

WALDO AND THE WALDENSIANS BEFORE THE REFORMATION.

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As in a chain link is joined to link, and in the sea the waves chase one another, so in the middle ages do we see reactions connect themselves and succeed each other. The cause seems to be varied, according to whether one has regard to mediate or immediate reasons, theological or historical. For instance, the Cathari, better known in Italy by the name of Patareni, derived the germ of their doctrines from old and Pagan traditions; but they increased and prospered in the midst of mediaeval Christianity. And with regard to the Waldensians, if they drew their faith - the very cause of their existence - from the eternal word of Christ, yet only after that and other reactions did they arise from the midst of noticeable events which indicated their origin. This, at any rate, was the opinion of the oldest narrators, to whom it will be well for us to return in order to get the thread of the true information concerning the origin of the Waldensians. These ancient witnesses are divided into two classes: first, the Catholics.

According to Catholic testimonies, the origin of the Waldensians goes back to Peter Waldo of Lyons. This their opinion remains almost unchanged with their successors even to this day. Has this no weight, because of adverse source?

It will invite suspicion, some one will tell us, if it finds no echo with the Waldensian writers, from whom, however, we wish to hear.

From various testimonies that came to light many years ago, it was legitimate to infer that the primitive Waldensians accepted the opinions of their persecutors concerning their origin. Now, the doubt upon this point is at last removed thanks to the discovery of documents that relate partly to the Italian branch nourishing in Lombardy and partly to the Gallic branch that had already penetrated into the Cottian Alps.

However, we see at first the rise of conflicting stories occasioned by theological disputes. It was inevitable, that, in contrast with the apostate church which was forever boasting of its apostolic succession, there should arise anew the protest of Claudius, Arnaldo, and the Patareni, to recall the people to the traditions lost at the time

of Constantine. And since the Waldensians had given themselves up to this work of restoration, they became indeed successors of the apostles in spirit and in truth. This fact, manifest in itself, opened the way here and there to a less legitimate ambition, no longer of mere antiquity of faith but of origin; and the evidence of its effect was such as to modify the traditions of the fathers.

The Reformation, thanks to the influence which it exercised upon the Waldensians, silenced in them the rising pretensions in favour of the exclusive authority of the Sacred Scriptures. But subsequently, some of its apologists noticed them with polemic purpose, anxious to oppose them to those of the Romish Church. Finally, the churches of France decreed to revise them, and to give to the press a history of the Waldensians. This having come to the knowledge of the Pastors of the Valleys, they entrusted to One of their Seniors, Dominique Vignaux by name, the charge of putting together the original documents inherited from the Fathers, to be transmitted where necessary. Thus they came into the hands of Perrin, first historian of the Waldensians, who, having examined them, confirmed that which had been advanced from the beginning, viz., that they originated from Peter Waldo of Lyons. Indeed, this first effort was not very satisfactory, at least to the Pastors of the Valleys. Among these was Gillio, who was induced to work at a second history of the Waldensians. He devoted himself to it in earnest, and received praise which still endures. Now, where he speaks of origin, we do not see that he departs from the primitive tradition; only he holds that the fugitive Waldensians found in the Valleys favourable surroundings. One there was who went out from the beaten path, to flutter upon the wings of fantasy, in the field of legends, that Leger, who inspired a generation of writers who not only ruled Waldensian literature, but had repeaters abroad, especially among English-speaking fellow-believers. Now it languishes under the lash of criticism which it partly called upon itself, and the true traditions of this history (which can well be compared to the Nile, not only because it is beneficial in its course; but also because of the darkness in which it has been enveloped for centuries) come again to light.

With this introduction, we now begin our narrative, which must first be about Peter Waldo. Peter was born not far from Lyons, in Dauphin. It is not evident whether he received his name (not a rare one at that time) from his family or his native place. He went to Lyons about the middle of the twelfth century, and there resided for many years. He engaged in business, and became rich, but found that "a man's life consists not of the things which he possesses." One day, while conversing with some friends, one of them, stricken by sudden disease, fell lifeless at his feet. This sight made Peter very thoughtful. "If death had taken me, what would now be my destiny?" He was still revolving this grave question in his mind, when, one Sunday walking in the streets of Lyons, he saw people crowding around a troubadour, who was just then reciting, in sad accents; the death of St. Alexis. He drew near him, heard him, and was deeply affected; longing to hear him again, he invited him to his house. Nothing else is known of this troubadour, except that he left our merchant more restless than before, and anxious for peace; so much so that during the following night he resolved to consult a spiritual adviser. The next day he went to a theologian, who endeavoured to show him that there were many ways that lead to heaven. But pressing him with the question, "Which is the most perfect and secure?" he answered: "If you will be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor." And saying this he pointed to the Gospel, which from that day Peter never had out of his sight. At this he was not troubled; but he joyfully began to divide his property between his wife and his creditors, without defrauding his two daughters, not forgetting the poor, for whom there still remained an ample portion. Famine was a chronic evil of that period: it was then raging terribly at Lyons, as well as elsewhere. It is said, that beginning at Pentecost, for three days of every week he distributed bread and provisions to whosoever came to him to be fed. Thus he continued until a little before the Feast of the Assumption. On that day, out on the squares, Peter distributed much money, crying: "No one can serve two masters, God and Mammon" Many crowded about him; and it was whispered about that the good man was out of his mind,' when he, taking a stand whence he could be heard, said: -

"Citizens and friends, I am not mad, as you imagine; but I am avenging myself on my enemies, who had reduced me to such a state of servitude as to make me more mindful of them than of God, and serve the creature rather than the Creator. I know that not a few will blame me for doing these things publicly; but I am urged to this for my own good and yours for myself, that if hereafter any one should see me with money, he may say that I have gone mad; for you also, that you may learn, to put your trust in God, and not in riches."

The next day he went to church. On his return he fell in with an old friend whom he asked for something to eat, and who received him at his house, and comforted him with the most friendly promises. This strange occurrence having come to the knowledge of his wife, she, ashamed and almost demented, ran to the archbishop, who incontinently bade both Peter and his host to appear before him. When she saw her husband she laid hold of him, and with a voice between anger and tears, said, "Is it not far better that I, rather than those who are not of our household, should do penance for sins by giving alms to you?" And from that day Peter was forbidden to take food anywhere but at his wife's table.

Meanwhile, without formally binding himself, he had shown that he was without fear of consequences, unlike many others, who were quite ready to call themselves poor so long as they suffered no privation.

Now, it is to be observed that the money which Waldo had set aside for the poor did not serve alone to procure them bread: a portion of it had a still better result, and to this we must give our attention.

The word of Christ, which the theologian had finally shown him, had induced him not only to break the idol in his heart, but also to search the treasures hidden in the Sacred Scriptures. He was not learned; but neither was he so illiterate as to be unable to succeed in this, although he was obliged to read them in Latin. Every day he would find new teachings which so filled his soul with joy, that he began to speak of them to his acquaintances. Finally he determined to translate a

portion of the Scriptures with the assistance of two churchmen, each of whom was entrusted with a special charge: Stefano d' Ansa was to dictate the translation, and perhaps make the annotations, while Bernardo Ydros was to act as amanuensis. Although many questions relative to the character of this version have not been solved, it certainly was not insignificant, either in itself or as a sign of the times. On the contrary, this proved the powerful as well as indispensable lever of the new reaction, and its first effects were already noticeable in Waldo. This word gained power and authority: it became the hammer that breaks the hearts hardened by error. It may well be said that he had a school; for his hearers, even the women, were also witnesses to the things to which they listened, and they spoke of them. Zeal increased, and propagated itself, but without confusion, because Waldo directed, being always inspired by the Sacred Scriptures. While his disciples went to preach the gospel in the surrounding country, he generally remained in the city, and was soon assisted by able coadjutors; so, when the word of God was silent in the churches, it was heard on the squares and in the houses, as in the time of the apostles. Then the clergy became suspicious, censured him, and made him the object of the first abuse, and denounced him at Rome. There the third Lateran Council was about to convene. What will Peter do? He went there, and fearlessly rose in the presence of Alexander to defend his cause, and claim for himself and his followers the sanction of their every right, especially that of preaching. The Pope received him with kindness and words of praise: he even gave way to his pretensions to preaching, on condition that he would not depart from the doctrine of the holy fathers. Here we are induced to think that he had the favour of some cardinal. But, after all, he obtained nothing for his followers. At last he left Rome, and in it how many delusions! But the divine word, notwithstanding opposition, had left there some fruit; so that he felt encouraged to continue to proclaim it while passing through our provinces, where he saw the first tokens of a large harvest reserved for the near future. Having returned to Lyons in the midst of his disciples, he had now the proof that "since the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." He did not at all give up his claims upon the recognition of the rights hitherto denied his fellow

believers. Perhaps he had left some of them at Rome; if not, he selected them, and sent them there (the council being then in session), with directions to plead their cause, being provided with an authentic copy of the Waldensian version of the Sacred Scriptures, together with the notes gleaned from the works of the Holy Fathers. They then appeared before the Pope. But he left to others the care of hearing them, and perhaps that also of reporting to the council concerning this matter which still divided men's minds. They were admitted to a discussion, not only pedantic but ridiculous and interrupted by coarse laughter. Soon after not only they, but even their master, were forbidden to preach, except by request of the priests. Finally they withdrew, already being feared by their own judges, who thus far had admonished and perhaps condemned them, but had not yet excommunicated them.

The crisis, decisive and solemn, had now arrived for the Waldensians. Their enemies were deceived, because their faith retired within itself in the silence of meditation and of quiet meetings. But soon it burst forth, conscious in itself and determined. And what? they said unanimously, did not Christ command his disciples to preach the gospel to every creature? If we preach Christ, should not the bishops and priests be the first to rejoice? Hence they should not hinder us; and if they try to do so, what moves them if it be not jealousy? If necessary, we will face their anger and persecution. Is not this the destiny of every follower of Christ? So saying, they began again to proclaim with all boldness the word of salvation. Then it appeared that the same oppositions which marked the birth of the apostolic Church at Jerusalem were repeated at Lyons. So true is this, that the history alluded to could be applied almost literally in this case.

The rulers and the scribes then having gathered together, they conferred among themselves saying, "What shall we do to these men? Let us straitly threaten them that they speak henceforth to no man in the name of Christ." And having called them, they commanded them not to speak at all nor teach. But Peter and the others, answering, said, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken to you more than to God, you be the judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we

have seen and heard." Then they were expelled from the synagogue. But the apostolic zeal of the Waldensians, instead of diminishing, was stimulated by persecution. The clergy was frightened, and raised a cry of alarm. Lucius III. heard it, and called a council at Verona in the presence of the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. This time the Waldensians were solemnly excommunicated.

Although this was not a final sentence, it is but too true that it had the most injurious consequences; though gradual, perhaps because the number of the excommunicated had grown to such an extent as to necessitate the secret and laborious work of the rising Inquisition. Indeed, they were not immediately considered as open enemies. A proof of this is the fact that they were admitted to discussion, now against the Cathari, with the good-will of the clergy that assumes authority and exhibits ignorance; now to defend themselves in public debates opened even by archbishops, who hoped to lead them back under the clerical yoke, or to build a barrier against the torrent of their proselytism, as it happened in the city of Narbonne. So their influence continued to extend; and the more persecution raged in Lyons and behind them, the more were they scattered, multiplying at the same time, as had also been true of the first Christians. It is natural that where the Cathari, Henry Italicus, surnamed of Lausanne, and Peter of Bruys had already prepared the way, and where the breach or the doors were open wide, our Waldensians should hasten and rush; and that, still holding fast their own belief, they should bind themselves with dissenters more or less secretly, to resist the wolf that hunted them, not to distinguish the goats from the lambs; nay, more! not even her young, when an opportunity was offered to satisfy her thirst for blood. At first they pitched their tents in Dauphiné, whence they went to Provence, to Languedoc, and other provinces of the South of France then subject to the kings of Aragon, where they settled and multiplied, notwithstanding the barbarous decrees issued by the odious satellites of the Inquisition. Others, crossing the Alps or passing along the sea coast, entered some of the valleys of Piedmont into Lombardy, and perhaps even the States of Naples and Sicily; or they pressed on towards the West; but, being soon compelled to fold their tents, they strengthened the ranks of emigrants to those parts of

Aquitaine, Guienne, and Gascony still under English jurisdiction, which, though lacking in that sort of sympathy that imparts confidence, allowed a band of sturdy men to land on the British shore, and formed a little colony in County Kent, where they were welcomed by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Finally in another direction we find unmistakable and lasting traces of exiles who reached Metz, the Netherlands, Flanders, and Picardy, and wandered across the Rhine into Bohemia near the Moravian Brothers, around whom are gathered a great portion of later traditions.

Now what becomes of Waldo in the midst of this tumult of emigration? One is sensible of the fact that he is the soul of it, and that there must be some truth in the reports which multiply, so to speak, his presence. But traces of him are soon lost in exile, and we are ignorant even of the date of his death, which is said to have taken place in Bohemia. Nevertheless, his name was held in such veneration by his followers, that it occasioned a reaction, of which the Waldensians of Italy, more independent than their brethren of the other side of the Alps, have not ceased to boast; perhaps because this boast was united for ages with the prejudice which divides the common origin.

Now it is time that we should follow the footsteps of those with whom our history exclusively deals.

They descended, as has already been mentioned, from two principal directions: some from across the Cottian Alps, down into the Waldensian Valleys; others by devious roads to Milan and the district of Lombardy; all intent on finding a refuge, there in the citadel of the ever hospitable Alps, here in the great fortress of reactions.

It is well known from the time of the Romans, that these Alps had served as bulwarks to a king after whom they were named, and how at the time of Claudius they favoured the invasions of the Saracens. It was therefore natural that a defenceless people, fugitive on account of their religion, should also take refuge there to escape death; and this, if we are not mistaken, did also happen at least occasionally. But is

this a reason to believe that we see gathered here a population not devotedly Catholic, or Protestant? No indeed, neither according to Vigilantius or Claudius, whatever may be inferred from historians de bonne volont; neither were they Cathari, although it may be admitted that they drew near from various parts of these Alpine abodes, or even penetrated them. One thing cannot be denied, and we believe it sufficient for a right understanding of the historical facts concerning the coming of the Waldensians; that is, that the surroundings of the place towards which they were about to wend their way were favourable, inasmuch as they were fanned by the breath of liberty which reached them, now from the east, now from the west, as from two seas of reactions. They then formed here the hive, from which soon came a few bees, and later new swarms.

Now, the question is not to fix the year of this immigration, but the epoch, which evidently is included between the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, as may be inferred from all historical deductions. These do not in any way allow us to go back to an earlier date, as several writers have done. On the contrary, if we were not restrained by the fear of venturing an opinion upon an already much disputed ground, we would say, that, if the Waldensian immigration began before this period, it ended at the time the crusade was decreed against the Albigenses, because then more than ever did the fugitives penetrate farther into the Alps. At all events, at this point is found the first information in regard to them which has come down to us on this side of the Alps, where monks were not wanting to spy them out, nor rulers to subjugate them, nor other interested parties to take notice of their presence. Finally they appeared on the summits which overlook the valleys of Angrogna and San Martin, and descended as far as the Porte, occupying the uncultivated localities.

It is understood, that, on their arrival, they did not at once and with fanaticism proclaim their opinions, at least in matters of faith: their spiritual guides, perhaps in order to avoid suspicion, called themselves Barbi. But soon after they were discovered, feared, and then denounced before the proper authority, the Bishop of Turin. He, believing that persecution was the only means of bringing them into

subjection, and that the Benedictines were not able to accomplish this, as he was on his way to the court of the Emperor Otto IV., - who had come down into Italy to be solemnly crowned, - took advantage of this favourable opportunity, and told him that a handful of heretics had penetrated his diocese down from the borders of France, and asked him for help. Otto invested him with full power for the extirpation of all heretics, especially the Waldensians, and at the same time granted new privileges to the diocese of Turin. But because of quarrels he had with the pontiff, the emperor desisted from persecuting them. If this caused the bishop to weep, it was not a subject of mirth at the abbey, as the monks were placed in a bad light before the population of the valley, not only weary of their oppression, but stimulated by the Waldensians, behind whom was perhaps hidden the hostility of some lord of Luserna or Dauphin. Nevertheless they were compelled to return their feudal rights to the house of Savoy; but it may well be imagined here how well our Waldensians were recommended. The people of Pinerolo greeted with joy the militia of the Count of Moriana, lord of Piedmont, who was then Thomas I, who, in granting to that little city its first liberties, issued the first decree of persecution against the Waldensians in these words: "We decree that whoever shall knowingly harbour a Waldensian - man or woman - in the district of Pinerolo, shall be condemned to pay for every such offence ten soldi." But Prince Thomas, besides having a truly political and opportunely liberal mind, was engaged in other affairs of a very different nature: it is therefore easily understood why for many years no further mention is made of the Waldensians in the laws of Piedmont. Moreover, these latter were not to be frightened by any such oppressive measures. And the lords of Luserna, who were not yet entirely under the dominion of the prince, anxious to make them friends, boldly demanded as a condition that they should be restored to their rights, and that "freedom of worship be allowed the Waldensians." What followed is not very clear: it is certain, however, that those of our exiles who remained upon Italian soil, soon after acknowledged the sovereignty of the house of Savoy; and if they made proselytes, these became Waldensians, but were not so by birth.

Such were the circumstances that attended their immigration into the valleys of Pinerolo. Let us now glance at their brethren, who several years before had penetrated into and distributed themselves through the free cities of Lombardy.

Lombardy, as is well known, was a stronghold of the heretics: not only the Gentile Patareni, perhaps more numerous and stronger; the Arian and Judaistic Pasagini more isolated and less feared; the Fraticelli, so called Apostolic, and others whom it is not necessary here to mention; but also the Arnaldisti and the Umiliati, who had not absolutely separated from the Church of Rome, and were more akin to our fugitive Waldensians, drew near to them so as to have a common faith and destiny.

It is easy to recognize in the Arnaldisti the followers of the martyr of Brescia, previously called Lombardi, and afterwards designated by the name of him who had been, if not their first teacher, certainly their most illustrious representative. They continued to hold, that to have authority, priests should be successors of the apostles in faith and custom, and that where this was not the case their office was usurped, and even the administration of the sacraments was void. As for the Umiliati, they originated from a free association of Milanese exiles, who, when they returned to their country, had not given up their religious habits nor their trade of weavers. They worked in common, and divided their profits with the poor. They prospered, so that they did not fear competition: they multiplied both within and without Lombardy, like fishes of the sea. Among their first statutes, there was none forbidding marriage, but taking the oath was forbidden. Therefore it was said: -

Sunt et in Ytalia fratres humiliati
Qui jurare renuunt et sunt uxorati.

But this religious and beneficent association was too open to escape the suspicion of the papal police, and not to give rise to hateful murmurings. It was denounced, and we must admit that it was not truly Catholic at the time Lucius III. condemned it at Verona, as we

have seen. But the sentence, as it generally happens, had the effect of dividing the members into two parties; urging some to do servile homage to the seat of Rome, which enrolled and blessed them, and others to greater intimacy, not only with the followers of Arnaldo, but also with those of Waldo, who had just arrived in the midst of these discords. And what was the result? A fusion (a partial one at least) of this triple reaction, which had in common the law of voluntary poverty; and a larger sect sprang up, flourishing and independent, which may be called the "Poor Italians" or "Waldensians of Lombardy."

This sect had its chiefs and its school in Milan, where, notwithstanding the snares of the clergy, they enjoyed greater security, thanks to the moderation of the civil authorities, who were at times even favourably disposed.

From all parts there collected those of the same religion, sometimes to do homage to the primates or to offer their contributions; sometimes to pursue their studies, especially that of the Sacred Scriptures, coming out as teachers and evangelists. Here, then, was a limit to the power of him who raged against the Albigenses. It was a territory less propitious to crusades than to disputes and discords. Hence we must not be surprised, if, under the threat of excommunication, the Waldensians divided themselves into two parties: on one side the peacemakers, who had in no wise forsaken the Church of Rome; on the other, the dissenters, resolved to live not only independent of it, but also of the Ultramontane Waldensian traditions. Now, the former have lain for centuries bedewed by the pontifical benediction, under a miserable stone, on which antiquaries with difficulty read an inscription that says: "Poor Catholics!" and let us turn to the others, who having put their hand to the plough, look no longer behind; neither to the Pope, who invokes again upon them the fire of heaven, nor too much to Waldo himself, who was their teacher and guide.

Here we arrive at a new phase, in which the physiognomy of the Waldensians of Lombardy becomes prominent.

As has been said, they had an ultramontane origin, though born in Italy. A Waldensian branch grafted upon the kindred secular associations of Lombardy, they had imbibed from them their most characteristic and vital maxims, particularly those of the Umiliati. For some time they were not wanting in feelings of fraternity and reverence for their first guides. It is true, that, as long as Waldo was alive, he followed them with his eye, and the power of his name contributed much to keep them united if not subordinate. But after his death dissensions and strifes were inevitable, not only because on certain points they felt somewhat differently, but also on account of incompatibility of temper and circumstances; and we have clear indication of this in the fact that we are about to narrate.

It was in May, 1218. Not far from Bergamo, there gathered a few Waldensian deputies, who had come from both sides of the mountains separating Lombardy from Germany. There were twelve delegates in all, six for each side. Their names have come down to us: with one exception they are quite unknown. The object of the meeting was to settle a sort of controversy concerning the election of rulers, the ordination of ministers, the relations with the working classes, the baptism of children, marriage, and the celebration of the eucharist; finally to solve some personal questions. The discussion commenced, became fervent and protracted; a few differences disappeared, but dissension still continued on two points:

The first had reference to the sacrament Christ established as a symbol of union, but which his disciples more than once, as now and even in the days of the Reformation, had made, alas too often, the subject of discord; the other related to Waldo.

The Waldensians still held the doctrine of transubstantiation; but those from beyond the mountains were of the opinion that the virtue of the sacramental words was sufficient, without regard to the character of the minister or the believer; but our Italian friends, while holding that the power of transubstantiation emanated from the Redeemer through his word, did not grant its realization where there was not true faith in the officiating priest as well as in the

communicants. And here they supported their assertions by many declarations of the Sacred Scriptures, which really have nothing to do with transubstantiation, but prove conclusively that the promises of the Lord are made only to believers, and are never left under the control of the wicked. In vain did they allege sentences of the Fathers: they were confuted by others equally authoritative. And as they were accused of contradicting themselves, since they had at first agreed with their brethren on these disputed questions, they answered, "When we were children we understood as children, we spoke and thought as children; but when we became men, we put away childish things; and we do not believe that those among us who died with this superstition are for this cause condemned if they served the Lord to the end. If, therefore, you censure us for not thinking as you do, and for refusing to join you in the same confession of faith, we will say, We cannot believe against the already known evidence of the Sacred Scriptures, neither would we adhere to such a creed, even if the Waldensians wished to force it upon us, because we must obey God rather than men, Paul did not yield, and he himself asserts it to those who desired to bring him back under the yoke of the law. And after Peter had declared the command he had received in a vision, concerning the conversion of Cornelius, the brethren of the circumcision made no more opposition, neither did they enter into discussion; but they quieted themselves, and glorified the Lord, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life"

Another point was yet to be decided upon; and, though of minor importance, it contained the venom which usually is found in personal or party controversies. Waldo and his colleague Viveto had died, mourned by all the Waldensians who cherished the memory of their apostleship. Their example was more than ever felt. Instead of following it, some fanatics magnified too much its memory; and they exalted the man, rather than the divine power manifested in him. They expressed a desire to be called after his name, and to profit by it, a thing he had never done or allowed. And one can understand how with this tendency they were led to believe themselves his truest disciples, while, if Waldo had returned to life, he would probably have

looked for them on this side of the Alps. It is easy to comprehend how this subject must have fired all minds, and caused warm and exciting discussions. But the greatest debate arose on the question of the destiny of Waldo after death. The Italian party, not inclined to define questions of this kind, nor even to subordinate to them the interests of the community, limited themselves to acknowledging that he was saved if, before dying, he had made his peace with God. At this point one of the ultramontane delegates burst forth in indignant assertions: "We, on the contrary, say that Valdesio is in Paradise; and if you do not join us in this belief, let us speak no more of reconciliation" It does not seem possible that the Waldensians of the other side of the Alps should have desired this only as a homage to the free and sufficient grace of God: they had much to learn on this subject as well as their brethren of Lombardy. At all events, if these did not like to contradict, neither would they bring themselves to pass a judgement that belongs only to the Lord, upon a man, however worthy and venerable.

Now, this controversy did not end for several years, as appears from the Report, or Rescript, that refers to it, and which was sent to the brethren of Germany, in the name of those of Lombardy. One may certainly infer from this that there was not always among them a unanimous opinion on all subjects. But this did not prevent unity of faith; since we find them praying earnestly for each other, and maintaining, as much as time and change of circumstances would allow, the relations of brotherhood that had existed up to that time, and which the school of Milan naturally served to strengthen. Here we admire particularly the candid and free manifestation of piety, the growing conception of the authority and virtue of the word of God, which then spread rapidly from city to city, from province to province, calling forth unheard-of prohibitions. Gradually the Waldensians left behind them the other reactions as divided they fell: they outlived the Arnaldisti, the Umiliati, the Cathari, and all those sects; they increased and remained alone in the arena apparently defenceless and faint-hearted, but yet feared; not because of angry invectives or loud demonstrations, but on account of the intimate faith they had in the power of the truth. We do not mean to say that they passed unscathed through the furnace of trials. In a few centuries we find them

diminished in numbers: one would say that where their voice was first most obvious, it was now silent; and that it was thenceforth heard where it had been most subdued, viz., in the Valleys. Here the light of the gospel continues to burn; nay, more, it is fanned by the wind of persecution; the principal institutions are kept alive; among others the ecclesiastic and missionary meetings, the worthy though humble school of the Barbi; there is the heart from which bursts forth the faith which is to flow with fresh vigour to the most distant cities and provinces. The Waldensian people, in consequence of the oppressive laws, and also by the more natural one of rapid increase, had filled to overflowing their limited territory. So that, when they had the opportunity, they again sent forth colonies down as far as Calabria, where new communities sprung up and became the object of the pastoral zeal of the brethren before they were noticed by the agents of the Inquisition. The new ministers kept them in view in their excursions as they came down from the Valleys, two by two, and more frequently than ever; on their going and returning, in the midst of great dangers, they sowed the word of life; they comforted the scattered and weakened congregations of believers; they listened to their longings and wants, and these found echo in the bosom of what was already regarded by many as the Mother-Church. But the movements of these pastors did not escape the vigilant eye of the Inquisition; which at first discovered the place of meeting of their fellow-believers, then followed their footsteps up to the doors of the Valleys, spied them on all sides, and surrounded their inviolable refuge with the flames of persecution. Overpowered by oppression, what will the Waldensians do? They stand, yet soon languish in their safe retreat: their light grows dim, and it is even rumoured about that the school of the Barbi has ceased to exist. One would think that to prevent the extinguishment of the sacred fire that no longer glows, they hid it under the ashes. Whoever seeks it finds it; and it will again be manifest to all, when reached by the breath of the Reformation.

Now that we have traced the origin and the first progress of the Waldensians, let us proceed a little farther to notice a few principal facts concerning their writings, which, more than those of their enemies, shall afford us information upon their beliefs and customs.

Of the Waldensians it may be said, that, originally at least, they were a people unius libri; but this, the book par excellence the Bible. First, we notice their translations and annotations; then miscellaneous writings. We would not here undertake an enumeration of them - it would be too long. Their poetical compositions have a genuine worth; while the prose, notable on account of their number and variety, are wanting at times in originality. The first annotations, we know already, are a meagre collection of sentences from the Fathers; nor do later ones amount to any thing more. Several treatises, even creeds, contain doctrines taken, now from the most authoritative Catholic authors, not excluding some Popes; now from dissenting writers, mostly from Bohemia. Some of the Waldensian works, especially the poetical ones, first appeared in France, some in Germany, a few in Italy. Years ago there rose very grave doubts about the date of some of these, which Perrin, Loger, and their followers had made to go back as far as the beginning of the twelfth century: this they did for the purpose of a mistaken defence of the Waldensian faith. The discussion proved long and animated, and the more so because a little light upon the origin of the Waldensians was expected from it. Indeed, it was not barren of results. The delusions of those who had already proclaimed them to be older than their ancestors began to disappear. The date of the Nobld Leiczon remained, however, enigmatic: this is a little poem ever golden with original purity and candour, which reveals the physiognomy and even the name of the Waldensians.

" lib dion qu'el es Vaudes e degne e punir."

That date seemed to be expressly indicated in these

verses: -

"Ben ha mille cent ans compli entierement, Que fo scripta l'ora car sen al dernier temp," -

which occur in two manuscripts, those of Geneva and Dublin. For awhile the question was to find the point of time a quo the herein-mentioned one thousand one hundred years and more were

calculated, to establish the date of the poem. We can easily imagine how differently these verses must have been interpreted. Some, anxious to conclude that the first Waldensians had existed prior to Waldo, traced them back to the twelfth century; while others placed them in the thirteenth to avoid a gross error. This oscillation of opinions was still continuing when the manuscripts deposited in the library of Cambridge by Sir Morland in 1658 were found, and among them a third copy of the Nobla Leiczon, - the oldest of all, - in which, by means of a magnifying-glass, the following version was discovered. It read:

" Ben ha mille 4 cent ans compli entierament."

But, because of an erasure, the figure 4 was almost invisible; then this reading was confirmed by the discovery, in the same library, of a scrap of another manuscript of a later date, which reads:

" Ben ha mille cccc anz compli entierament."

If this cannot be said to settle definitely the question of the date, it nevertheless removes all anachronism, and thereby the last objections of those who complicated with their fancies a problem as clear and simple as that of the Waldensian origin.

In the mean time, this study of manuscripts led to a more general examination, which was attended with new results: thus we are assured of the fact that the larger number of the known documents that have been preserved belong to the sixteenth century, and the others to an earlier period. Moreover, with regard to the origin of the writings, they must be divided into three categories: first, the most original, anterior to the times of Huss; next, those that appeared or were altered under the influence of the Hussite reaction, as well as that of the Bohemian brethren; and last, those contemporary with the Reformation.

Now, if we keep in mind the chronological order, both of the Waldensian writings and of the Catholic documents, we will have the thread leading to the end of our narrative.

Let us inquire, then, into the genuine doctrines of the Waldensians. As we said before, they were called Leonists, from Leona, the Latin name of the city whence they came; as followers of Waldo they retained, perhaps unwillingly, the name of Waldensians. We may already infer, what is otherwise proved by facts, that, after the manner of Waldo, they sought for the supreme authority in matters of faith, in the Gospel and all the Sacred Books of the Old and New Testament, not even excepting the Apocrypha: besides, they found there first a rule of conduct, that is, poverty according to the teachings of Christ; hence their favourite name: Poor. It is evident that we have here an example of literal interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures, but this is an exception rather than a rule. There is here an evidence of obedient faith, rather than a pretension to free examination and discussion. Here it is also plain that meditation and the preaching of the word are a duty more than a right; not a mere profession, but a work for all. And now our Waldensians preach what they read, and what impressed them, the word of Christ: Repent, the kingdom of God is at hand. The end draws near, they say, and we are but dust: our life will soon be taken from us. The hour comes, which no man knows, when we shall appear before God, our just judge. Who will be able to stand in his presence. Neither the worthless absolutions of the priests, nor intercessions, nor the vain hope of a purgatory that does not exist except in this life, shall avail. Hence, come out of the broad road that leads to perdition, enter the narrow path that leads to life, by means of prayer, vigils, alms, and fasts; do these and other works meet for repentance if you wish to obtain salvation? But how shall we please God, if not by faith, through which we become his sons, capable of good works? Therefore, let us first seek faith to be justified; not a faith bare and sterile, but joined with love, and full of good works. Now, the source of faith, of love, of life, is Christ. So that we should look to him with longing to receive him in our hearts. There, through faith, he will diffuse the knowledge of his glorious name: he will cause his fear to bring forth in us works of justice. Besides, he himself is like a tree

planted in the midst of the Church, in the heart of every believer: he grows and blooms, rooted in us by fear, humility, mercy, charity, justice, temperance, prudence, and fortitude. Thus by active contemplation we grow into a temple consecrated to his presence: we are free from hell; and we become heaven, his dwelling-place, and by his grace we are made partakers of his divinity.

Thus far, but no farther, does the primitive faith of the Waldensians soar, when carried away on mystic wings: it does not fall into Pantheism, any more than it reaches Protestantism. It still moves in the orbit of the oldest Catholic traditions, without being at all inspired by the Augustinian reaction which leads to reforms. Nevertheless some dissension already exists, but not so much in the creed as in the spirit, the life, and the customs.

In fact, what was their ideal? It was perfection itself. They strove to reach it by means of a strict, almost literal observance of the evangelical principles taught by Christ upon the Mount. That sermon was their code. It cannot be said that they went astray for the sake of novelty, since they adopted an interpretation which at least was not unknown, - all that for love of perfection. And this love made them free, as compared with others; so that while they had the appearance of a new species of monk, they were really no more clerical than the first Christians. If they made a vow, it was to imitate Christ and the Apostles. That meant to obey but God alone; to be poor, but humble; to be chaste, without condemning marriage; not to lie; not to take an oath; not to hate nor kill, even the persecutors, who feared them none the less, and sometimes gave them marks of respect.

Now, in regard to the Church of Rome, they were dissenters, because they believed it to have wandered, faithless to Christ; not, however, schismatic, as they did not lose sight of the little flock of believers it contained: they loved peace, and sought the salvation of souls, more than the halo of martyrdom. Where they were most isolated, they met together and prayed, mostly repeating the Lord's Prayer: they meditated upon the promises of Christ to his disciples, lifting up their eyes unto him, as lambs that follow -their shepherd. Occasionally they

celebrated his death with free communion. So it happened that here and there sprung up small congregations not absolutely separate, as was the case with the Pietists, known for their *ecclesiolae in Ecclesia*, But they did not remain quiet; they came out to visit the believers, or to seek the lost: they industriously took part in conversations; they even entered the churches while mass was being celebrated, and united with the faithful. For this, it will not be said that they betrayed their faith, yet undefined; which, although free from any idolatry, did not exclude certain practices, for instance, that of the confessional: it admitted the seven sacraments, and, as we have already seen, transubstantiation.

And yet growing with their faith there was already a germ, an element, of schism. The first Waldensians were not *canes muti*, as the laity of that time, but living Christians. The love of the Word of God moved them all, even the women, if not to preach, at least to testify. They were the more laical because priests in the truest sense of the word. There never was such an anti-clerical clergy. Some regulations, however, had been adopted in some of the more or less dissenting communities, since we find here a special and regular ministry, bishops or priests and deacons; senior and junior fathers; the brethren divided in two classes, perfects and believers; here and there a few synods, or conferences, and schools. But the schism goes no further: it even loses its force, and apparently reduces itself to a protest against the hierarchy of Rome. And either because its vigour had been weakened, and fear of persecution had gained access to the minds, or for want of the full knowledge or the sincere and open profession of the more vital doctrines barely indicated in the symbols, the Waldensian faith, like an opening bud withered by the storm, began, to fade. It is also true that it revived somewhat under the influence of the double reaction of the Hussites and of the brethren of Bohemia, which also contributed to hasten the separation. But in order that this should come to pass, it was necessary that a restoration of beliefs should take place, which indeed followed the action more or less imperious of the Reformation, into which the Waldensian reaction resolved itself. Then occurred the schism which detached it from the Church of Rome, and united it to the evangelical churches.

And now, from what has been said, what are we to infer concerning the origin and the nature of this reaction?

We said in the beginning that it resembled the Nile on account of the supposed mystery of its origin. We will now resume the simile to conclude, that, notwithstanding certain clouds, it is yet perceptible that it springs from the heights of Catholic tradition, from the rock of the Sacred Scriptures by means of Waldo. We see rivulets flowing into it on all sides: here, Christian doctrines mixed with Romish errors; there, ascetic customs and ecclesiastic forms already in use with the Cathari, but still free from their Pagan superstitions; farther on, new notions derived from the reactions of Huss and the brethren of Bohemia; finally it widens, and empties into the sea of the Reformation. And in its changeable course it was ever beneficent, since it restored to honour the Word of God, obscured by traditions. It made the life, the liberty, the fellowship of believers to shine in contrast with a clergy, vulgar, despotic, and sectarian. Between the degenerate Church of Rome and the Reformation there was, in a dogmatic, moral, and even ecclesiastic point of view, a period of transition, which reminds one of that between the synagogue and the apostolic Church. Entered upon by an apostle of the Sacred Scriptures, it enrolled a legion of masters in an age fruitful in illiterate people; and therefore at the dawn of new days it was ready to receive them with the aid of the Bible printed in their mother-tongue.