

CHAPTER 10

Waldensian Colonies in Calabria and Apulia

An Inn at Turin—Two Waldensian Youths—A Stranger—Invitations to Calabria—The Waldenses Search the Land—They Settle there—Their Colony Flourishes—Build Towns—Cultivate Science—They Hear of the Reformation—Petition for a Fixed Pastor—Jean Louis Paschale sent to them—Apprehended—Brought in Chains to Naples—Conducted to Rome.

One day, about the year 1340, two Waldensian youths were seated in an inn in Turin, engaged in earnest conversation respecting their home prospects. Shut up in their valleys, and cultivating with toil their somewhat sterile mountains, they sighed for wider limits and a more fertile land. "Come with me," said a stranger, who had been listening unperceived to their discourse, "Come with me, and I will give you fertile fields for your barren rocks." The person who now courteously addressed the youths, and whose steps Providence had directed to the same hotel with themselves, was a gentleman from Calabria, at the southern extremity of the Italian Peninsula.

On their return to the Valleys the youths reported the words of the stranger, and the flattering hopes he had held out should they be willing to migrate to this southern land, where skies more genial, and an earth more fertile, would reward their labour with more bounteous harvests. The elders of the Vaudois people listened not without interest. The population of their Valleys had recently been largely increased by numbers of Albigensian refugees, who had escaped from the massacres of Innocent III. in the south of France; and the Waldenses, feeling themselves overcrowded, were prepared to welcome any fair scheme that promised an enlargement of their boundaries. But before acceding to the proposition of the stranger, they thought it advisable to send competent persons to examine this new and to them unknown land. The Vaudois explorers returned with a flattering account of the conditions and capabilities of the country they had been invited to occupy. Compared with their own more northern mountains, whose summits Winter covered all the year through with his snows, whose gorges were swept by furious gusts, and whose sides were stripped of their corn and vines by devastating torrents, Calabria was a land of promise. "There are beautiful hills," says the historian Gilles, describing this settlement, "clothed with all kinds of fruit-trees spontaneously springing up according to their situation—in the plains, vines and chestnuts; on the rising ground, walnuts and every fruit-tree. Everywhere were seen rich arable land and few labourers." A considerable body of emigrants set out for this new country.

The young men were accompanied to their future homes with partners. They carried with them the Bible in the Romance version, "that holy ark of the New Covenant, and of everlasting peace."

The conditions of their emigration offered a reasonable security for the free and undisturbed exercise of their worship. "By a convention with the local seigneurs, ratified later by the King of Naples, Ferdinand of Arragon, they were permitted to govern their own affairs, civil and spiritual, by their own magistrates, and their own pastors" [Muston, p. 37]. Their first settlement was near the town of Montalto. Half a century later rose the city of San Sexto, which afterwards became the capital of the colony. Other towns and villages sprang up, the region, which before had been thinly inhabited, and but poorly cultivated, was soon transformed into a smiling garden. The swelling hills were clothed with fruit-trees, and the plains waved with luxuriant crops. The Marquis of Spinello was so struck with the prosperity and wealth of the settlements, that he offered to cede lands on his own vast and fertile estates where these colonists might build cities and plant vineyards. One of their towns he authorised them to surround with a wall; hence its name, La Guardia. This town, situated on a height near the sea, soon became populous and opulent [Leger, part ii., p. 333].

Towards the close of the same century, another body of Vaudois emigrants from Provence arrived in the south of Italy. The new-comers settled in Apulia, not far from their Calabrian brethren. Villages and towns arose, and the region speedily put on a new face under the improved arts and husbandry of the colonists. Their smiling homes, which looked forth from amid groves of orange and myrtle, their hills covered with the olive and the vine, their corn-fields and pasture-lands, were the marvel and the envy of their neighbours.

In 1500 there arrived in Calabria yet another emigration from the Valleys of Pragelas and Fraissinieres. This third body of colonists established themselves on the Volturata, a river which flows from the Apennines into the Bay of Tarento. With the increase of their numbers came an increase of prosperity to the colonists. Their neighbours, who knew not the secret of this prosperity, were lost in wonder and admiration of it. The physical attributes of the region occupied by the emigrants differed in no respect from those of their own lands, both were placed under the same sky, but how different the aspect of the one from that of the other! The soil, touched by the plough of the Vaudois, seemed to feel a charm that made it open its bosom and yield a tenfold increase. The vine tended by Vaudois hands bore richer clusters, and strove in generous rivalry with the fig and the olive to outdo them in enriching with its produce the Vaudois board. And how delightful the quiet and order of their towns; and the air of happiness on the faces of the

people! And how sweet to listen to the bleating of the flocks on the hills, the lowing of the herds in the meadows, the song of the reaper and grape-gatherer, and the merry voices of children at play around the hamlets and villages! For about 200 years these colonies continued to flourish.

"It is a curious circumstance," says the historian M'Crie, "that the first gleam of light, at the revival of letters, shone on that remote spot of Italy where the Vaudois had found an asylum. Petrarch first acquired a knowledge of the Greek tongue from Barlaam, a monk of Calabria; and Boccaccio was taught it from Leontius Pilatus, who was a hearer of Barlaam, if not also a native of the same place" [M'Crie, Italy, pp. 7,8]. Muston says that "the sciences flourished among them" [Muston, Israel of the Alps, p. 38]. The day of the Renaissance had not yet broken. The flight of scholars, which was to bear with it the seeds of ancient learning to the West, had not yet taken place; but the Vaudois of Calabria would seem to have anticipated that great literary revival. They had brought with them the Scriptures in the Romance version. They possessed doubtless the taste and genius for which the Romance nations were then famous; and, moreover, in their southern settlement they may have had access to some knowledge of those sciences which the Saracens then so assiduously cultivated; and what so likely, with their leisure and wealth, as that these Vaudois should turn their attention to letters as well as to husbandry, and make their adopted country vocal with the strains of that minstrelsy with which Provence and Dauphine had resounded so melodiously, till its music was quenched at once and for ever by the murderous arms of Simon de Montfort? But here we can only doubtfully guess, for the records of this interesting people are scanty and dubious.

These colonists kept up their connection with the mother country of the Valleys, though situated at the opposite extremity of Italy. To keep alive their faith, which was the connecting link, pastors were sent in relays of two to minister in the churches of Calabria and Apulia; and when they had fulfilled their term of two years they were replaced by other two. The barbes, on their way back to the Valleys, visited their brethren in the Italian towns; for at that time there were few cities in the peninsula in which the Vaudois were not to be found. The grandfather of the Vaudois historian, Gilles, in one of these pastoral visits to Venice, was assured by the Waldenses whom he there conversed with, that there were not fewer than 6,000 of their nation in that city. Fear had not yet awakened the suspicious and kindled the hatred of the Romanists, for the Reformation was not yet come. Nor did the Waldenses care to thrust their opinions upon the notice of their neighbours. Still the priests could not help observing that the manners of these northern settlers were, in many things, peculiar and strange. They eschewed revels and fetes; they had their children taught by foreign

schoolmasters; in their churches was neither image nor lighted taper; they never went on pilgrimage; they buried their dead without the aid of the priests; and never were they known to bring a candle to the Virgin's shrine, or purchase a mass for the help of their dead relatives. These peculiarities were certainly startling, but one thing went far to atone for them—they paid with the utmost punctuality and fidelity their stipulated tithes; and as the value of their lands was yearly increasing, there was a corresponding yearly increase in both the tithe due to the priest and the rent payable the landlord, and neither was anxious to disturb a state of things so beneficial to himself, and which was every day becoming more advantageous [Perrin, *Histoire des Vaudois*, p. 197. Monastier, pp. 203-4].

But in the middle of the sixteenth century the breath of Protestantism from the North began to move over these colonies. The pastors who visited them told them of the synod which had been held in Angrogna in 1532, and which had been as the "beginning of months" to the ancient Church of the Valleys. More glorious tidings still did they communicate to the Christians of Calabria. In Germany, in France, in Switzerland, and in Denmark the old Gospel had blazed forth in a splendour unknown to it for ages. The Lamp of the Alps was no longer the one solitary light in the world: around it was a circle of mighty torches, whose rays, blending with those of the older luminary, were combining to dispel the night from Christendom. At the hearing of these stupendous things their spirit revived: their past conformity appeared to them like cowardice; they, too, would take part in the great work of the emancipation of the nations, by making open confession of the truth. No longer content with the mere visit of a pastor, they petitioned the mother Church to send them one who might permanently discharge amongst them the office of the holy minister.*

*Muston, p. 38. Monastier and M'Crie say that the application for a pastor was made to Geneva, and that Paschale set out for Calabria, accompanied by another minister and two schoolmasters. It is probable that the application was made to Geneva through the intermediation of the home Church.

There was at that time a young minister at Geneva, a native of Italy, and him the Church of the Valleys designated to the perilous but honourable post. His name was Jean Louis Paschale; he was a native of Coni, in the Plain of Piedmont. By birth a Romanist, his first profession was that of arms; but from a knight of the sword he had become, like Loyola, through in a truer sense, a knight of the Cross. He had just completed his theological studies at Lausanne. He was betrothed to a young Piedmontese Protestant, Camilla Guerina [M'Crie, p. 324]. "Alas!" she sorrowfully exclaimed, when he

intimated to her his departure for Calabria, "so near to Rome and so far from me." They parted, nevermore to meet on earth.

The young minister carried with him to Calabria the energetic spirit of Geneva. His preaching was with power; the zeal and courage of the Calabrian flock revived, and the light formerly hid under a bushel was now openly displayed. Its splendour attracted the ignorance and awoke the fanaticism of the region. The priests, who had tolerated a heresy that had conducted itself so modestly, and paid its dues so punctually, could be blind no longer. The Marquis of Spinello, who had been the protector of these colonists hitherto, finding his kindness more than repaid in the flourishing condition of his states, was compelled to move against them. "That dreadful thing, Lutheranism," he was told, "had broken in, and would soon destroy all things."

The marquis summoned the pastor and his flock before him. After a few moments' address from Paschale, the marquis dismissed the members of the congregation with a sharp reprimand, but the pastor he threw into the dungeons of Foscalda. The bishop of the diocese next took the matter into his own hands, and removed Paschale to the prison of Cosenza, where he was confined eight months.

The Pope heard of the case, and delegated Cardinal Alexandrini, Inquisitor-General, to extinguish the heresy in the Kingdom of Naples [Monastier, p. 205]. Alexandrini ordered Paschale to be removed from the Castle of Cosenza, and conducted to Naples. On the journey he was subjected to terrible sufferings. Chained to a gang of prisoners—the handcuffs so tight that they entered the flesh—he spent nine days on the road, sleeping at night on the bare earth, which was exchanged on his arrival at Naples for a deep, damp dungeon, the stench of which almost suffocated him [M'Crie, p. 325].

On the 16th of May, 1560, Paschale was taken in chains to Rome, and imprisoned in the Torre di Nona, where he was thrust into a cell not less noisome than that which he had occupied at Naples.

His brother, Bartolomeo, having obtained letters of recommendation, came from Coni to procure, if possible, some mitigation of his fate. The interview between the two brothers, as told by Bartolomeo, was most affecting. "It was quite hideous to see him," says he, "with his bare head, and his hands and arms lacerated by the small cords with which he was bound, like one about to be led to the gibbet. On advancing to embrace him I sank to the ground. 'My brother,' said he, 'if you are a Christian, why do you distress yourself thus? Do you know that a leaf cannot fall to the ground without the

will of God? Comfort yourself in Christ Jesus, for the present troubles are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come." His brother, a Romanist, offered him half his fortune if only he would recant, and save his life. Even this token of affection could not move him. "Oh, my brother!" said he, "the danger in which you are involved gives me more distress than all that I suffer" [M'Crie, pp. 325-7].

He wrote to his affianced bride with a pen which, if it softened the picture of his own great sufferings, freely expressed the affection he bore for her, which "grows," says he, "with that I feel for God." Nor was he unmindful of his flock in Calabria. "My state is this," says he, in a letter which he addressed to them, "I feel my joy increase every day, as I approach nearer the hour in which I shall be offered a sweet-smelling sacrifice to the Lord Jesus Christ, my faithful Saviour; yea, so inexpressible is my joy that I seem to myself to be free from captivity, and am prepared to die for Christ, and not only once, but ten thousand times, if it were possible; nevertheless, I persevere in imploring the Divine assistance by prayer, for I am convinced that man is a miserable creature when left to himself, and not upheld and directed by God" [Ibid., pp. 326-7].