

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

THE WALDENSIAN VALLEYS.

LEAVES FROM A TOURIST'S NOTE BOOK.

A former letter contained the opinions of those who had most carefully studied the question, as to the origin of the Waldenses, and the probable date of their arrival in the valleys in which their descendants still reside. This letter, and one or two others which may follow, are intended to give those who are interested in the subject, an idea of the present condition of things in the valleys, and to point out the localities made memorable by deeds of heroism and victories gained by a few hardy mountaineers over whole armies sent by powerful states to exterminate them, or by terrible sufferings heroically borne. If they should be the means of awakening the interest of any Canadians in this remarkable people, or better still, of inducing some to visit the valleys and see and hear for themselves, the object of these few notes will have been attained.

The extent of the whole

VAUDOIS TERRITORY

is small, not more than twenty-two miles long by eighteen wide. This little piece of ground to which the latest guide books devote scarcely half-a-dozen lines, forms an irregular triangle in shape, having for its base the mountain chain of the Cottian Alps, which separates France from Italy, and for its sides spurs from the central ridge, which stretch eastward, and converge almost to a point on the plain of Lombardy. It is in the narrow valleys between these projecting spurs, and on their precipitous sides that the poor "Valley-men" live and labour, finding it a difficult task to sustain life on soil that for five or six months of the year is covered deep in snow, and the rest of the time is scorched by an Italian sun. The principal valleys are those of Luserne, Angrogna, Perouse and St. Martin, though there are many other smaller vales, hidden in the recesses of the hills to which attach also, for different reasons, memories that still linger. And as sentinels guarding this sacred spot of earth, stand Monte Viso (12,670 feet) on the south and Mont Genevre (6,200 feet) on the north.

THE VALLEY ON LUSERNE,

called also the valley of the Pellice from the stream which waters it, is connected with the city of Turin by a railway which was opened a year ago as far as Torre Pellice, so that access to the valleys in now an easy matter. Torre Pellice, better known by its French name La Tour, is the capital of the valleys. So we shall dwell for a little here, before pursuing our walk up the Pellice, nothing briefly the principal Vaudois institutions which are now to be seen. On our way from the station at the east of the town, the most prominent object which meets our view is the Roman Catholic church with its towers, its presbytere and its schools. And here let me say once for all, that in every parish of the valleys where stands a Vaudois temple, is also in proximity a Roman Catholic church, however small the number of the adherents may be.

TORRE PELLICE,

although the capital, is but a small country town, (population 2,370) its streets are narrow, roughly paved, and like most mountain towns, have, at certain hours of the day, streams of water rushing through the centres, which serve the double purpose of cleaning and of cooling them in the summer months. There are two large mills or *fabriques* on the bank of the river which impart a lively air to the place as the workers, of both sexes, leave for their meals; and doubtless the railway will, in time, improve the town, and in many ways benefit the valleys. But the buildings we are in quest of are on the west of the town, and so we hasten on. And first we arrive at the college, a large building erected in 1835, which, in addition to class-rooms, contains a small but valuable library, where may be seen the copy of the celebrated Bible translated and printed at the expense of the Waldensian Church in 1535. There is also a museum containing amongst other things, some records of the times of persecution. As early as 1829, the Rev. Dr. Gilly, of Durham, England, who had twice visited the valleys, and by his published volumes was the first in modern times to create an interest in the Vaudois, supplied the funds for founding a college to promote the study of the classics, and prepare young men for entering on the study of Theology. There are now between seventy and eighty young men attending the

classes here, their studies being directed by six professors. A few of these are fitting themselves for joining the classes of theology open in Florence since 1860.

Nearly opposite to the college is a new building—a High School for girls, which was founded in 1837 by General Beckwith, for the purpose of educating the daughters of such Vaudois as are in better circumstances, to become teachers at mission schools or governesses abroad, or fit to act the part of Christian mothers in their own homes. There are usually about sixty young ladies in attendance, the majority of them from the valleys, but some are English. The exercises are in French and Italian, and these languages are spoken with correctness. Those from a distance are received into different families where board does not cost more than £50 per annum. I found when visiting the parishes that almost all the pastors' wives had been educated here, and afterwards spent some years abroad as governesses. In this way they are all good linguists, and can converse in several languages, English amongst the number. The daughters of a few of them are at present at this school in La Tour. They themselves though refined in manner and cultured, spend lives of hardship and toil, especially in the highland parishes.

Next comes the Vaudois temple on a raised terrace, having on one side the manse, and on the other a row of neat villas in which reside Madame Beckwith, and the professors of the college. These houses were all erected by General Beckwith in 1847, and in summer they look very pretty, each having a garden in front, filled with rose-trees, and a variety of flowers and shrubs. Each, too, has its rustic arbour where, in the heat of the day, the owners can sit and read or receive their friends. In the evening these gardens are literally alive with fire flies, which light them up as if it were day. All through this valley countless myriads of fire-flies flit about in the dark, and when walking your dress gets covered over with light. In front of the church is a large grassy lawn, in which stand some magnificent chestnut trees, and here on Sunday mornings congregate the peasants from the hills around, dressed in their characteristic costumes and converse with each other, until the pastor—Rev. G. P. Pous—issues from the manse in gown and bands, and passes into the church. They all follow, the men going to the right and the women to the left of the main aisle—a custom which is observed in most European countries. The scene reminds one of what was common in former days in the country parts of Scotland and Ireland, and which may still exist in some places. If we were to follow them into the church, we should see a plain building with galleries round three sides and a high pulpit on the other. On either side of the pulpit are benches—one for the elders, and the other for the deacons. There is a reading desk from which the schoolmaster or regent, reads the Scriptures, and conducts the singing. The minister uses a short liturgy, but always preaches without reading or even referring to notes. The morning service, at which about 750 attend, is conducted in French, but the reunions in the evening are in Italian. There are three Sunday schools open in La Tour each Sabbath, and four others in adjoining hamlets. Missionary meetings are held once a month, in which some of the professors take a part.

On quitting the village on our way up the valley we pass the hospital founded in 1826 by Signora Geymet. It stands on high enclosed ground which is neatly laid out and planted. Its expenses are defrayed from a fund collected in different countries; sufficient to provide for 150 patients, about the number admitted in the course of the year. At the head of the institution is a deaconess—Signora Delessert—who is assisted by trained nurses, and everything within and without, indicates cleanliness, comfort, economy and skill.

Higher up on the side of the hill, appears the tower of the old church of Coppiers, and adjoining it, the manse in which resides the Rev. E. Tron, assistant to Mons. Pons. The attendance here is about 200 on Sunday.

Very prominent is

THE CASTELUZZO,

a precipitous rock of tragic memory which terminates the lofty Mont Vandalin, and which is far the most remarkable natural object in all the valley. In the face of this mighty cliff and near its base, is the cave in which the Vaudois of Torre Pellice took refuge from

their persecutors at different times. It was also from the summit of this rock that the signal was given in 1665 to begin that general massacre, the horrors of which excited intense feeling in all the Protestant states of Europe, caused Milton to write his heart-stirring sonnet "Avenge O Lord," etc.; induced Oliver Cromwell to send a special ambassador to Piedmont to plead for the oppressed Vaudois, and many brave soldiers from different countries to offer their services to the Waldenses and large sums of money to be contributed from which some benefit continues to be enjoyed to the present time.

Dr. Gilly, after infinite toil, succeeded in reaching, by means of a rope, the mouth of the cave, during one of his visits, but found it nearly closed by fallen rocks, rubbish etc. I had not the courage to make the attempt, though I ascended the hill to within a short distance of the base of the rock. The walk I found to be a toilsome one for all over the face of the mountain are ravines and beds of torrents then dry, which are invisible from below, but which cost an immense amount of extra physical exertion to traverse. I found many solitary hamlets also scattered about, the only inhabitants of the houses being fowl, goats, and a few cattle, the other occupants being employed in cutting grass or collecting berries and other fruits on the sides of the precipices around. I was told that even here in winter, when deep snow compels both man and beast to remain under shelter, schools are open for at least three months. But we must continue our onward course up the valley.

Here, on our left, in the meadows rendered fertile by the irrigating waters of the Pellice, are the hay-makers busy at work, while the river is glittering in the sunshine, as it tumbles from one rocky ledge to another in its downward career. Observe the faces of these men and women; they look resigned and contented indeed, but wear a care-worn and sad expression. They have nothing of the cheerful, bright-hearted appearance of the same class in Britain or Canada. They always return our greetings, however, in the *patois* of the country, and answer any questions we ask, but in a sombre manner. Vines, acacias, mulberry and chestnut trees, stud the valley on both sides, and afford a grateful shade to the cattle in hot summer months. The mulberry, too, supplies food to the silkworm, one of the sources of income to the peasants, while the chestnuts are largely used for food in the valleys, especially when other crops happen to fail. We are now approaching the second village of the valley,

VILLARO,

where the Rev. M. Gay is pastor. He is a superior old gentleman, several of whose daughters—refined and well-educated women—I had already met. Every pastor expects visitors to the valleys to call for him, and share his hospitality, and accept him as a guide to the sights of the parish. All this is so heartily done, one has no hesitation in acquiescing in the custom. To refuse would be tantamount to affront. Indeed, in the mountain parishes, the pastor's house, rude though it be, is the only one in which you can find food to eat or a bed to lie on, so it becomes a matter of necessity, not of mere choice, to call at the manse. After passing Villaro, the road is less steep than it was, and the views even grander as

BOBBIO

the third and last village in the valley is reached. Here you are enclosed in a regular *cul-de-sac*, with mountains in front, and mountains on either hand; and even in July, many of them are still enfolded in their mantles of snow. It was in this commune that Dr. Revel was long pastor before he was called to the College in Florence, where his son occupies his vacant chair. The Rev. B. Gardiol is now the minister of this parish—a young and vigorous man who thinks nothing of walking ten or twelve miles down to a meeting at Torre Pellice, and the same distance back in the evening. The usual Sabbath attendance at his church is about 300. His manse, which is a large and comfortable one, is shared by a young and cultured wife, from the parish of St. Jean, of which I shall have something to say on a future occasion. After partaking of his hospitality, he will accompany us to the meadow of

SIRAND,

up on the face of the mountain, to the right, and famous in Vaudois story, for it was here that Henri Arnaud and his brave band of exiles terminated their long and marvellous march from Switzerland on a Sunday