they recognised as privileged persons, entitled to immuni­ties and franchises, by virtue of ancient stipulations.@@1

State policy, disputes with France, and the necessity of conciliating the borderers, when a band of gallant soldiers was required for the defence of the frontier, often operated in their favour, in the moment of danger; and even at times when the sovereigns of the principality consented to their destruction, the lords of the soil became their advo­cates. Thus, in the year 1553, when the havoc which was made among the nonconformists of Provence and Dau­phiné, reached the valleys of Piedmont. It would have been more fatal, had not Blanche, countess of Lucerna,@@1 inter­posed in behalf of her dependents.

In 1560, the dark cloud which had long been gathering over the mountain church, burst upon it with all its fury ; and never did the majesty of truth and innocence stand out more brightly to view, than during the tempests of perse­cution, which raged at intervals for the next hundred years and more.

The subalpine communities, which had been placed un­der papal interdicts, saw themselves exposed to the hostile power of the French king on one side, and to that of the duke of Savoy on the other. They were commanded by edicts to banish their ministers and schoolmasters, to ab­stain from the exercise of their own forms of worship, and to attend the services of the Romish church. They re­fused, and orders for confiscation, imprisonment, and death, were launched against them. Hundreds perished on the scaffold, or at the stake ; and the villages swarmed with brigands, who, under the name of officers of justice, plun­dered the wretched inhabitants, and haled them to prison, until the dungeons were choked with victims.

The population of the valleys still remaining faithful to the religion of their forefathers, the sword was openly un­sheathed, and the scabbard thrown away. An armed force, commanded by a chief whose name was in terrible con­trast with his character, the Count de la Trinité, poured into the proscribed territory. But a spirit stronger than the sword upheld the Valdenses, and an arm more powerful than that which assailed them, fought on their side. The villages near the plains were deserted, the women, the chil­dren, the feeble, and the aged, were sent for refuge to the heights of the mountains, to the rocks and to the forests. Every man and boy who could handle a weapon, planted himself against the invaders, and a successful guerilla war­fare was carried on by small brigades of peasants, against the veteran troops who were let loose upon them. Greater exploits, and instances of more enduring fortitude, were never recounted, than those which have immortalized the resistance offered by the Valdenses to their oppressors. It must however suffice to say, that the history of the Val­denses, from the year 1560 to the close of the eighteenth century, is a narrative of sanguinary struggles for existence, with very few intervals of repose.

If the churches of the valleys had an intermission of suf­fering under one reign, they were driven to desperation in another. The years 1565, 1573, 1581, 1583, and the pe­riod between 1591 and 1594, are memorable as dates of re­ligious and civil conflict.

In 1595, the duke of Savoy smiled upon his Protestant subjects ; in 1596 and 1597 he persecuted them. From 1602 to 1620, a series of edicts,@@3 some threatening, and others indulgent, kept the Valdenses in a state of perpetual suspense and agitation ; but the tenor of the most alarming of these, which confined them within certain limits, proves that they had rights and privileges, within those limits at least, which nothing but the importunity and the misrepre­sentations of the Romish hierarchy, could induce their sove­reigns reluctantly to violate.

Of the twenty years that followed, almost all were distin­guished by some act of cruelty or oppression. In 1640,@@4 the appointment of an English envoy at the court of Turin, and his occasional residence at La Tour, the principal village of the Valdenses, shed a ray of transient sunshine over this afflicted people; but this was shortly followed by a hurricane of persecution similar to that of 1560, and unutterable atro­cities were committed by the soldiery employed to enforce the destroying edict of 1655. That year would have seen the last of the Valdenses, had not all the Protestant powers of Europe interposed, especially England, whose supreme ruler, Oliver Cromwell, under the influence of Milton, be­came their protector.

In 1686, Victor Amadeus, the young duke of Savoy, in­stigated by the courts of France and Rome, and ambitious of succeeding where his ancestors had failed, sent an over­whelming body of troops into the valleys of Lucerna, Pe­rosa, and San Martino, to compel the inhabitants to go to mass. During three years and a half, the exercise of the ancient religion of the Valdenses had to all appearance ceased in Piedmont. Those who would not conform were obliged to flee for their lives. But the return of eight hun­dred Valdensian exiles in 1689,@@β who marched from the borders of the lake of Geneva to their native mountains, for the recovery of their rights, was signalised by incidents un surpassed in the history of providential and romantic events, and was crowned with success. At this critical juncture, a quarrel arose between the king of France and Victor Ama­deus, which induced the latter to take this heroic band and the scattered remnant of his Protestant subjects into fa­vour. “ Hitherto,” said he, “ we have been enemies, but from henceforth we must be friends ; others are to blame more than myself for the evils you have suffered.” This happy turn in their affairs was followed by treaties between the English and Piedmontese governments, in the reigns of William the Third and Queen Anne, articles of which were meant to secure to the Valdenses the undisturbed exercise of their religion within certain territorial limits.@@8 From that period to the present, Great Britain has been empowered, by virtue of solemn compacts, to interpose for their pro­tection, and their churches ought to have had rest.

But the wrongs of the Valdenses were not yet at an end, and their sovereigns, under their new title of kings of Sar­dinia, forgot to be generous and just. Again and again these sufferers have had to contend not only against petty injuries and harassing grievances, but also against absolute oppression. By an act of open violence, the valley of Pra- gela was dragooned into conformity with Rome, in the year 1727, on the diplomatic pretence, that this region was not included in the articles of treaty which secured toleration within defined boundaries. The English ambassador at Turin remonstrated, and urged the sacred engagements which guaranteed toleration and safety to the Protestants of Piedmont, but he was not properly supported by his go­vernment at home, and the objects of his sympathy cried for redress in vain.@@7

During the French empire of Napoleon, when the iron crown of Italy was placed on the head of the Corsican, the Valdenses enjoyed equal rights and privileges in common with the rest of their countrymen. But, at the restoration of the house of Savoy to the kingdom of Sardinia, four days after the king had taken possession of his palace at Turin, they were replaced under their former disabilities, and bare

@@@, Raccolta degl' Editti di Savoia e del Piedmonte.

@@@, Gilles, p. 39.

@@@’ See Raccolta degl' Editti.

@@@\* Gilles, Hist. Eccles, des Vaud. p. 567.

@@@‘ See Rentrée glorieuse dee Vaudois, par H. Amand, and Translation by H. D. Acland.

@@@, See Gilly's Waldensian Researches, p. 555.

@@@’ See the Correspondence of Mr Hedges with the duke of Newcastle, published in Dr Gilly's Waldensian Researches, pp. 539, 540.