

**HENRI ARNAUD; OR THE
GLORIOUS RETURN OF THE
WALDENSES OF PIEDMONT TO
THEIR NATIVE VALLEYS IN THE
YEAR 1689-90. A POEM**

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ARTHUR ROBERT PENNINGTON

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A Poem.

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280. b. 34.

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold ;
Ev'n them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipt stocks and stones,
Forget not ; in thy books record their groans
Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To heaven. Their martyr'd blood and ashes sow
O'er all th' Italian fields, where still doth sway
The triple tyrant ; that from thence may grow
An hundredfold, who having learned thy way,
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

(Milton.)



P R E F A C E .

A DISTINGUISHED writer of the last century observes,* "To abstract the mind from all local emotion would be impossible, if it were endeavoured, and would be foolish, if it were possible. Whatever withdraws us from the power of our senses; whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings. Far from me and from my friends be such frigid philosophy as may conduct us indifferent and unmoved over any ground which has been dignified by wisdom, bravery, or virtue. That man is little to be envied whose patriotism would not gain force on the plain of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona."

This eloquent description of the feelings excited by a visit to places consecrated by deeds of piety and heroism, admits of application, to the fullest extent, to the remarkable people who are brought before the reader in the following poem. And yet, while pilgrims from many lands have visited Italy for the purpose of indulging in the reveries of classical enthu-

* Dr. Johnson.

siasm, and of holding converse among its crumbling arches, and prostrate monuments, and ruined temples, and shattered shrines, with the illustrious dead of by-gone ages, few comparatively have visited a small district, at the extremity of the plain of Piedmont, immediately under the Alps, the home for ages of men, who have suffered and bled and died that they might preserve to themselves and their children the invaluable blessings of religious liberty and independence. The inhabitants are called Valdenses, or Waldonses, in Italian Valdesi, in French Vaudois, from the valleys which they inhabit. These are three in number, Luzern, San Martino, and Rora, about twelve Italian miles in length, and nearly the same in the direction opposite. The present population, occupying fifteen parishes, amounts to 28,000 souls, the subjects of the former Dukes of Piedmont and Savoy, and of the present king of Italy. The traveller through these valleys would be amply repaid, if he merely visited them to witness the scenes of sublimity and beauty which surround him on every side. In the valley of Luzern and Angrogna, he will see an image of that Eden which once bloomed and blossomed in this world's wilderness. Gushing fountains, sparkling rivers, vineyards festooned from tree to tree, and adorned with purple clusters, waving harvests, lofty precipices, and verdant meadows expanding around him, are here unfolded to his astonished and delighted view. While in the valley of St. Martin, he will gaze upon scenes of awful sublimity and grandeur.

He will stand amid the everlasting rocks and mountains, those fortresses of nature, the impregnable home of the Waldenses during ages of fiery persecution. But the associations with which these valleys are connected, would be quite sufficient to render them objects of interest to every rightly constituted mind. Every spot in them is associated with the recollection of a glorious triumph over the armies of their ruthless oppressors. Prodiges of valour have been performed by a little band of peasants, unskilled in the use of arms, which rival, nay, eclipse the deeds of those heroes of antiquity, whose names embalmed by poetry and song, have descended to all succeeding generations. The soil has been deluged with the blood of the martyrs.

The writer of the following poem believes that the contemplation of their labours and sufferings, amid the scenes which have been hallowed by their presence, would animate us with a holy determination to exhibit this constancy, and to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. He is very far from advocating that sentimentalism which leads to no practical result. But surely when controlled and directed, it may become an actuating and energizing principle. The traveller will hear a voice on every mountain, in every cave, and on every battle field, reminding him of the power of those principles by which the Waldenses were supported in their struggle with their cruel oppressors. The contemplation of the heroic deeds of the Grecian and Roman patriots has

nerved the arm, and animated the heart of many, who have triumphed gloriously over the enemies of their country, and have beaten back from their native soil the armies of the foreign invader. And shall no heart throb with emotion while we hold converse with those who stood in the front of the battle with the apostate Church of Rome, and surrounded as with a wall of fire the blood-stained banner of the cross! The author ventures to hope that many of his readers will catch their spirit, and emulate their zeal. He trusts that he may inspire some of them with that enthusiasm on their behalf, which now prompts him to submit the following poem to the public. In order that it may be well understood, he prefaces it with a sketch of the history and present condition of this remarkable people.

The Roman Catholic Church has, with the view of vindicating her own antiquity, asserted that the Waldenses are a sect of a late date, and that they derive their name from Peter Waldo, the merchant of Lyons, who separated from her communion about the year 1160. We believe that this assertion is erroneous. We may bring forward passages from her own writers reporting the constantly asserted tradition of the Waldenses, that they existed as a Church long before the time just referred to. Reinerius Saccho, an inquisitor, and one of their most implacable enemies, who lived only eighty years after Waldo, thus writes respecting them—"Of all the heretical sects that are or have been, none is more pernicious than

that of the Leonists, first from its superior antiquity; for some say that it has lasted from the time of Sylvester, others from that of the Apostles." A century later, Polichdorf thus repeats the tradition—"The sons of iniquity say falsely before simple men that this sect has endured from the time of Pope Sylvester, when the Church began to have possessions." About 1540, Claud Seyssel, Archbishop of Turin, thus writes respecting them—"Some of the heretics pretend that this sect has lasted from the time of Constantine the Great; and that under one Leo, execrating the avarice of the then Pope Sylvester, they made their choice to live by themselves in simplicity and seclusion."

We think with the majority of those who have carefully considered the subject, that the Waldenses have never apostatized from the faith. Dr. Allix, in his valuable work on the ancient Churches of Piedmont, published about 170 years ago, has clearly demonstrated that the whole diocese of the north of Italy, in which the territory of the Waldenses was included, was pure enough during the first eight centuries at least, to deserve the appellation of a true branch of Christ's Holy Catholic Church. Meanwhile the Church in the neighbouring districts had begun to be corrupted by error, and to be debased by superstition. A gorgeous pomp and ceremonial disfigured the simplicity of the early Christian worship. The glare of countless lamps at noon-day, streaming along the aisles of the sacred edifice, dazzled the senses, and