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LETTERS



WRITTEN IN CONNECTION WITH THE

Bi-Centenary Commemoration

OF THE

"GLORIOUS RETURN"

OF THE

WALDENSES TO THEIR NATIVE VALLEYS.

BY

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REGISTRO COMMERCIALE

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DR ANDREW THOMSON'S most interesting letters to the *Scotsman* having been the means of raising up friends for the Waldenses and their work, the WALDENSIAN MISSIONS AID SOCIETY have reprinted them in the hope that they may be still further useful. They trust that the letters may be largely instrumental in stirring up the interest of the Christian people of this country in the wonderful history and earnest labours of the Waldensian Church.

J. FORBES MONCRIEFF,
Secretary and Treasurer.

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LETTERS.

I.

MILAN, *August 24, 1889.*

IT has occurred to me that it may interest many of your readers to receive some account of the Bicentenary Commemoration of that interesting event in the history of the Waldensian Church known as "the Glorious Return." As I intend to be present on the principal days of the meetings, to which I am now on my way, I propose sending you some notices of its proceedings. In this first letter I shall confine myself to the statement of some facts in the history of that ancient Church and people which may account for, as well as justify, the Commemoration.

In the north of Italy, and in the midst of the Cottian Alps, with the glorious Monte Viso standing like a crowned monarch and looking down upon the other mountains, are the Waldensian valleys, the home and refuge of the Waldensian Church and people. It had been the prevalent belief among those Waldenses themselves, as well as among the students of Church history in other lands, that this Church

could trace its origin back to the times of the Christian Apostles, or to the generation which immediately succeeded the Apostles, and that Christian disciples fleeing from the persecution of the Roman Emperors, having found a place of safety in those mountain fastnesses, made many disciples among the heathen inhabitants, and in no very long time founded a Christian Church. This little Church of the Alps, it has further been affirmed, has maintained a comparative purity through all the intervening centuries, when other parts of Christendom had sadly degenerated, and from the earliest days of Christianity has continued in unbroken line up to the present day. That this belief in their primeval origin and undying constancy was held by Milton is evident from the words of his well-known sonnet, in which he describes them as "on the Alpine mountains cold, keeping the truth so pure of old, when all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones." The venerable Archbishop Usher was strong in the same belief.

This is a very fascinating theory of the origin and history of this ancient Church, bringing it before us, in its continuity of faith and life, as the living archway between the Church of the Apostles and the Churches of the Reformation. I do not wonder, therefore, that it is still fondly cherished by many of its intelligent pastors and people, all the more that they believe that they are in possession of facts, which warrant at least the strong presumption that they are right. At the same time, it is known to many that one of their own Professors, in a book which is marked by learning and ability, has recently called in question the fond tradition, and traced the origin of the Waldensian Church to the evangelistic labours

of Peter Waldo in 1180, a rich merchant of Lyons, who, having consecrated all his wealth to the relief of the poor and to the cause of religion, went everywhere preaching, and gathered around him many disciples. This, however, is a matter on which we would not dogmatise. But one thing is certain, that when the Reformation dawned in the fifteenth century there was already a little church nestling in those valleys which disowned the authority of Rome, and which was found to resemble in doctrine and polity, and in its simple manner of worship, the Churches of the Reformation, and which in its stability, organisation, and retrospect of its own past, bore ample evidence that it was not a thing of yesterday. No sooner did the sound of the Reformation trumpet penetrate into those valleys than the Waldenses were filled with a strange joy. In no long time they sent forth deputies to the venerable reformer Œcolampadius at Basle to express their sympathy with the reform, and to claim brotherhood with the new-born churches. "We are the teachers," said they, "such teachers as we are, of a certain unworthy and poor little people. Yet in all things we agree with you; and *from the very time of the Apostles our sentiments respecting the faith have been the same as your own.*" The Reformers hastened to respond and to own spiritual kindred to their little sister in the Alps, by acknowledging that "Christ was in them of a truth," at the same time referring to certain unworthy compliances with which some of them were chargeable. The deputies returned, a Synod was assembled in the romantic valley of Angrogna, to which, says an old chronicler graphically, came William Farel as a deputy from the French Churches, riding on a black horse. The evil compliances were

renounced, so far as they had ever been practised, and the Waldensian Church, made stronger by a sense of brotherhood, entered on a second life.

Although those Alpine valleys were the cradle and home of the Waldensian Church in those centuries which preceded the Reformation, its disciples and churches had spread far beyond those narrow mountain limits. It had planted little colonies, built churches, and erected villages so far south in Italy as Apulia and Calabria, and there were living links of connection and intercourse between them all. It has been recorded as a common saying among them in those days that a Waldensian might travel to the remotest province in Italy and sleep every night on his journey in the house of a Waldensian. This, too, has been denied by some of those sceptics in history who are accustomed in their destructive criticism to use acids instead of oils. But it has been confirmed within the last few years by the discovery of villages among the Calabrian mountains, which are inhabited by a people who claim to be the descendants of the Waldenses, and many of whose customs and forms of speech, and even some of their house utensils, are in use in the valleys at the present day.

In the centuries which have intervened between the Reformation and a period which does not date much more than a generation back, these mountaineers have been a persecuted people, and all this because of their immovable fidelity to their faith and worship. No doubt there had been times in their history in which the hand of the persecutor was arrested, and they enjoyed a season of peace, practising a quiet industry in the cultivation of their vines, and their chestnut and walnut trees, sowing and reaping their corn, and tending

their flocks far up on the mountain sides, and showing a morality that has never been surpassed in any age or by any people. But these were comparatively brief intervals, like a short summer followed by a long winter. Their immediate persecutors were most frequently the Dukes of Savoy and the Princes of Piedmont, and at other times the Kings of France, who had obtained a temporary sovereignty over the valleys. Again and again decrees of extirpation were issued against this unoffending people, the agents of intolerance coming in overwhelming numbers, and with instructions to spare neither young nor old, neither man nor maiden, but to cut off root and branch. Sword, and spear, and fire, drowning, and casting down from craggy precipices, every form of suffering which a devilish ingenuity could devise, was inflicted on those brave confessors, whose one offence was their assertion of the rights of conscience, and their claim to liberty of worship. Léger, their historian, who was the eye-witness of much that he describes, has placed on record facts so heart-rending and horrible that the children of later times were not allowed to read his book until they had reached maturity. There were especially two events in the history of this little Church of the Alps in which the furnace of their suffering was heated to the greatest intensity, and in which cruelty and treachery seemed to have exhausted their every resource. The former of these was the "great massacre," of which Dr Gilly speaks as "the most dreadful in existence," and as having spread anguish and rivers of blood over all the valleys. It took place in 1655, and was therefore contemporary with the period of Cromwell's protectorate in England. While awakening the horror of

all the Protestant States in Europe, it drew forth the remonstrance and won even the interposition of the Great Protector, who sent his ambassador, Sir Samuel Morland, to remonstrate in words which, if unheeded, would soon have become acts; his young secretary, Milton, also conveying in a Latin letter the thoughts and feelings of his master as well as his own, in eloquent words not unworthy of the immortal author of the "Paradise Lost." The heart of England was stirred to its depths, and, under the influence of Cromwell's encouragement and example, contributions were made for the relief of the sufferers, which, judged by the standard of the age, rose to munificence.

In the exile of 1686 all their sufferings culminated. The Waldenses, after having been greatly diminished and weakened by imprisonment and otherwise, were, in the cold of mid-winter, driven from their ancestral lands across the icy Alps into foreign countries, no doubt with the intention that the exile should be for ever. But their enemies could not make a full end. In three years contemporary with our own Revolution of 1688, the banished ones, unaided by the might of man, but with a superhuman bravery and endurance, came back; and this glorious return, which is perhaps the most wonderful passage in the history of the Waldenses—I might even say one of the most extraordinary chapters in the history of the Church—is at this very time the matter of bicentenary commemoration in their valleys, to which multitudes are gathering from many lands.

It has been the matter of wonder to many that while the Waldenses were almost always greatly inferior in numbers as well as in military resources, they so often succeeded in repelling their invaders. No

doubt, this frequent success is in part to be accounted for by the natural features of their country, with its caves and other hiding places, its rocky steeps, inaccessible to any but those who had lived in the midst of them, and narrow paths looking down upon giddy precipices, in which a brave man could keep a thousand at bay. Sure-footed, also, nimble and swift as the chamois goat on one of their own mountains, and trained marksmen from their boyhood, one Waldensian might usually be counted as equal to two or three of their adversaries. But all these natural advantages would have been of comparatively little avail and insufficient to account for the tenacity with which this wonderful people for centuries held fast their mountain home, were it not for the ever present consciousness that they were defending interests which were dearer to them than life, and for that faith in God which made them heroic, and which calamities could not quench. No warriors have ever equalled those who have rushed to the fight for something that was more precious to them than any earthly prize, and who have risen from their knees to face the foe.

Within the last eighty years the more violent forms of persecution have been lessening in their severity, even though the letter of the law had continued unchanged. Still, during the earlier portion of that period the Waldensian people were subjected to many wrongs and indignities. They were excluded from practising any of the higher and more lucrative professions, such as those of a physician, or a surgeon, or a lawyer. They were restricted to the toils of the vine-dresser, or the shepherd, or the crofter; the humbler trades alone were open to them. Indignities and insults followed them even to the grave. The

dead must be borne to their last resting-place with the coffin open, and the body exposed ; and no tombstone or other loving memorial was allowed in their churchyards, especially if this bore upon it any inscription expressive of a hope that it was well for ever with the dead. No Waldensian pastor was allowed to preach outside his own valleys, or to speak on religious subjects within the valleys with persons of another faith. Meanwhile, during this period of relaxed suffering the little Church began to be consoled by the growing sympathy and help which came to them from other lands, especially by the active and generous friendship of the noble-minded Dr Gilly of Norham, who built their college at La Tour, and drew towards them many other friends, and by the life-long and magnanimous liberality of General Beckwith, who assisted them in constructing their roads and bridges, and erecting many of their schools, while he cheered them with the hope, which to him had all the certainty of a Divine prophecy, that the day of their deliverance was not far off.

And at length that day of emancipation did come, when in 1848 King Charles Albert gave a free Constitution to his Piedmontese subjects, in which the Waldenses were included, and which was afterwards extended to unified Italy. Conscience was free. Their worship would henceforth be not only undisturbed, but protected. A new epoch in their history had dawned. The suffering Church was transformed into the working Church, and all beautiful Italy lay open before them.

I hope in a subsequent letter to give your readers some account of the Commemoration week.

ANDREW THOMSON.

II.

TORRE PELLICE, BY TURIN,
August 30, 1889.

ON Saturday last, travelling from Turin, I reached Torre Pellice, the picturesquely-situated little capital of the Waldenses, which stands like a gateway of entrance into the three principal valleys. The journey of thirty miles from Turin is, for the most part, through vineyards that are ripening for the vintage. I had come as one of the deputies from my Synod to be present at the commemoration of the great historic event of what is known as the "Glorious Return." There were evident signs that the commemoration had already in some measure begun, especially in the many flags that were planted on rocks and waved from gardens and chalets on the mountain sides around Torre, and that hung out from the windows of the town itself. The bustle in its streets showed that it had awakened out of its wonted quiet, and the variety of tongues spoken by those who came forth from the crowded train, and the hands-shakings and welcomings, assured us that the stream of visitors and deputies from foreign lands had already begun to flow.

It was with no little interest that, after an interval of somewhat more than a quarter of a century, I once more looked upon the worship of this remarkable people in their spacious temple, which began at an early hour on the following morning. It is scarcely changed at all in its external features. Indeed, there is much reason for believing that it is very much the same in its simplicity and order as the deputies from

the new-born Churches of the Reformation had found it three hundred years ago. The preacher's gown and bands, alike in shape and texture, are of the unmistakable Geneva type. The "régent," combining in himself precentor, teacher, and reader, continues as from time immemorial; though the practice of reading aloud passages from Ostervald's Bible until the congregation has assembled and the pastor has ascended the pulpit, appears to have become obsolete. The men and women sit in separate parts of the church, while the children are relegated to a place by themselves, under the care of teachers. The use of a prayer-book and of free prayer seem to be alternated in the worship, and still the men delight to linger under the plane trees in front of the church until the fixed hour for worship has come. The Waldensian, it is evident, is still a cautious innovator, and will not change from the mere love of change.

There were already about eighty deputies in the church yesterday, and more were known to be on their way. England, Scotland, and Ireland are largely represented. Wales has one deputy. The great Presbyterian Churches of America have some to speak for them. France, Geneva, Lausanne, Neufchatel also, and Basle, speak through honoured names. So do Germany, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, and Wurtemberg. Four Waldensian colonists have come all the way from Monte Video, in South America. Descendants of those who have been honourably associated by suffering and service in behalf of the Waldenses are here with an inherited zeal. As for the Beckwiths, they have long since become native to the soil. There are also many representatives from great missionary and benevolent

institutions in other lands, while many noble Christian workers—men of renown in doing good, and “honourable women not a few,” who, though not present as deputies, have come from far to express their love to this ancient Church, to visit scenes that have become sacred by noble acts, and to swell the rising tide of gratitude and joy.

The “Glorious Return” naturally suggests a previous period of exile, and I must be allowed a few sentences of history in order to explain what this exile was. Some time before the tragedy of the exile, imprisonment on a large scale, with all the cruelties and loathsomeness which imprisonment brought along with it, had become the favourite expedient by which the enemies of the Vaudois sought their destruction. We are assured by the chroniclers of the time that 14,000 of those brave and stalwart men crowded the prisons of Piedmont, in which disease and hunger and other forms of suffering did the work of death. Even this, however, wrought too slowly for the impatience of the persecutors. They determined that exile would be made to do more quickly what the prison had so far accomplished, and to make a full end. When at length the dungeons were thrown open at the intercession of friendly deputies from Switzerland, only 3000 persons were found to be alive, and these were so shrunken and emaciated that it would have been difficult to recognise them. Their persecutors now offered them two terrible alternatives between which to choose. It was now the month of December, and amid all the rigours of an Alpine winter, they were told that, within sixteen days, they must either renounce their faith or be banished from the land. At the end of

the sixteen days, their answer was that they were ready to sacrifice home and even life rather than become apostates. And so those heroic mountaineers, with inadequate clothing and scanty food, went forth on their trackless path across snowy mountains, and along the margin of precipices which winter had made doubly perilous, and at length, after many days of weary toil and trouble, with their numbers greatly diminished, if not decimated, by death, were received with admiring sympathy and prompt help by the Protestants of France, Geneva, and Holland.

But at the end of three years the desire of those exiles to return to their native valleys became irresistible and universal. It was, in fact, an intense soul-hunger for home, such as that which is sometimes known among Swiss emigrants even in the present day. They thought and dreamed of their simple chalets, their vineyards, their cornfields, and their flocks, and, not least, of their gladsome Sabbath assemblies ; and in the name of God they determined to attempt their return in the face of all obstructions and at all hazards. Through correspondence, a time and place of meeting were fixed for their departure, and thus began that glorious return which, in its moral grandeur and spiritual supports coming out of strong faith in God, has supplied one of the noblest chapters in human history. At this point there rises before our imagination one man who, in his unusual combination of gifts and excellences, was admirably fitted, if any man could be, to guide this enterprise to a successful issue. It is Henry Arnaud, the soldier and preacher, a very king of men, able to infuse into other minds his own spirit, and to make thousands act with the unity of one man. As we yesterday

looked upon his portrait which hangs in the library of the Waldensian College, we seemed to read in it the dauntless bravery, the iron will united with human tenderness, the simplicity of aim which makes men trusted, and the faith in God which makes men invincible. To this man was committed the work of conducting "The Return," and of turning those exiles into conquerors.

It would be a fit subject for a painter to represent those 800 brave men assembling, according to a concerted plan, somewhere near Nyon, on the northern shores of the Lake of Geneva, and, preceded by much prayer, in solemn silence embarking in the starlight in boats that had been provided for them, and in the early dawn landing in safety on the opposite shore of Savoy. Imagine them on some following days marching over the least frequented passes, in order to elude the notice of their enemies, at times obliged, with exhausting weariness, to pursue their way through soft snow, in which they sank a foot deep at every step, and, at another time, to force their passage across the Arve in the face of six hundred armed men. In six days after they have left the shores of the Lemman Lake, they have marched down Mont Cenis and descended into the valley of the Dora. But shall they dare to contend with those 2500 troops who open fire upon them, as they attempt to cross the bridge of Salabertrand? They do not hesitate; but, as with the irresistible force of one of their own swollen mountain torrents, throw themselves upon them and carry the bridge. But, on the next day as they look southward, how do their hearts leap with joy when they recognise in the distance the peaks of those mountains which encircle their own valleys! It

seems like home in view, and, kneeling down, they give thanks, by the lips of Arnaud, to Him who has hitherto prospered their way. But their joy is premature, for they find as they advance that their lands and houses are in the possession of enemies, and that their return must be followed by conflict and conquest. The next step taken by Arnaud was characteristic alike of himself and of the brave men whom he led. Conducting them to a spot called Sibaud, in the neighbourhood of Bobbio, he engaged them by a solemn oath, and one by one, with hands lifted up to heaven, to be true to their religion, and faithful to one another. Then returning to the rock of Balsiglia, which was to become so memorable in Waldensian history, and which Arnaud had noticed in his southward march, as already fortified, and capable, by its form and position, of being greatly strengthened, he took possession of it with the intention that this "munition of rocks" should, meanwhile, be their place of defence. I can well remember a fountain in the centre of the rock, from which hundreds of men could obtain ample supplies of water. Bread was also seasonably provided for them in an unexpected way. The harvest all around Balsiglia was ripe but unreaped, and its inhabitants taking flight at the sight of Arnaud and his followers left behind them corn which would afford them bread for months to come. And now, through all the dreary months of winter, the troops of the French General Catinat continued to lay siege to the brave little garrison; but in vain. Neither treachery, nor military genius, nor overwhelming numbers, could bring success to the besiegers. But at length, in the month of May, when the winter snows had melted, there came a new

alarm. Moving up the gorge, Arnaud and his faithful followers saw the besieging army dragging cannon after them to try the effect of their heavy artillery when every other resource had failed. It was obvious that against such a force as this resistance was in vain. On the following day there came a thick mist which enveloped the whole garrison in darkness—God's mantle, as Peden, one of our own Covenanters, was wont to call it; and under this friendly covert the brave men sought safety in flight. One was found who guided them some days' march distant, before Catinat became aware that the fortress was deserted. The last chain in the link of extraordinary deliverances was now revealed. Victor Amadeus of Savoy had quarrelled with the French King, and joined a confederacy of Monarchs against him. He needed the help of those brave Vaudois, and they were promised the restoration of all their lands and houses, as well as full liberty of faith and worship, on condition of their renewed loyalty and service. Thus, in the autumn of 1689, was the Glorious Return completed, and those words of another ancient Church burst in sacred song from their lips:—"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were as men that dreamed." A people and a church was thus saved from extinction through this wondrous series of events which stand the most prominent in the Vaudois history. The very name of the Balsiglia continues after two centuries to be the favourite watchword of a holy patriotism. The Waldensian thinks of it as the Scotchman does of Bannockburn, or as did the ancient Greek of Thermopylæ and Marathon.

On Tuesday, the 27th, in the present week, 4000

men and women, not a few of them from other lands, had come to celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of this deliverance, in many instances travelling all through the previous night by the light of the lantern or by dim starlight, or, midway, sleeping in barns and haylofts, that they might join in good time the thronging multitudes ; and no one grudged the roughing or the self-denial. And the scene, with its associations and its heart-stirring chants, and the eloquence of such men as Professor Geymonat, melted all hearts, and made that day at the Balsiglia a "day of days" ever to be remembered.

I must not omit to notice a very pleasing episode. The interest of the scene was enhanced by the arrival, at the right moment, of a band of Waldensians who had marched over the passes traversed by their forefathers in 1689. They had met the Waldensian colony of Geneva and many sympathising friends at Nyon, on the Lake of Geneva, on the 16th of August, the anniversary of the day on which, at this place, 200 years before, the 800 heroes began their memorable journey, and here a monument was inaugurated to commemorate the event. After consigning it to the Municipality of Nyon, they began their return march. Day by day they followed the course taken by their ancestors, and on the morning of the 27th August reached the Balsiglia, and were received with great enthusiasm by the assembled multitude.

The interest in this remarkable commemoration has extended to the King of Italy, and has found expression in forms which indicate his high appreciation of the character and loyalty of his Waldensian subjects. I refer, among other facts, to his conferring the honour of knighthood on this occasion on the

Moderator of the "Table," the Rev. J. P. Pons, and to his gift of 5000 francs to be divided equally between the Waldensian Church House and the College. This was accompanied by an admirable letter which reflects honour even on a king. It is written by the Minister Visone:—"The faithful Waldensians will shortly celebrate the bicentenary of their return to their native land, dear to them at all cost. This event, which is justly an occasion of rejoicing to these our fellow-countrymen, who furnish an example of such eminent goodness and virtue, is hailed with joy by our King, who well knows the unfaltering devotion of the Waldensians to the House of Savoy. And this their fidelity to his dynasty, joined to a fervent love of their country, having given to Italy courageous soldiers, and loyal and faithful children, has prompted His Majesty the King to show his regard for this loyal and loving section of his people, and to aid them in developing and maintaining in their midst, with increasing fervour and energy, the culture of civil and moral virtue."

And, not least in significance, there is the intimation, which has more recently been given, that King Humbert has commanded the Prefect of Turin to be present and represent him at the inauguration of the Church House, which is to take place on Monday first.

In my next letter, I hope to present some notices of the proceedings of the Waldensian Synod.

ANDREW THOMSON.



III.

GENOA, *September 9, 1889.*

IN this letter I shall endeavour to present your readers with some account of the meetings of the Waldensian Synod at Torre Pellice in the first week of September, and of incidents connected with them. But I must anticipate this by a notice of another of their grand commemorative meetings which immediately preceded the Synod. This took place at the famous rock of Sibaud, where, on a Sunday exactly two centuries before, Henri Arnaud had administered to his brave followers the oath commonly known as "the oath of Sibaud," in which they had promised, with hands uplifted to heaven, that they would be faithful to their God and their country. It was one of those events which have written themselves, as with the pen of a diamond, on the hearts of succeeding generations, as sublime acts of moral heroism, and, as the event has proved, the veneration for the men who had thus pledged themselves, as with their lives in their hands, has remained undiminished. The rock of Sibaud is six and a half miles from the little Waldensian capital, at the head of the valley of Pellice, and at the earliest morning dawn streams of men and women already began to crowd the rugged path, many of them on foot, others on the backs of horses and mules, or in vehicles of every name and size. As I looked out on the ever-increasing stream, and, by-and-bye, mingled with it, I was reminded of what I had read or heard of the great sacramental gatherings in Scotland some ninety or a hundred years back. But all the valleys, as well

as Pellice, were sending their tribute of spectators or worshippers. We were at Bobbio, at the head of the valley, about nine o'clock, having passed under three triumphal arches with "Salve" introduced in their centres, and almost entirely woven of the beautiful edelweiss, so dear to these mountaineers. Urging our way, with no little strain and effort, up the side of a steep mountain, we found 6000 people already assembled for the commemoration. Hundreds were seated on the grass, and seeking the shadow of the noble chestnut trees, which were offering their friendly shelter, and when this open space was filled, others might be seen stretching away into lanes between the trees, until they passed out of view. The very silence of such a multitude, as we looked upon it from the platform, seemed itself a kind of worship. The services lasted for three hours, and consisted mainly of short sermons and addresses, which were sweetly diversified by the singing of appropriate chants by an admirable choir, whose members were in full sympathy with the object of the commemoration. The intelligent interest expressed in those thousands of upturned faces was pleasing to look upon. But the interest culminated to its highest point when Dr Prochet, after the people had more than once been warned by him to make no profession which was not sincere, invited them to renew the consecration which their forefathers had made on that very spot two hundred years before. In a moment a vast forest of hands were held up to heaven. And one loud and solemn voice cried out from the uttermost fringe of the multitude, Amen, amen.

The Monday which followed was "a high day" among the Waldenses. It began at ten o'clock A.M. with the

consecration of the *Maison Vaudoise* or "church house," or, as we would probably call it, the church buildings. It is an elegant but unpretentious structure, with beautiful flower-plots in front, and stands opposite to the Normal School on the other side of the road. It consists of a hall of moderate dimensions for the meetings of Synod, with a gallery for the people, a large room for the meetings of the venerable standing committee, known as "The Table;" smaller rooms for other committees, a spacious apartment for the better accommodation of the library, and, what will no doubt be an object of growing attraction to many, a museum, in which will be preserved objects of curiosity and historic interest in connection with the Waldensian Church—such as the long and ponderous guns of the brave Janavel, and of Poulat, the humble patriot, who led the returned exiles out of the mist when they fled from the Balsiglia; cannon balls picked up from the neighbourhood of the Balsiglian rock; the communion cup in which Henri Arnaud administered the sacrament; the military sash which was presented to Arnaud by King Victor Amadeus, his former persecutor, after friendship had been restored with the Vaudois; a large Bible which the exiles had taken with them when they fled on their three years' exile, and which they brought back on their return; a ring in which a portion of the "Psalms" was ingeniously secreted at a time when a Bible, if found in possession of a Vaudois, would have been taken and burned; and a snuff-box which concealed within it a tiny piece of mechanism, by which a fragment of tobacco could in a few moments be turned into snuff, with which, it is recorded, the Vaudois preacher of some centuries past

was wont to recruit his energies for the delivery of another paragraph of his discourse.

The inauguration service was presided over by the Rev. J. P. Pons, the Moderator, who was decorated with the Cross of the Corona d'Italia, with which he had recently been invested. But one thing which lent a special interest to the occasion was the official presence of the Prefect of Turin, Count Lovera di Maria, as representing the King, accompanied by a number of distinguished senators and deputies. This anticipated visit had, no doubt, done much to gather towards the place the extraordinary multitude, which greeted them with prolonged cheers as they ascended the platform, which had come not only from the neighbouring St Jean and Pignerol, but from every part of Piedmont, and which was estimated by experts in such matters as, at the least, 7000 in number. One remarkable figure among the more distinguished visitors was that of Sir Henry Layard, the explorer of Nineveh, who has done such valuable service in the matter of Biblical antiquities, and in his later years has represented our Queen as her Ambassador at several foreign Courts. He is an old man, with a fine white beard and a hale appearance, and his look and bearing seem to hold out the promise of a green old age. He is a descendant of the persecuted French Huguenots, and had come to express his regard for the descendants of the persecuted Vaudois on the south side of the Alps.

After reading the Scriptures and prayer, an introductory address was delivered by the Moderator, founded on the prophetic words, "At evening time there shall be light," with happy adaptation to the past and present state of the Waldensian Church.

An oration followed by the Rev. William Meille, of Turin, which rose to the occasion, which even rose above it, moving the vast multitude to continuous bursts of applause; even the representative of the King, while seeming impassive at the first, soon showing himself unable to conceal either his emotion or his admiration. The newspaper press is almost unanimous in its approbation, one of the most influential and critical writers dwelling on the address with a kind of surprised admiration, as spoken in "*lingua italiana elegantissima.*" Referring, amongst other things, to the fact that the Waldenses in earlier days had been accustomed to be called by their persecutors "The people of the Bible," he launched into a glowing passage, with an apostrophe to the Bible, which seemed to move all hearts:—

"When in that collection of ancient records I see those old copies of the sacred volume, torn, worn, smoked, and unsewn, and remember that not for their material worth, but for the truths they contain, a people numbering only a few thousands have carried on a war of giants, have shed tears of blood, have suffered unspeakable tortures, have gone into exile—with emotion I exclaim—'Beloved Bible, precious inheritance of our fathers and gift of God, thou wilt not be taken from us. We shall preserve thee intact; thy place is in our churches, thy dwelling in our schools. In our families, on the trembling knees of the old, and in the weak hands of the young thou wilt ever have an altar, and in our hearts a sanctuary, because thou alone hast the truth which we wish to profess. Let our young men wear it as the sword of God and as an impenetrable shield, nor let them forget that to thee we owe our life, our existence as the

Waldensian people. For thy sake, and to maintain intact that truth which they thought unassailable, our fathers fought and bled even unto death. Some carried thee from rock to rock, from peak to peak, hiding thee in the remote caves of their mountains when the enemy pressed upon them; others drew from thee comfort and strength when buried in prisons or nailed to the galleys; thou wert a source of valour to our heroes, and gavest an immortal crown to our martyrs.' ”

And beyond the vein of living religious thought which ran through the address, it possessed a high political value, not only because of the political maxims with which it was enriched, and which would almost have been worthy of the lips of Cavour, but also because of the ardent loyalty which it proclaimed, and the promise that if their Sovereign should ever be troubled by internal intrigue, or by assault from without, he would find his Waldenses coming down from their mountains, and ready to stand by him, even to the shedding of their blood. “Tell our beloved Sovereign,” he said, addressing the Prefect, “that if our mountains are a strong bulwark to his kingdom, he will find a yet stronger bulwark to his throne in our Waldensian people ready to defend him and their country even to the last drop of their blood. Tell him that you have this day heard a people pronounce his name with veneration and affection, a name which it keeps as a precious memorial in its heart, and that you heard them proclaim with a unanimous and potent cry, ‘Viva il Re,’—‘God save the King.’”

It was not until the afternoon of Monday that the Synod was constituted, the introductory sermon being preached by Professor Comba of Florence. Its first

work was the ordination of four young men to the office of the Christian ministry, three of whom had recently finished their preparatory studies by attendance at one or more of our theological colleges in Scotland — a practice which is becoming common amongst Waldensian students, and which, among other benefits, by the knowledge which they attain of the English language and religious literature, affords increased facilities for future intercourse with the Churches of Scotland. I may mention that there is no such intermediate stage, as we have among the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland, of first licensing a young student to preach. But, on the Synod's being satisfied with the student's qualifications for the ministry, he is at once ordained to the ministerial office, and has warrant and power to discharge all its functions. The moderator lays his hand on the head of each of the candidates while kneeling, at the same time kissing him, and pronouncing over him a short prayer, and the other members of Synod, after a consenting Amen, hold up their hands in silent benediction.

The long prepared-for illumination took place on the evening of the same day. Not only in Torre Pellice, but in all the neighbouring towns and in far off mountain hamlets, there were such testimonies of joy; but in the little capital itself almost every window was illuminated, many who were not Waldenses showing their sympathy and goodwill in the same manner. On the front of the Vaudois temple, the new church buildings, the Normal School, and of the house of the Parliamentary deputy for La Torre, the illuminations were particularly beautiful and elaborate.

As I threaded my way from end to end of the

densely crowded central street, I saw no disorder or violence, or rude jostling. I only beheld one instance of two men who were not quite sober, and their excess took expression not in fighting with, but in kissing, each other. All around, on the neighbouring lofty mountain peaks, bonfires were blazing, the moon looking down in serene silence upon all. Some of the bonfires were seen from a great distance, even so far as from Turin, which is thirty miles off. As I looked up from the garden of the Beckwiths upon the mountains of Castelluzzo and Vandalino, with the great blazing bonfires, and thought how, in earlier centuries, those very places had been the scene of many a cruel and wholesale slaughter, I thought of the benignant change of which this evening was the witness, and how the descendants of those forefathers who had so often sown in tears were now called to reap in joy.

The sittings of the Synod were brought to a close on Friday afternoon. As the necessary consequence of listening to the speeches of more than eighty deputies, little business, as we usually understand this word, was done by the Synod beyond what could not be delayed. But the usual report of the venerable Table and the Commission of Evangelisation was read and subjected to the fire of a fearless and searching criticism; and a successor to the late Dr Albert Revel in the Chair of Exegesis, at Florence, was unanimously appointed in the person of Signor Bosio, of whom all speak well as alike gifted and humble, and prophesy good things. On the evening of Thursday, by appointment and arrangement of the Synod, the Lord's Supper was observed by the members of Synod and by others who desired to join in this

immeasurably higher commemoration. Three ministers who had passed their jubilee, and who belonged to different countries and spoke different tongues, were chosen to preside at the solemn service: Dr Lantaret of Pomaret, Dr Professor Godet of Neufchatel, and the writer of this letter. It was the last evening of the Synod. In the case of a Synod to which deputies had come from so many lands with the message of goodwill, and bearing the benedictions of myriads, and whose meetings had been conducted in a spirit of Christian brotherhood which was alike spontaneous, exuberant, and joyful, this was surely the most fit and crowning service.

ANDREW THOMSON.

IV.

63 NORTHUMBERLAND STREET,

September 23, 1889.

SIR,—During some pleasant days of sojourn among the Apennines since the close of the Waldensian Synod, and after my recent return to Edinburgh, the question has frequently been put to me, What use have the Waldenses made of the freedom which was granted by their chivalrous King, Charles Albert, in 1848, and which put it in their power to extend their influence and action beyond their own valleys? To what extent has the previously suffering Church, with all beautiful Italy before it, become a working Church? What congregations has it formed? What schools has it founded down in the far-stretching peninsula? What have this people done in the interval to justify the testimony of their present King

Humbert, that they have been important agents in promoting intelligence and morality among his subjects? The question is not unreasonable or uninteresting, and perhaps you will allow me space for a brief supplementary letter, which will prove that theirs has been no barren opportunity, but that, from the hour of their liberty until now, they have been alive to their responsibility. I shall state the facts as they were found to exist in July of the present year.

1. Of Churches and Stations.—Outside their own valleys,* and scattered over all Italy, the Waldenses have now 44 churches, ministered to and superintended by 38 pastors, these pastors having, in some instances, more than one congregation entrusted to their care. Kindred to these there are also 46 evangelistic stations, presided over by 11 evangelists and 9 teacher-evangelists, the likelihood being that when these have reached a requisite measure of numerical strength, and their constancy has been tested, they shall be organised into churches, with all their privileges and responsibilities. The fact needs to be repeated to prevent a still prevalent mistake, that these congregations are not intended to consist, neither do they, in fact, consist of Waldenses alone, who may have changed their homes from the valleys into the peninsula. They are open to all Italians; they are open to all men who possess and manifest the necessary qualifications. It is not nationality, but Christian enlightenment, with corresponding character and deportment, that is the condition of membership.

2. The number of communicants or members in

* In the Valleys there are 18 parishes, 23 pastors, 13,350 members.

full communion is 4266, as compared with 4076 members in July 1888. This does not include occasional hearers or the children of members who are in nonage or have not as yet sought a closer fellowship with the Church, though they are under its systematic tuition and vigilant oversight. The number of catechumens or applicants for full membership at the time of the recent statistical statement was 428.

3. The Waldenses during their long history of centuries, and while commonly restricted within their own valleys, uniformly showed a warm and enlightened interest in the education of their children. The "regent" or teacher might almost be said to have held an official position in the Church, standing in honour and influence next to the pastor himself. And they have carried this traditional custom with them into their evangelistic work in Italy, to such an extent, indeed, as to draw down the commendation of the newspaper press and the public authorities. The old honours have gone with the "regent" into his new spheres. Already they number 56 day schools,* with 60 teachers and 2324 scholars. There are also 26 evening schools for adults, and specially for working men whose education had been insufficient or utterly neglected in their boyhood. In these most useful schools, in which technical training holds a prominent place, we find 930 scholars presided over by 41 teachers. The Sunday schools send their irrigating streams into many an Italian home and even hovel, and reach many children whose parents could not even be approached by the evangelist.

* In the Valleys there are 201 elementary schools, with 4547 scholars.

When I mention that there are 66 Sunday schools* with 2683 scholars, who receive regular weekly instruction in religion from 150 voluntary teachers, in which also the pastor as well as the regent usually takes part, it must be seen that in this department of Christian zeal the labours of the Waldensian Church are very abundant. There are also nine colporteurs and five Bible readers, working according to their own special modes of Christian usefulness outside their old mountain limits, and, labouring not in vain, sowing seeds which will be brought back one day in golden sheaves. Before I pass away from the subject of education, I must be allowed a brief but admiring reference to the singularly valuable services in this department carried on by Dr Commandi in Florence. In his now well-known institution, nearly a hundred youths, whose only qualification for admission is their poverty and orphanhood, reside, and not only receive a good secular and religious education, but are trained in good moral habits, and brought up in one or other of the more common and useful trades, going forth, when on the verge of manhood, well equipped for honourable citizenship and for the battle of life. He is doing in Florence what Dr Barnardo and Mr Quarrier are doing among ourselves. I must, however, guard against conveying the impression that his orphan house is either supported or controlled by the Waldensian Church; but he is an elder in one of the Waldensian congregations in that queenly city, and his fellow-workers are largely supplied from the ranks of his fellow church members. He has long been engaged in this noble work. He was originally an advocate in good practice in his native city of Sienna,

* In the Valleys there are 89 Sunday schools and 3310 scholars.

but, under the influence of the highest motives, he threw aside all the prospects of a natural ambition that he might give himself to this enterprise of goodness, yielding up a large competency for its support, and living frugally that he might be able to give the more. There is an element of joy in his entire self-consecration, and no one can converse with him or visit his institution without loving the man and finding his own comparative coldness warmed into fervour.

4. There is something at once significant of hopeful purpose and of permanent occupancy in the fact that the Waldenses have arranged the whole of Italy under five Presbyteries, whose names are as follows:—1, Piedmont and the Riviera; 2, Lombardy and Venice; 3, Tuscany; 4, The Marches, Rome, and Naples; 5, Sicily.

5. On the subject of finance, one explanation is greatly needed in order to prevent injurious mistake. Within its own valleys the Waldensian Church is self-supporting. The good pastors, nestling in their unpretentious manses, live frugally and with contentment on their small incomes, and if any gifts are sent in from without into the pastoral fund, they are spontaneous and unsought. It is outside the ancient mountain limits, and with special reference to their constantly extending evangelistic missions in Italy proper, that they ask and receive the assistance of individuals and churches in other lands; and especially from the churches in Scotland, England, Ireland, Holland, and the United States generous and steady help has come. They have said to themselves, "We have a little sister." But even these new-born churches and stations of yesterday are very far from

being entirely dependent on foreign aid. £2729, 17s. have this year been sent in by themselves to their central fund, which marks a satisfactory increase on the contributions of the previous year. It is to the honour of this interesting people that, with the exception, perhaps, of the little Moravian Church, they supply more missionaries and evangelists in proportion to their aggregate numbers than any other Christian community in the world. Is it unreasonable in them to expect that, when they provide and prepare, by a long and elaborate training, qualified labourers for the great world harvest, the richer and stronger Churches in other lands should help in contributing for their adequate support in the mission field? It is the old story, repeated in new circumstances, of Carey saying to Fuller and other friends, "I will go down into the pit if you will hold the ropes."

6. I am naturally led, by what I have just written, to specify the measures that have been taken by the Waldenses to provide for their congregations and fields of evangelism in Italy a succession of properly qualified pastors and teachers. Through the past centuries they have never made light of this part of their responsibility, and in the present day, and in the midst of new conditions and widening prospects, they have shown a resolute disposition to keep pace with opportunity. In a busy street on the left side of the Arno, leading up to one of the principal city gates, stands the Palazzo Salviati, formerly the stately residence of a Tuscan noble, but which, mainly through the munificence of a few liberal men in Scotland, England, and the United States, was, many years since, purchased and transformed into the Theological College of the Waldensian Church. In this spacious

structure are concentrated all the requisite arrangements and provisions for a school of theology ; a large hall, in which the professors in succession may deliver their lectures and conduct their examinations ; a library, already rich in books of sacred learning, and waiting to become richer ; suites of rooms for the Professors and their families, and dormitories for the students ; a place of worship which accommodates one of the two Waldensian congregations of Florence, and where the Professors and students are expected usually to worship ; and, not least in importance, the premises and material of the Claudian press, under the care of Signor Pons, which has already done much, and is likely under new arrangements to do much more, to provide a pure and healthful Christian literature for Italy ; while behind the College there is an extensive garden, abounding in shady trees, and flowers, and shrubs, free to the students and Professors with their families, where the din of the great Florentine capital has sunk into a faint murmur. The Professors are three in number :—Dr Geymonat, Professor of Systematic Theology ; Dr Comba, Professor of Church History ; and Signor Bosio, who was appointed at the recent Synod to the Chair of Old and New Testament Exegesis. After three* years of classical and scientific study, young men desiring to be educated for the Christian ministry, and who have satisfied the Committee of Examiners in reference to their character and motives, are transferred to the College of Theology at Florence, where their curriculum of sacred study extends over another period of other three years. When this is ended, the student is encouraged to spend one session at least in attend-

* The full curriculum in the College of Torre Pellice is *nine* years.

ance on the lectures of some of the Theological Professors at Berlin or Halle, or at our own Edinburgh or Glasgow. The desire on the part of the Waldensian Synod is that, by means of this and other arrangements, the connection between them and our Churches in Scotland should be maintained and increased.

In writing as I have done in this and former letters, I am far from thinking that this beloved Church, with so wonderful a history and experience, is without its peculiar dangers. There is even a possible danger which may arise out of its very history, if it should be tempted to rest in it, to make it a matter of boasting, and to lie down and be satisfied in the trail of glory which the past has left behind it, like that other Church which said, "We have Abraham for our father." It cannot be unseasonable to remind them, in their comparatively novel circumstances, that the proper use to make of the history of their forefathers is to imitate their example of holy courage and indomitable perseverance, and of honouring conscience and the Lord of the conscience at all hazards. It would be presumptuous in me to forecast the future of this remarkable Church. But I say with strong conviction that, even now, they are already doing a great work in Italy. It would be a stupid mistake to measure their influence for good over Italy by the number of its Church members or of its Sunday scholars. Beyond these more tangible results, it is, by its position and action, casting abroad great thoughts and principles on the general community, as on the rights of conscience, the proper relations of the Church to the State, the possibility of uniting loyalty to the temporal king with fidelity to the

heavenly. All this the newspaper press is shrewd enough to perceive, and honourable enough to acknowledge with no bated breath, so that, come what may, it is destined to bear an important part in working out the elevation and regeneration of the Italy that is to be. Our desire for them is that their centuries of suffering, borne with such heroic endurance, may now be followed by centuries of devoted service in the noblest of causes and for the most beneficent ends.—I am, &c.,

ANDREW THOMSON.

