the beginning of the thirteenth century, after their recep­tion of the followers of Valdo, they were then obliged for the first time to constitute ministers of their own, out of the clergy, whose orders were derived from the national churches of France and Italy, and who espoused their cause. That they had originally the form of an episcopal church, with clergy of different orders, (although their discipline is now Presbyterian, very much resembling that of the Church of Scotland,)@@1 appears both in an ancient MS. which speaks of *regidars,@@t* or *leaders* of the flock, as well as of priests ; and in the direct and plain evidence of Claude Seyssel in 1520, who speaks tauntingly of persons whom they called their *bishops* and *priests,* and challenges them to show from what lawful source of authority, from what church, and from what province, they, who boasted of their apostolical descent, derived their orders and succession.@@3

The fiercest deciaimers against Valdensian schismatics might find some extenuation for a people who were forced into secession ; first, by the corruptions and spiritual neglect of the clergy of the dominant church ; and, secondly, by excommunication. Every ecclesiastical history makes men­tion of the utter depravity of most of the Romish clergy of the tenth, eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries; and we gather from the first volume of the Piedmontese Histori­cal Documents, published in 1836, that at one time nearly all the ecclesiastics of the Cottian Alps fled from before the Saracen invaders, and never returned to their parishes ; and at another time that there was a wreck of churches *(naufragatis ecclesiis,)* and destitution of pastors through­out the whole diocese of Turin. Endowments for parochial service were transferred to monasteries at a distance, and villages were left without regular pastoral superintendence. One charter states that a third of the whole mountain ter­ritory between Mount Cenis and Mount Genèvre was made over to a distant convent. Another consigns no less than half of all the lands lying between Pignerol and Col Sestrières to an abbey at Pignerol. A third despoils the whole of Val Guichard of its rents, for the enrichment of a fra­ternity of monks in another part of the country, in the plains on the banks of the Po. All this must have con­tributed to produce that state of spiritual destitution which ultimately led to, and warranted separation ; and when the severance was once completed, the hierarchy of Rome could never re-establish its authority over those valleys of Piedmont which are now called Protestant. They were so free from Romish intrusiveness at one period, that Vin- centius Ferrerins, the Dominican, who preached to the Val- denses in the year 1405,@@4 reported to the principal of his order, that they had not heard the voice of a minister of the church for thirty years before; and Claude Seyssel declared a century afterwards, that so entirely had they been abandoned by priests and bishops, no prelate but himself had dared to approach them within the memory of man.

The transfer of property in the valleys, to monasteries and convents, was the first step that led to persecution. The possession of lands in signoralty carried with it certain rights of jurisdiction, which enabled the monastic bodies to exercise temporal as well as spiritual tyranny. They ac­quired the power of holding local courts for the adjudication of all criminal causes, co-extensive with that which had been originally conferred on the feudal proprietors for the pro­tection of the people of their domains ; so that the very privileges which were favourable to religious liberty, while they were exercised by lay superiors, became dangerous to the vassals of estates, in process of time, when they were made over to ecclesiastics. The commencement of the thirteenth century is the era from which we date those horrible atrocities with which religion has been insulted, and humanity outraged, to appease the offended majesty of Rome. Innocent the Third, and Dominic, the father of the Inquisition, (the seraphic spirit of Dante’s commendation) divide the honour of having let loose fire and sword against those who presumed to question the dogmas of the Vatican, in two new forms, impiously called “ missions of peace and good will.” The one was the crusade against the Albi­genses, which swept multitudes from the face of the earth in open warfare ; and the other was the institution of a secret tribunal, which had its informers and its executioners every where, and, as an “act of faith,” condemned thousands, after the mockery of a trial, to expire in the flames, or to linger out life in a dungeon. But though some martyrs were dragged to the stake from the vicinities of the Cot­tian Alps, nearest to the plains of Piedmont on the one side, and to the cities of Dauphiné on the other, yet the more secluded of these regions continued to be secure asylums until the end of the fourteenth century. The communes of Fressinière and Argentière, in the diocese of Embrun, on the French side of the mountains, were then ransacked for victims, in obedience to a papal bulh@@β Whole families were sacrificed, and others were obliged to fly to the very edge of the glaciers for safety. But it is remark­able, that although a similar bull was issued against the nonconformists of the valleys of Lucerna and San Martino on the Italian border, no means were there found of putting the exterminating commission in execution. Again and again the temporal sovereigns of the Piedmontese Valdenses received mandates from Rome to draw the sword against them, and to “ crush the serpent,” but they would not. Even when the persecuting storm of 1400 extended from Dauphiné to the Italian valley of Pragela, which was then under the dominion of France, the adjoining valleys of Lucerna and San Martino heard the pontifical thunder, but were unscorched by its lightning.

At length the memorable bull@@· of Innocent the Eighth, which gave unlimited powers to Albert de Capitaneis to carry confiscation and death throughout the whole of those parts of the sees of Embrun and Turin which were infected with heresy, precipitated a host of armed enemies upon the mountain retreats of the Valdenses. The edict of Iolanta, the regent-mother, during the minority of the duke of Sa­voy, in the year 1476,@@7 in which she called on the authori­ties of the province of Pignerol to assist the inquisitors in compelling heretics, and especially those of Val Lu­cerna, to come into the bosom of the church, is one of the first state papers which indicate a departure from the mild and tolerant principles on which the house of Savoy had hitherto acted. But the sanguinary torrent rolled through these valleys, without forcing any of the inhabitants into the arms of Rome. Some subsequent edicts of the dukes of Savoy, speak of their Valdensian subjects, not under the obnoxious appellation of heretics, but under the gentle and more courteous term of Religionists, and call them “ men of the valleys,” “ beloved and faithful vassals,” whom

@@@1 In the middle of the sixteenth century several changes were effected in the government of the Valdensian church. The principal authority rests with ecclesiastical officers called the Table, consisting of the moderator, the moderator-adjoint, and the secretary, assisted by two la, members. These are elected by the Synod, which is held every five years, in the presence of a royal commissioner. The moderator presides at ordinations. Pastors are nominated by parishes, subject to the approbation of the Table, and confirmation of Synod.

@@@\* “ Eslagistan Regidors del Poble, et Preires en lors Officie.” See Morland's Churches of Piedmont, p. 74.

@@@’ The episcopal form of church government was retained by many other separatists from Rome, in Italy and Germany. See Reiner and Stephen de Borbone.

@@@∙ See Praef. Ricchini ad Monetam, p. xvi.

@@@\* This and the document next quoted are published in the works of Morland and Leger.

@@@\* Printed in the works of Morland and Leger.

@@@’ Raccolta degl' Editti del Piemonte, p. 1.

8 Those of 1499 and 1509