

CHAPTER 8

Preparations for a War of Extermination

Pastor Gilles Carries the Remonstrance to the Duke—No Tidings for Three Months—The Monks of Pinerolo begin the Persecution—Raid in San Martino—Philip of Savoy's Attempt at Conciliation—A Monk's Sermon—The Duke Declares War against the Vaudois—Dreadful Character of his Army—The Waldenses hold a Fast, &c.—Skirmishing in Angrogna—Night Panic—La Trinita Occupies the Val di Lucerna—An Intrigue—Fruitless Concessions—Affecting Incidents—La Trinita Demands 20,000 Crowns from the Men of the Valleys—He Retires into Winter Quarters—Outrages of his Soldiers.

Where was the Vaudois who would put his life in his hand, and carry this remonstrance to the Duke? The dangerous service was undertaken by M. Gilles, Pastor of Bricherasio, a devoted and courageous man. A companion was associated with him, but wearied out with the rebuffs and insults he met with, he abandoned the mission, and left its conduct to Gilles alone. The duke then lived at Nice, for Turin, his capital, was still in the hands of the French, and the length of the journey very considerably increased its risks. Gilles reached Nice in safety, however, and after many difficulties and delays he had an interview with Queen Margaret, who undertook to place the representations of which he was the bearer in the hands of her husband, the duke. The deputy had an interview also with Philip of Savoy, the duke's brother, and one of the commissioners under the Act for the purgation of the Valleys. The Waldensian pastor was, on the whole, well received by him. Unequally yoked with the cruel and bigoted Count La Trinita, Philip of Savoy soon became disgusted, and left the bloody business wholly in the hands of his fellow-commissioner [Muston, p. 68.] As regarded the queen, her heart was in the Valleys; the cause of the poor Vaudois was her cause also. But she stood alone as their intercessor with the duke; her voice was drowned by the solicitations and threats of the prelates, the King of Spain, and the Pope [Muston, p. 72].

For three months there came neither letter nor edict from the court at Nice. If the men of the Valleys were impatient to know the fate that awaited them, their enemies, athirst for plunder and blood, were still more so. The latter, unable longer to restrain their passions, began persecution on their own account. They thought they knew their sovereign's intentions, and made bold to anticipate them.

The tocsin was rung out from the Monastery of Pinerolo. Perched on the frontier of the Valleys, the monks of this establishment kept their eyes fixed upon the heretics of the mountains, as vultures watch their prey, ever ready to sweep down upon hamlet or valley when they found it unguarded. They hired a troop of marauders, whom they sent forth to pillage. The band returned, driving before them a wretched company of captives, whom they had dragged from their homes and vineyards in the mountains. The poorer sort they burnt alive, or sent to the galleys; the rich they imprisoned till they had paid the ransom to which they were held [Muston, p. 69. Monastier, p. 178].

The example of the monks was followed by certain Popish landlords in the Valley of San Martino. The two seigneurs of Perrier attacked, before day-break of April 2nd, 1560, the villagers of Rioclareto, with an armed band. Some they slaughtered, the rest they drove out, without clothes or food, to perish on the snow-clad hills. The ruffians who had expelled them took possession of their dwellings, protesting that no one should enter them unless he were willing to go to mass. They kept possession only three days, for the Protestants of the Valley of Clusone, to the number of 400, hearing of the outrage, crossed the mountains, drove out the invaders, and reinstated their brethren [Muston, p. 70. Monastier, pp. 176-7].

Next appeared in the Valleys, Philip of Savoy, Count de Raconis, and Chief Commissioner. He was an earnest Roman Catholic, but a humane and upright man. He attended sermon one day in the Protestant church of Angrogna, and was so much pleased with what he heard, that he obtained from the pastor an outline of the Vaudois faith, so as to send it to Rome, in the hope that the Pope would cease to persecute a creed that seemed so little heretical. A sanguine hope truly! Where the honest count had seen very little heresy, the Pope, Pius IV., saw a great deal; and would not even permit a disputation with the Waldensian pastors, as the count had proposed. He would stretch his benignity no further than to absolve "from their past crimes" all who were willing to enter the Church of Rome. This was not very encouraging, still the count did not abandon his idea of conciliation. In June, 1560, he came a second time to the Valley of Lucerna, accompanied by his colleague, La Trinita, and assembling the pastors and heads of families, he told them that the persecution would cease immediately, provided they would consent to hear the preachers he had brought with him, Brothers of the Christian Doctrine. He further proposed that they should silence their own ministers while they were making trial of his. The Vaudois expressed their willingness to consent, provided the count's ministers preached the pure Gospel; but if they preached human traditions, they (the Vaudois) would be under the necessity of withholding their consent; and, as regarded silencing their own ministers, it was only reasonable that they

should be permitted first to make trial of the count's preachers. A few days after, they had a taste of the new expositors. Selecting the ablest among them, they made him ascend the pulpit, and hold forth to a Vaudois congregation. He took a very effectual way to make them listen. "I will demonstrate to you," said he, "that the mass is found in Scripture. The word *massah* signifies 'sent,' does it not?" "Not precisely," replied his hearers, who knew more about Hebrew than was convenient for the preacher. "The primitive expression," continued he, "*Ite missa est*, was employed to dismiss the auditory, was it not?" "That is quite true," replied his hearers, without very clearly seeing how it bore on his argument. "Well, then, you see, gentlemen, that the mass is found in the Holy Scripture" [Muston, p. 71. *Monastier*, pp. 177-8]. The congregation were unable to determine whether the preacher was arguing with them, or simply laughing at them.

Finding the Waldenses obdurate, as he deemed them, the Duke of Savoy, in October, 1560, declared war against them. Early in that month a dreadful rumour reached the Valleys, namely, that the duke was levying an army to exterminate them. The news was but too true. The duke offered a free pardon to all "outlaws, convicts, and vagabonds" who would enrol as volunteers to serve against the Vaudois. Soon an army of a truly dreadful character was assembled. The Vaudois seemed doomed to total and inevitable destruction. The pastors and chief persons assembled to deliberate on the measures to be taken at this terrible crisis. Feeling that their refuge was in God alone, they resolved that they would take no means for deliverance which might be offensive to him, or dishonourable to themselves. The pastors were to exhort every one to apply to God, with true faith, sincere repentance, and ardent prayer; and as to defensive measures, they recommended that each family should collect their provisions, clothes, utensils, and herds, and be ready at a moment's notice to convey them, together with all infirm persons, to their strongholds in the mountains. Meanwhile, the duke's army—if the collected ruffianism of Piedmont could be so called—came nearer every day [Muston, p. 72. *Monastier*, p. 182].

On the 31st of October, a proclamation was posted throughout the Valley of Angrogna, calling on the inhabitants to return within the Roman pale, under penalty of extermination by fire and sword. On the day following, the 1st of November, the Papal army appeared at Bubiana, on the right bank of the Pelice, at the entrance to the Waldensian Valleys. The host numbered 4,000 infantry and 200 horse; comprising, besides the desperadoes that formed its main body, a few veterans, who had seen a great deal of service in the wars with France [Letter of Scipio Lentullus, Pastor of San Giovanni. (Leger, *Hist. des Eglises Vaud.*, livr. ii., p. 35.)]

The Vaudois, the enemy being now in sight, humbled themselves, in a public fast, before God. Next, they partook together of the Lord's Supper. Refreshed in soul by these services, they proceeded to put in execution the measures previously resolved on. The old men and the women climbed the mountains, awakening the echoes with the psalms which they sung on their way to the Pra del Tor, within whose natural ramparts of rock and snow-clad peaks they sought asylum. The Vaudois population of the Valleys at that time was not more than 18,000; their armed men did not exceed 1,200; these were distributed at various passes and barricades to oppose the enemy, who was now near. [So says the Pastor of Giovanni, Scipio Lentullus, in the letter already referred to. (Leger, livr. ii., p. 35.)]

On the 2nd of November the Piedmontese army, putting itself in motion, crossed the Pelice, and advanced along the narrow defile that leads up to the Valleys, having the heights of Bricherasio on the right, and the spurs of Monte Friolante on the left, with the towering masses of the Vandalin and Castelluzzo in front. The Piedmontese encamped in the meadows of San Giovanni, within a stone's-throw of the point where the Val di Lucerna and the Val di Angrogna divide, the former to expand into a noble breadth of meadow and vineyard, running on between magnificent mountains, with their rich clothing of pastures, chestnut groves, and chalets, till it ends in the savage Pass of Miraboue; and the latter to wind and climb in a grand succession of precipice, and gorge, and grassy dell, till it issues in the funnel-shaped valley around which the ice-crowned mountains stand the everlasting sentinels.

It was the latter of these two valleys (Angrogna) that La Trinita first essayed to enter. He marched 1,200 men into it, the wings of his army deploying over its bordering heights of La Cotiere. His soldiers were opposed by only a small body of Vaudois, some of whom were armed solely with the sling and the cross-bow. Skirmishing with the foe, the Vaudois retired, fighting, to the higher grounds. When the evening set in, neither side could claim a decided advantage. Wearied with skirmishing, both armies encamped for the night—the Vaudois on the heights of Roccomaneot, and the Piedmontese, their camp-fires lighted, on the lower hills of La Cotiere.

Suddenly the silence of the evening was startled by a derisive shout that rose from the Piedmontese host. What had happened to evoke these sounds of contempt? They had descried, between them and the sky, on the heights above them, the bending figures of the Vaudois. On their knees, the Waldensian warriors were supplicating the God of battles. Hardly had the scoffs with which the Piedmontese hailed the act died away, when a drum was heard to beat in a side valley. A child had got hold of the instrument, and was amusing itself with it. The soldiers of La Trinita saw in imagination a

fresh body of Waldensians advancing from this lateral defile to rush upon them. They seized their arms in no little disorder. The Vaudois, seeing the movement of the foe, seized theirs also, and rushed down-hill to anticipate the attack. The Piedmontese threw away their arms and fled, chased by the Waldenses, thus losing in half an hour the ground it had cost them a day's fighting to gain. The weapons abandoned by the fugitives formed a much-needed and most opportune supply to the Vaudois. As the result of the combats of the day, La Trinita had sixty-seven men slain; of the Vaudois, three only had fallen [Letter of Scipio Lentullus. (Leger, livr. ii., p. 25.) Muston, pp. 73-4].

Opening on the left of La Trinita was the corn-clad, vine-clad, and mountain-ramparted Valley of Lucerna, with its towns, La Torre, Villaro, Bobbio, and others, forming the noblest of the Waldensian Valleys. La Trinita now occupied this valley with his soldiers. This was comparatively an easy achievement, almost all its inhabitants having fled to the Pra del Tor. Those that remained were mostly Romanists, who were, at that time, mixed with the Waldensian population, and even they, committing their wives and daughters to the keeping of their Vaudois neighbours, had sent them with them to the Pra del Tor, to escape the brutal outrages of the Papal army. On the following days La Trinita fought some small affairs with the Vaudois, in all of which he was repulsed with considerable slaughter. The arduous nature of the task he had in hand now began to dawn upon him.

The mountaineers, he saw, were courageous, and determined to die rather than submit their conscience to the Pope, and their families to the passions of his soldiers. He discovered, moreover, that they were a simple and confiding people, utterly unversed in the ways of intrigue. He was delighted to find these qualities in them, because he thought he saw how he could turn them to account. He had tools with him as cunning and vile as himself—Jacomel, the inquisitor; and Gastand, his secretary; the latter feigned a love for the Gospel. These men he set to work. When they had prepared matters, he assembled the leading men of the Waldenses, and recited to them some flattering words, which he had heard, or professed to have heard, the duke and duchess make use of towards them; he protested that this was no pleasant business in which he was engaged, and that he would be glad to have it off his hands; peace, he thought, could easily be arranged, if they would only make a few small concessions to show that they were reasonable men; he would propose that they should deposit their arms in the house of one of their syndics, and permit him, for form's sake, to go with a small train, and celebrate mass in the Church of St. Lorenzo, in Angrogna, and afterwards pay a visit to the Pra del Tor. La Trinita's proposal proved the correctness of the estimate he had formed of Vaudois confidingness. The people spent a whole night in deliberating over the count's proposition, and,

contrary to the opinion of their pastors and some of their laymen, agreed to accept it [Leger, livr. ii., p. 35. Monastier, pp. 184-5].

The Papal general said his mass in the Protestant church. After this he traversed the gloomy defiles that led up to the famous Pra, on whose green slopes, with their snowy battlements, he was so desirous to feast his eyes; though, it is said, he showed evident trepidation when he passed the black pool of Tompie, with its memories of retribution. Having accomplished these feats in safety, he returned to wear the mask a little longer.

He resumed the efforts on which he professed to be so earnestly and laudably bent, of effecting peace. The duke had now come nearer, and was living at Vercelli, on the plain of Piedmont; La Trinita thought that the Vaudois ought by all means to send deputies thither. It would strengthen their supplication—indeed, all but insure its success—if they would raise a sum of 20,000 crowns. On payment of this sum he would withdraw his army, and leave them to practice their religion in peace [Leger, livr. ii., p. 35]. The Vaudois, unable to conceive of dissimulation like La Trinita's, made concession after concession. They had previously laid down their arms; they now sent deputies to the duke; next they taxed themselves to buy off his soldiers; and last, and worst of all, at the demand of La Trinita, they sent away their pastors. It was dreadful to think of a journey across the Col Julien at that season; yet it had to be gone. Over its snowy summits, where the winter drifts were continually obliterating the track, and piling up fresh wreaths; across the Valleys of Prali and San Martino, and over the ice-clad mountains beyond, had this sorrowful band of pastors to pursue their way, to find refuge among the Protestants in the French Valley of Pragelas. This difficult and dangerous route was forced upon them, the more direct road through the Valley of Perosa being closed by the marauders and assassins that infested it, and especially by those in the pay of the monks of Pinerolo.

The count believed that the poor people were now entirely in his power. His soldiers did their pleasure in the Valley of Lucerna. They pillaged the houses abandoned by the Vaudois. The few inhabitants who had remained, as well as those who had returned, thinking that during the negotiations for peace hostilities would be suspended, were fain to make their escape a second time, and to seek refuge in the woods and caves of the higher reaches of the Valleys. The outrages committed by the ruffians to whom the Valley of Lucerna was now given over were of a kind that cannot be told. The helpless man, who had lived a hundred and three years, was placed in a cave, and his granddaughter, a girl of seventeen, was left to take care of him. The soldiers found out his hiding-place; the old man was murdered, and outrage was offered to his granddaughter. She fled from the brutal pursuit of the soldiers, leaped over a precipice and died. In another instance, an old man

was pursued to a brink of a precipice by one of La Trinita's soldiers. The Vaudois had no alternative but to throw himself over the brink or die by the sword of his pursuer. He stopped, turned round, and dropped on his knees, as if to supplicate for his life. The trooper was raising his sword to strike him dead, when the Vaudois clasping him tightly round the legs, and swaying himself backwards with all his might, rolled over the precipice, dragging the soldier with him into the abyss.

Part of the sum agreed upon between La Trinita and the Waldenses had now been paid to him. To raise this money the poor people were under the necessity of selling their herds. The count now withdrew his army into winter quarters at Cavour, a point so near the Valleys that a few hours' march would enable him to re-enter them at any moment. The corn, and oil, and wine he had not been able to carry away he destroyed. Even the mills he broke in pieces. His design appeared to be to leave the Vaudois only the alternative of submission, or of dying of hunger on their mountains. To afflict them yet more, he placed garrisons here and there in the Valleys; and, in the very wantonness of tyranny, required those who were themselves without bread to provide food for his soldiers. These soldiers were continually prowling about in search of victims on whom to gratify their cruelty and their lust. Those who had the unspeakable misfortune to be dragged into their den, had to undergo, if men, excruciating torture; if women, revolting outrage [Muston, p. 77. Monastier, pp. 186-7].