he emphatically adds: "*but there was no breath in them.*" Not that I mean to intimate that this is wanting in the case under consideration; but feeling, as I do, that it is "neither by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts," that both the individual Christian, as well as the collected church are to be judged, I would much more rejoice in any sign of spiritual progress and true Christian experience than in any mere outward works and ways.—But the examination of this, as applicable to the Waldenses, must be left for another paper.

## Family Circle.

Are you a Parent?

And if so, what lessons are you teaching that child who is so fondly looking to you for guidance, who is listening to catch the first syllable that falls from your lips, and who is ready to copy the first example you may unconsciously present? Perhaps in the arms of the mother there reposes the first and only one. It is yet innocent; within its little bosom a heart beats gently, but it is a heart uncontaminated by sin, and undisturbed by care. It knows nothing of the conflicting elements of this wicked world, and as the mother gazes upon that sinless form, she firmly resolves, and the father assents, that the lessons of temperance, morality and truth, shall early and faithfully be instilled into its young heart, and that no effort shall be wanting to rear it for usefulness to society and the world. A few years past away, but during this time the mind of that child has not been inactive. It has been allowed to mingle with others of its age; its range of observation