

# THE WALDENSES

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE ITALIAN WALDENSES.—

*By Sophia V. Bompiani. 12mo. A. S. Barnes & Co.*

**T**HE equipment of an historian, according to the author of this volume, should be uncompromising hatred of the Roman Church, and his tactics in argument should be the marshalling of question-begging adjectives in platoons. This is not the way to write serious history, but it does not necessarily preclude the composition of an interesting volume. The story of the Protestant communities of the Alpine valleys lying near Mont Cenis is a striking one, and Mrs. Bompiani has told it with fierce sympathy. "From time immemorial," as she has it, a sturdy, brave and sober race has lived in these mountains, cherishing the simpler virtues nobly and the Bible evangelically. They first appear in contemporary records as Leonists, so called from Vigilantius Leo, who, after a controversy with Jerome, fled from Aquitaine to their mountains. The name Waldenses comes possibly from the name of their district, but it is commonly, this author says, falsely supposed to be a derivation from Peter Waldo, of Lyons, who started to evangelize Europe in the twelfth century. The Waldenses suffered frightful persecutions, both in their parent valleys and their colonies in Calabria, from 1476 till 1686, when they were actually driven from their home, and survived only as a miserable remnant, to which Switzerland gave an eager welcome. They defended themselves with almost incredible valor during these persecutions, and suffered martyrdom unflinchingly. Protestant Europe flamed up in their behalf. Milton's sonnet, beginning—

"Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose  
bones  
Lie whitened on the Alpine mountains cold,"

was written about this time. The great event in Waldensean history is the "Glorious Return" of 1689, when nine hundred of the faith were led back over the Alpine wilderness from Geneva to take possession of their old valley homes, where fortunate circumstances allowed them to remain. This was the end of the actual persecution and slaughter, but until 1848 they were hedged in and bound by all kinds of restrictions. During this period the spirit of the old religion rather died away, but after 1848, stimulated somewhat by foreign aid, it was once more in evidence. Again the brown-robed *barbes* tramped through Italy with the missionary's zeal, and now all the great towns of the peninsula have Waldensean churches.