

ART. V.—AN AUTUMN TOUR IN WALDENIA.

IT is sometimes said that there are only two things in these days which it is impossible to vulgarize—death and snow-mountains. But perhaps it may be doubted, when one thinks of the swarms of cheap-trippers that are annually shot down at the foot of the Swiss Alps, whether their snowy summits can quite escape. Surely the calm solemnity of those upper regions must be disturbed by the uproarious hilarities of the crowded hotels which lie around their feet. One would fain induce those who love quietness, and what Arnold calls “the cheerful silence of the fells,” to go further afield; nor need they go far to find, not only scenery of Alpine magnificence seldom explored, but connected with it historical and religious associations to which the Swiss Alps can lay little claim.

Among the many thousands of our countrymen and countrywomen who pass through the Mont Cenis Tunnel every year, few recollect, as they fly through the valley, that close at hand, on the eastern side of the mountains, lie those historic valleys which have sheltered for many centuries the hardy and long-enduring people called the pioneers of the Reformation, who have remained faithful during all the vicissitudes of their long and troubled history, and still remain the standing protest, not only against the accumulating corruptions of the Church of Rome, but for the simple faith and Apostolic forms of the primitive Christian Church. There, still resident on the south-eastern slopes of the Cottian Alps, in valleys of singular beauty, is the ancestral home of this ancient people; and from thence, in obedience to the example of Peter Waldo, their pious organizer, they are now spreading through all the fertile plains and classic cities of Italy those sacred truths which they have received from their forefathers.

The religious impulse which followed the reforming zeal of Hildebrand (A. D. 1075) resulted in a widespread inquiry into the doctrines and institutions of the Christian Church. On the one hand scholasticism, by keen logical argument, strove to strengthen the dogmas of the Church of Rome; but on the other hand increasing secessions testified against her errors, and sought, by a return to Apostolical Christianity, to resist those corruptions which were rapidly destroying her apostolicity. Having repudiated the authority of ecclesiastical tradition, the Waldenses clung to the Scriptures as the only rule of faith. They rejected purgatory, transubstantiation, and the adoration of images, and in obedience to Waldo, who had had the Gospels translated into the Romance, they went forth from Lyons into the surrounding country to proclaim the old truths

they had learnt from their Bibles. The Archbishop of Lyons forbade such unlicensed exhortations; and when they determined to persevere in spite of him, he excommunicated them. As one of his Archdeacons assured him, "If you admit these men, you yourself will soon be driven out." As has so frequently happened in the history of the Church, short-sighted ecclesiastics have cut off the bough on which they rested, and though a few years later Pope Innocent III. made overtures to win back these zealous evangelicals, the thing had gone too far, and his concessions came too late. Widely over all the North of Italy, Spain, South Germany, and France, their doctrines had spread, in the teeth of episcopal opposition. The pure morals and eager zeal of the evangelists was contrasted with the ignorance and laxity of the priests, and the "poor preachers of Lyons," spite of accusations of blasphemy, had spread through the greater part of Europe a creed which largely anticipated the reformed faith of the next century.

While rejecting transubstantiation, they believed in a mystical presence of Christ in the bread at the Holy Communion as received by the faithful, not in the hand of the priest. They abjured indulgences, but retained confession and absolution as valid even when administered by pious laymen. But from 1233 until the Reformation, the Inquisition, with its tortures to mind and body, was unmercifully inflicted upon the Waldenses, and what were called "Crusades" were organized to attempt their extermination. Under Innocent VIII., in 1488, a great number of fugitives, men, women, and children, were smoked to death in an Alpine cave. Great bundles of hay were lowered to the mouth of the cave and being set on fire destroyed all who had there taken refuge. By these and other means the Waldensian Church was nearly destroyed. Even after the Reformation persecution continued, and in 1655, that terrible massacre took place of some 6,000 inhabitants of the valleys, which roused the indignant interference of Cromwell and inspired the poetical imagination of Milton.

These obscure and inconsiderable ravines among the spurs of the high Alps, though affording but a few square miles of habitable earth, have nourished a hardy handful of men who have made deeper marks on the history of Europe than countries many times their size and natural importance. They have drawn out the sympathies of all who value lofty heroism or can admire the indomitable courage which comes from deep conviction of the truth. They have attracted the respectful notice of historians and theologians, and afforded to the student of ecclesiastical history the most primitive models of Church institutions which survive to us. Every rock in

those valleys has its legend, every precipice its tragedy, and every pass amongst the mountains which hem them in gives its witness to the long and weary struggle of truth against falsehood, in which truth has been victorious at last. The natural charms of their country are a fitting theatre for their stories of love, war, and self-sacrifice. There are few scenes in the world more lovely than are to be found in the Val Angrogna or the Val Pelice, few more stern and terrible than the upper portion of the Val Lucerna or Germanasca; and for wild and untrodden passes amongst Alpine snows and icy glaciers the Col St. Julien and the Col de Pis, or the steep slopes of Monte Viso or Monte Genèvre, may take rank with those of the Oberland itself.

Full of romantic anticipations and primed with the history of this interesting people, I found myself one autumn at the little Bear Inn in Latour Pelice.

For a fortnight I gave myself up to the happiness of intercourse with the natives, making pilgrimages to every spot sacred to the memory of heroic actions in the four valleys which may still be considered the patrimony of the Israel of the Alps. During that time I visited every principal village to which their historians had directed attention. An interesting account of them may be found in the admirable little book¹ by Dr. Gibson of Edinburgh. But there was one point of high interest which all the writers about the Waldenses mentioned, but of which no one in the valley could give me any definite information. It was the great cavern of Casteluzzo. Leger, Muston, Gilley, Beattie, Bramley Moore, Worsefold, all speak of this celebrated cavern. For centuries, during several successive persecutions, it seems to have formed the chief hiding-place of the persecuted peoples of the towns and villages of the Val Pelice. Whenever the inhabitants of Latour Villaro or Bobbio were threatened with massacre—and they were frequently threatened—the women and children were conveyed to this cave. Leger tells us that as many as 400 persons, young and old, lay at one time, and that for a considerable period, concealed in its recesses. He describes it with some particularity, and a more marvellous retreat could hardly be conceived than that which God provided for these tried and persecuted people in close proximity to their principal centres of population. Dr. Gilley felt its importance in the history of their persecutions to be so great that he made repeated efforts to reach it. His account of the manner in which he ultimately succeeded is to be found on

¹ "The Waldenses: their Home and History," by Dr. Gibson, Edinburgh.

p. 509 of his later Waldensian researches. He ascended to the top of Casteluzzo, and with a number of guides approached the edge of the precipice, which, he says, was as perpendicular as a wall. He was utterly incredulous of any cave there, or, if there were a cave, of any human creature being able to reach it. "He stretched his body and neck over the precipice in vain: not the slightest hold for a man's hand or foot was to be seen." His guide explained that "the descent was to be achieved by stooping over the projecting crag on the edge of which he stood, and catching hold of the rough points of the cliff, and so letting yourself down till you come to a sort of chimney, by which, one at a time, it was easy to descend into the cavern; but," he adds, "how men, women, and children, and aged fugitives, were to perform this exploit, which we confessed ourselves utterly afraid to attempt, did not appear." His guide "supposed there had been a second entrance which was now lost," and most pertinaciously insisted that by that very means he had described men he knew had actually got into the cavern. He directed their attention to immense blocks of stone at the base of the cliff, which appeared as if they had recently fallen from the rocks above, and which had rendered the descent more difficult than formerly. Dr. Gilley and his party then gave it up in despair, but some time afterwards he made a fresh attempt, provided with a rope ladder, spade, pickaxe, lantern, and cords, and this time he was more successful. Making a *détour* by Borel, he once more reached the point where his guide had conducted him on July 6. "Nothing," says he, "presented itself to the eye which gave the slightest idea that the wall of rock down which we looked with shuddering gaze contained an accessible hiding-place large enough to admit 400 people. The two notable climbers Camforan and Ricca, whose services he had secured, pulled off their shoes and stockings, and looked as if they were rallying their courage for an exploit. Two young mountaineers besides, one twenty, the other sixteen, signified their intention to follow the others at all risks, and the coolness with which they stood over the precipice and moved along its dizzy edge satisfied us that they had nerve enough for anything. When the guides were ready for the descent, they addressed their countrymen, M. Bonjour and M. Revel, and told them that they would not dare to go down. "Then, what will our friends do?" said they. "They are English," replied Camforan, "and will break their necks rather than turn back." Presently they disappeared. How they sustained their footing and to what projecting point they clung I could not imagine. I looked down, but the cliff projected so much that I could not distinguish the means by

which they descended. Presently a shout from below directed us to lower the rope ladder." And then with infinite precautions and infinite congratulations the worthy doctor stepped down the hempen staircase. He estimated the distance from the top of the cliff to the top of the chimney at 20 feet, and the further distance 50 feet, and then a few feet more landed him on the floor of the cavern. His agile companion took care he should come to no harm, and he adds: "The risk which the men encountered who descended without the rope ladder consisted in passing from ledge to ledge where the hold was very slight and insecure. What, then, must have been the horrible nature of the persecutions which compelled women and children to trust themselves to the peril of such an enterprise. It is probable that ropes had been before used to facilitate the descent, for I observed several places which looked as if they had been indented by the friction of cordage."

This, then, was the place to which my inquiries had been directed. The great crag in which the cavern lay is seen from all parts of the valley of the Pelice. On going out on to the balcony of the Bear Inn early on the morning after our arrival, it was the first object which struck the eye. Mont Vandolin lies on the north side of the valley, the first of a vista of eminences which bound the view to the right. On the side of Mont Vandolin, towering above the villages and vineyards of the valley, a castellated spur juts out and rises in a bold bluff against the sky. This is called, from its tower-like appearance, "le bric castelluzzo," and is connected with the masses of the Vandolin by a neck of narrow upland. In the steep face of this cliff a ledge may be discerned from La Torre with a glass. This is all that can now be seen from below of the once-famous cavern; nor is it easy to see that, for amid the seams and ledges which score the face of the precipice it is difficult to say with certainty which of them it is. This accounts for the vagueness with which old residents in La Torre, whose whole lives had been passed in sight of it, answered my inquiries as to its exact locality. Their replies were conflicting and perplexing. The existence of a secret rock refuge somewhere among the unscalable precipices of "le bric castelluzzo" was known to everybody; the way into it was known by none, and even the possibility of finding access to it was stoutly denied. A dismal story was carefully repeated to me, of two young Waldensian students of the college who had some years before made the attempt, and one of them, having slipped, was dashed to pieces on the rocks at the base of the precipice, and his companion returned without having accomplished his purpose.

But I heard of an English clergyman who had succeeded in finding his way into the cave, though without the assistance of rope or rope ladders. He describes his difficulty in finding at last a lad of thirteen as a guide, as for more than fifty years no one, as far as is known, had entered the cave. "He led me up," says he, in his account of his adventure, "round the steep sides of Castelluzzo to the narrow 'col' between it and Vandolin, and thence to the summit of Castelluzzo itself. There we were well repaid by a view of peerless magnificence. Turin, the Superga, the winding Po, most of the marquisate of Saluzzo, Cavour, Paesana, Campiglione, Fenile, were all in sight beyond the Vaudois territory; San Giovanni and Latour lay at our feet; Villaro and Bobbio to the west, and the torrents of Pelice, winding like threads of silver seen at intervals through the valleys; while peering over the ridges of l'Envers, above Roccabetta, and apparently close to us, the snowy peak of Monte Viso shone like a gigantic pharos of frosted silver. The tableland of the summit where we stood was dotted by patches of rhododendron and heather, a seamed and wind-swept rock sloping down on three sides towards a precipice of vast depth and dizzy steepness. We proceeded to the edge of the precipice, and reached the spot, which it would have been impossible to discover without a guide, where the lad said we should have to descend. I looked in vain for any sign of a descent or any possible means of getting on to the face of the rock, which sunk down to the base of the cliff with almost absolute perpendicularity. The little lad then sat down on the edge and pulled off his shoes; he threw his feet over the edge, and they rested two or three feet below on a ledge a foot or two wide, from which a plumb-line might have been dropped clear for some hundred feet. Suddenly he began to thrust his feet inwards through an unseen 'tron,' which seemed to pierce the cliff. Gradually his body disappeared, and I soon heard his voice some distance below calling me to follow. I hesitated for a moment, till assured there were no other means of discovering the mysterious cave. There was nothing for it but to follow, so, removing my shoes and stockings, I squeezed feet foremost through the 'tron' with some difficulty, and found myself on the face of the precipice below it, and just able to get on to a sharp and rapidly descending ridge, on to which I clung, and very slowly and carefully hitched down face foremost in the direction in which my agile guide had disappeared. The ridge seemed to get steeper and steeper, and to lead into the air, after the manner of falling dreams. One foot was hanging over the precipice, and beneath it could be seen villages and fields far below. I felt like a fly creeping

on a vast wall, but unprovided with that adhesive secretion which allows the insect to walk, or those filmy integuments by which, when it can no longer walk, it can fly. I may confess," says he, "that at this moment the strangeness of the position and the uncertainty as to what unknown difficulties lay below so impressed my imagination, that, if I could have turned round and got back again, I should have done so and given up the pursuit. But it was impossible; the utmost care was needed to avoid being overbalanced by projections of the rock which jutted inconveniently outwards, but afforded no holding. I could now and then hear the voice of the lad some distance below, but during all the descent never caught a glimpse of him, or could learn by what peculiar gymnastics he had got down. The thought of however I was to get obtruded itself uncomfortably, for just then a moment's indecision or loss of nerve must have destroyed me. Pulling myself together, I crept down, and rounding a projection which hid the lower part of the descent, I came to the top of all that is now left of what the old Waldenses called the 'chiminee.' It was probably formerly a shaft through the rock; it is now simply an open cranny down which the climber must get, inch by inch, planting his feet firmly against one smooth and sloping side of it, and his back against the other. He must then look sharply for certain thin ledges, 1 or 2 inches in breadth, to prevent a fatal slip, and at this point he will experience the importance of having taken off his socks as well as his shoes; the prehensibility of the naked foot was invaluable to me. By the aid of it I reached the bottom of this open chimney in safety, though every limb trembled with the unaccustomed exertion; and soon after, relaxing not a muscle, but gingerly descending from projection to projection, I found myself at last in what is left of the great cavern of the Waldenses. It is now an open horizontal gallery of rock cleavage, deeply indenting the southern face of the precipice. It was so exposed that at first I felt some doubt whether it could be the veritable cavern; but my doubt was instantly resolved, for there, on the sides of it, carved on the rock, were the names or initials of the very few persons who have ever managed to get into it. There was the large name of Gilly, of A. Vertu, of Caffadon, of Henri, of J. Gott, Meille, Th. Mallan, 'Rl.' for Revel, and a few other initials, to which I added my own with the date of my visit, feeling that I might possibly doubt hereafter whether I had really visited such a place unless the record of my visit could be appealed to on the spot.

"There was a solemn stillness, full of awe and sweetness, about the place which my young companion did not seem

inclined to break, but he showed me the place where he had been told the Waldensian marksmen picked off their Papist foes, resting their nine-foot-long guns on the outer edge of the rocks. Another place was pointed out where buckets or baskets were let down for those provisions which supported the refugees, and in which, he said, children had sometimes been sent swinging down, to run at the risk of their lives with information of the movements of the enemy and to return with news and provisions. From this lofty erie the poor Waldenses could have distinctly seen their houses in flames, or heard, on still days, the shouts of their brutal pursuers." From this scene of strange loveliness persecutors and persecuted have alike long since passed away to judgment, not without leaving behind them indelible footprints upon the sands of history indicating to all after-ages the principles by which they were respectively animated.

It is quite clear that this is the great cavern of Waldensian history. It is equally clear that it is not in the condition in which it afforded shelter to so large a number of persons. It seems that Dr. Gilly's guide explained the matter when he pointed to "the rocks, crags, and mounds confusedly hurled" at the bottom of the cliff. The whole face of the rock has fallen, including one of the three sides of the shaft or chimney and all the outer walling of the cave itself in which formerly the windows, which Leger mentions, were pierced. Only the inmost parts of it are now left, but its shelter is no longer required; a fresh set of perils, more subtle than the open and bloody persecutions of former times, has now set in, and it has been rumoured that the intercourse between Waldenses and Romanists incidental to their missionary operations has resulted in mixed marriages between them and their hereditary foes, but I am glad to say with results not so disastrous as was supposed. In a parish of 2,000 souls only one out of six instances of such marriages, and that a German, has resulted in the children being educated as Romanists. In all the other cases not only are the children brought up as Waldenses, but the wives also have accepted the Protestant faith of their husbands. The Waldenses possess 114 churches and mission stations served by 61 pastors and evangelists in different parts of Italy beside promising colonies of Waldenses in Uruguay and Argentina with 6,000 members. The London headquarters of the Waldensian Church Missions, which are producing a religious revolution in Italy, is at 118, Pall Mall, S.W. Lieutenant-Colonel Frobisher, J.P., is the active and intelligent secretary. They often ask us to come and see the work which is proceeding, and assure us that our visits to them do them

good. "Come and test our reports," say they, "and assure yourselves that they give a true description of what is being done." We feel sure if people knew how accessible they are many of the crowds which now swarm over Switzerland would prefer these delightful mountains. Torre Pelice, the chief town, is only forty miles from Turin. Fast trains from Paris by Mount Cenis bring you to Turin, and a train goes direct from there to Torre Pelice. At that place a most homely hotel at six francs a day, the Hôtel de l'Ours, is kept by M. Michelin and his obliging Swiss wife, who speaks English. The Pension Bel Air, a few minutes' walk from the town, amidst gardens and woods, is highly spoken of, and from there charming drives may be taken to all the chief centres of Waldensian interest.

FRANCIS GELL.

ART. VI.—STUDIES ON ISAIAH.

CHAPTERS II. AND III.

WE take the last verse of chap. ii. in connection rather with what follows than what precedes, because it is united with chap. iii., ver. 1 by the word "for." The connection of thought between chap. ii. and chap. iii. would seem to be this: in the former the prophet, in perhaps the finest of all his magnificent word-pictures, has contrasted the Majesty of God with the littleness of man. He has invoked the vengeance of the Divine Being, Whose greatness he has depicted on the puny worm which has dared to lift up itself against its Maker. He recalls the words—modern criticism, be it remembered, attributes these words to an unknown writer, whose work Isaiah may or may not have seen—in which the founder of Judaism tells us who placed in man's nostrils the breath of life (Gen. ii. 7), and he goes on to predict the punishment in store for a rebellion which is irrational as well as ungrateful.

Vers. 1-6.—We have already noted that moral strength can only co-exist with faith in, and obedience to, Him Who is eternal. The intellectual power, the gift of organization, the capacity for rule which God imparts to those whom He has raised up for special tasks, and which is often dependent on national rivalries and personal ambitions, and independent of moral character, *may* and even *will* do a mighty work for a time. But it has no permanence. The great empires of ancient days—Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Greece—passed swiftly away. They depended only on a fortuitous concurrence of