

CHAPTER 11

Extinction of Waldenses in Calabria

Arrival of Inquisitors in Calabria—Flight of the Inhabitants of San Sexto—Pursued and Destroyed—La Guardia—Its Citizens Seized—Their Tortures—Horrible Butchery—The Calabrian Colony Exterminated—Louis Paschale—His Condemnation—The Castle of St. Angelo—The Pope, Cardinals, and Citizens—The Martyr—His Last Words—His Execution—His Tomb.

While Paschale was calmly awaiting a martyr's death in his dungeon at Rome, how fared it with his flock in Calabria, on whom the gathering storm had burst in terrific violence?

When it was known that Protestant ministers had been sent from Geneva to the Waldensian Churches in Calabria, the Inquisitor-General, as already mentioned, and two Dominican monks, Valerio Malvicino and Alfonso Urbino, were dispatched by the Sacred College to reduce these Churches to the obedience of the Papal See, or stamp them out. They arrived at San Sexto, and assembling the inhabitants, assured them it was not intended to do them any harm, would they but dismiss their Lutheran teachers and come to mass. The bell was rung for the celebration of the Sacrament, but the citizens instead of attending the service, left the town in a body, and retired to a neighbouring wood. Concealing their chagrin, the inquisitors took their departure from San Sexto, and set out for La Guardia, the gates of which they locked behind them when they had entered, to prevent a second flight. Assembling the inhabitants, they told them that their co-religionists of San Sexto had renounced their errors, and dutifully attended mass, and they exhorted them to follow their good example, and return to the fold of the Roman shepherd; warning them at the same time, that should they refuse they would expose themselves, as heretics, to the loss of goods and life. The poor people, taken unawares, and believing what was told them, consented to hear mass; but no sooner was the ceremony ended, and the gates of the town opened, than they learned the deceit which had been practised upon them. Indignant, and at the same time ashamed of their own weakness, they resolved to leave the place in a body, and join their brethren in the woods, but were withheld from their purpose by the persuasion and promises of their feudal superior, Spinello.

The Inquisitor-General, Alexandrini, now made request for two companies of men-at-arms, to enable him to execute his mission. The required aid was instantly given, and the soldiers were sent in pursuit of the inhabitants of San Sexto. Tracking them to their hiding-places, in the thickets and the caves of the mountains, they slaughtered many of them; others, who escaped, were pursued with bloodhounds, as if they had been wild beasts. Some of these fugitives scaled the craggy summits of the Apennines, and hurling down the stones on the soldiers who attempted to follow them, compelled them to desist from the pursuit.

Alexandrini dispatched a messenger to Naples for more troops to quell what he called the rebellion of the Vaudois. The viceroy obeyed the summons by coming in person with an army. He attempted to storm the fugitives, now strongly entrenched in the great mountains, whose summits of splintered rock, towering high above the pine forests that clothe their sides, presented to the fugitives an almost inaccessible retreat. The Waldenses offered to emigrate; but the viceroy would listen to nothing but their return within the pale of the Church of Rome. They were prepared to yield their lives rather than accept peace on such conditions. The viceroy now ordered his men to advance; but the shower of rocks that met his soldiers in the ascent hurled them to the bottom, a discomfited mass, in which maimed and dying were confusedly mingled with the corpses of the slain.

The viceroy, seeing the difficulty of the enterprise, issued an edict promising a free pardon to all bandits, outlaws, and other criminals who might be willing to undertake the task of scaling the mountains and attacking the strongholds of the Waldenses. In obedience to this summons, there assembled a mob of desperadoes, who were but too familiar with the secret paths of the Apennines. Threading their way through the woods, and clambering over the great rocks, these assassins rushed from every side on the barricades on the summit, and butchered the poor Vaudois. Thus were the inhabitants of San Sexto exterminated, some dying by the sword, some by fire, while others were torn by bloodhounds or perished by famine [Leger, part ii., p. 333. M'Crie, p. 303. Muston p. 41].

While the outlaws of the Neapolitan viceroy were busy in the mountains, the Inquisitor-General and his monks were pursuing their work of blood at La Guardia. The military force at their command not enabling them to take summary measures with the inhabitants, they had recourse to stratagem. Enticing the citizens outside the gates, and placing soldiers in ambush, they

succeeded in getting into their power upwards of 1,600 persons [Monastier, p. 206]. Of these, seventy were sent in chains to Montalto, and tortured, in the hope of compelling them to accuse themselves of practising shameful crimes in their religious assemblies. No such confession, however, could the most prolonged tortures wring from them. "Stefano Carlino," says M'Crie, "was tortured till his bowels gushed out;" and another prisoner, named Verminel, "was kept during eight hours on a horrid instrument called the hell, but persisted in denying the atrocious calumny" [M'Crie, p. 304]. Some were thrown from the tops of towers, or precipitated over cliffs; others were torn with iron whips, and finally beaten to death with fiery brands; and others, smeared with pitch, were burned alive.

But these horrors pale before the bloody tragedy at Montalto, enacted by the Marquis di Buccianici, whose zeal was quickened, it is said, by the promise of a cardinal's hat to his brother if he would clear Calabria of heresy. One's blood runs cold at the perusal of the deed. It was witnessed by a servant to Ascanio Caraccioli, himself a Roman Catholic, and described by him in a letter, which was published in Italy, along with other accounts of the horrible transaction, and has been quoted by M'Crie. "Most illustrious sir, I have now to inform you of the dreadful justice which began to be executed on these Lutherans early this morning, being the 11th of June. And, to tell you the truth, I can compare it to nothing but the slaughter of so many sheep. They were all shut up in one house as in a sheep-fold. The executioner went, and bringing out one of them, covered his face with a napkin, or benda, as we call it, led him out to a field near the house, and causing him to kneel down, cut his throat with a knife. Then, taking off the bloody napkin, he went and brought out another, whom he put to death after the same manner. In this way the whole number, amounting to eighty-eight men, were butchered. I leave you to figure to yourself the lamentable spectacle, for I can scarcely refrain from tears while I write; nor was there any person, after witnessing the execution of one, could stand to look on a second. The meekness and patience with which they went to martyrdom and death are incredible. Some of them at their death professed themselves of the same faith with us, but the greater part died in their cursed obstinacy. All the old met their death with cheerfulness, but the young exhibited symptoms of fear. I still shudder while I think of the executioner with the bloody knife in his teeth, the dripping napkin in his hand, and his arms besmeared with gore, going to the house, and taking out one victim after another, just as a butcher does the sheep which he means to kill" [Pantaleon, *Rerum in Eccles. Gest. Hist.*, ff. 337-8. De Porta, tom. ii., pp. 309,312--ex M'Crie, pp. 305-6]. Their bodies

were quartered, and stuck up on pikes along the high road leading from Montalto to Chateau-Vilar, a distance of thirty-six miles.

Numbers of men and women were burned alive, many were drafted off to the Spanish galleys, some made their submission to Rome, and a few, escaping from the scene of these horrors, reached, after infinite toil, their native Valleys, to tell that the once-flourishing Waldensian colony and Church in Calabria no longer existed, and that they only had been left to carry tidings to their brethren of its utter extermination.

Meanwhile, preparations had been made at Rome for the trial of Jean Louis Paschale. On the 8th of September, 1560, he was brought out of his prison, conducted to the Convent della Minerva, and cited before the Papal tribunal. He confessed his Saviour, and, with a serenity to which the countenances of his judges were strangers, he listened to the sentence of death, which was carried into execution on the following day.

Standing upon the summit of the Janiculum Mount, vast crowds could witness the spectacle. In front the Campagna spreads out its once glorious but now desolated bosom; and winding through it like a thread of gold is seen the Tiber, while the Apennines, sweeping round it in craggy grandeur, enclose it like a vast wall. Immediately beneath, uprearing her domes and monuments and palaces, with an air that seems to say, "I sit a queen," is the city of Rome. Yonder, asserting an easy supremacy amid the other fabrics of the Eternal City, is the scarred and riven yet Titanic form of the Coliseum, with its stains of early Christian blood not yet washed out. By its side, the partner of its guilt and doom, lies the Palatine, once the palace of the world's master, now a low mound of ruins, with its row of melancholy cypresses, the only mourners on that site of vanished glory and fallen empire. Nearer, burning in the midday sun, is the proud cupola of St. Peter's, flanked on the one side by the buildings of the Inquisition, and on the other by the huge Mole of Hadrian, beneath whose gloomy ramparts old Tiber rolls sluggishly and sullenly along. But what shout is this which we hear? Why does Rome keep holiday? Why do all her bells ring? Lo! from every street and piazza eager crowds rush forth, and uniting in one overwhelming and surging stream, they are seen rolling across the Bridge of St. Angelo, and pressing in at the gates of the old fortress, which are thrown wide open to admit this mass of human beings.

Entering the court-yard of the old castle, an imposing sight meets the eye. What a confluence of ranks, dignities, and grandeurs! In the centre is placed

a chair, the emblazonry of which tells us that it claims to rise in authority and dignity over the throne of kings. The Pontiff, Pius IV., has already taken his seat upon it, for he has determined to be present at the tragedy of to-day. Behind his chair, in scarlet robes, are his cardinals and counsellors, with many dignitaries besides in mitres and cowls, ranged in circles, according to their place in the Papal body. Behind the ecclesiastics are seated, row on row, the nobility and beauty of Rome. Plumes wave, stars gleam, and seem to mock the frocks and cowls gathered near them, whose wearers, however, would not exchange these mystic garments for all the bravery that blazes around them. The vast sweep of the Court of St. Angelo is densely occupied. Its ample floor is covered from end to end with a closely-wedged mass of citizens, who have come to see the spectacle. In the centre of the throng, rising a little way over the sea of human heads, is seen a scaffold, with an iron stake, and beside it a bundle of faggots.

A slight movement begins to be perceptible in the crowd beside the gate. Some one is entering. The next moment a storm of hissing and execration salutes the ear. It is plain that the person who has just made his entrance is the object of universal dislike. The clank of irons on the stone floor of the court, as he comes forward, tells how heavily his limbs are loaded with fetters. He is still young; but his face is pale and haggard with suffering. He lifts his eyes, and with countenance undismayed surveys the vast assembly, and the dismal apparatus that stands in the midst of it, waiting its victim. There sits a calm courage on his brow; the serene light of deep, untroubled peace beams in his eye. He mounts the scaffold, and stands beside the stake. Every eye is now turned, not on the wearer of the tiara, but on the man who is clad in the sanbenito. "Good people," says the martyr—and the whole assembly keep silence—"I am come here to die for confessing the doctrine of my Divine Master and Saviour, Jesus Christ." Then turning to Pius IV. he arraigned him as the enemy of Christ, the persecutor of his people, and the Anti-Christ of Scripture, and concluded by summoning him and all his cardinals to answer for their cruelties and murders before the throne of the Lamb. "At his words," says the historian Crespin, "the people were deeply moved, and the Pope and the cardinals gnashed their teeth."*

*Crespin, *Hist. des Martyrs*, pp. 506-16. Leger, part i., p. 204, and part ii., p. 335.

The inquisitors hastily gave the signal. The executioners came round him, and having strangled him, they kindled the faggots, and the flames blazing

up speedily reduced his body to ashes. For once the Pope had performed his function. With his key of fire, which he may truly claim to carry, he had opened the celestial doors, and had sent his poor prisoner from the dark dungeons of the Inquisition, to dwell in the palace of the sky.

So died, or rather passed into the life eternal, Jean Louis Paschale, the Waldensian missionary and pastor of the flock in Calabria. His ashes were collected and thrown into the Tiber, and by the Tiber they were borne to the Mediterranean. And this was the grave of the preacher-martyr, whose noble bearing and undaunted courage before the Pope himself gave added value to his splendid testimony for the Protestant cause. Time may consume the marble, violence or war may drag down the monumental pile:

"The pyramids that cleave heaven's jewelled portal;
Elean Jove's star-spangled dome; the tomb
Where rich Mausolus sleeps—are not immortal"
[Sextus Propertius (Cranstoun's translation), p. 119].

But the tomb of the far-sounding sea to which the ashes of Paschale were committed, with a final display of impotent rage, was a nobler mausoleum than ever Rome raised to any of her Pontiffs.