

CHAPTER II.

THE ANTIQUITY OF THE VALLENSES SHEWN FROM THE TESTIMONY OF JEROME.

Thus, during the persecutions of the second and third and fourth centuries, placed in the valleys of the Cottian Alps as in a citadel fashioned by the hand of nature herself, we find the Vallenses, in the self-same region, still holding the self-same primitive doctrine and practice at the beginning of the fifth century: while, by so doing, they characteristically bore witness against those growing superstitions, from which, by their secluded situation, they had been providentially exempted.

The account of this matter, which I place at the head of the chain of testimony that runs through the whole period of the Middle Ages, is both deeply interesting and specially important, inasmuch as it furnishes the precise link which has long been wanted, in order, on the strength of evidence, synchronical with the particulars detailed, to connect the Vaudois with the Primitive Church: and it will not, I hope, argue an unreasonable degree of assumption, if I say,

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Martyrs and the idle unscriptural figment that they are potent intercessors at the throne of grace: ridiculed the blind reverence, which was paid to their senseless and useless relics: exposed the gross folly of burning tapers, like the Pagans, before their shrines in broad day-light: detected the spurious miracles, which were said to be wrought by their inanimate remains: vilified the boasted sanctity of vainly gratuitous monachism: and pointed out the useless absurdity of pilgrimages, either to Jerusalem or to any other reputed sanctuary*.

Such was the drift of his Treatise: and, in the course of it, he naturally adverted to Jerome's former indecent attack upon him.

Matters being in this state, Jerome wrote a very intemperate and abusive epistle, addressed to Riparius: and, shortly afterward, receiving the Treatise itself, he composed an Answer to it; in which, it is hard to say, whether illogical absurdity or brutal scurrility is the most predominant†.

From those documents, we fully learn the drift and object of the now lost Treatise of Vigilantius the Leonist: and the author, as will readily be

* Hieron. adv. Vigilant. ad Ripar. Oper. vol. ii. p. 157. Hieron. adv. Vigilant. cap. i, ii, iii, iv, vi. Oper. vol. ii. p. 159—161.

† Hieron. Epist. liii. Hieron. adv. Vigilant. Oper. vol. ii. p. 157—161.

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that, so far as my own knowledge and reading are concerned, I have been privileged to be the first discoverer of the evidence in question*.

I. Vigilantius, a native (as we have seen) of Lugdunum Convenarum or of the Pyrenæan Lyons in Aquitaine, and a Presbyter of the Church of Barcelona in Spain, had charged Jerome with too great a leaning to the objectionable opinions of Origen. This circumstance called forth the rage of the irascible Father: and, in the year 397, he addressed to him a very violent epistle on the subject†.

Subsequently to the propounding of that epistle. Vigilantius returned into his native country of Aquitaine: and there he published a most uncompromising and decisive Treatise against the miserable growing superstitions of the age; a Treatise, which is ascribed to the year 406.

In this Treatise, he attacked the notion, that Celibacy is the duty of the Clergy: censured, as idolatrous, the excessive veneration of the

* This evidence, however, in brief, has twice appeared in print. I communicated it to Dr. Gilly who introduced it into the second edition of his Memoir of Felix Neff: and Dr. Gilly communicated it to Dr. Muston, who, on the strength of his authority, has similarly introduced it into his recently published History of the Vaudois. See that Work, book ii. note 15. vol. i. p. 178.

† Hieron. adv. Vigilant. c. ii. Oper. vol. ii. p. 159. Epist. lxxv. vol. ii. p. 251, 252.

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concluded, has had the honour of being, by the Papal Church, duly enrolled in the list of heretics.

II. To the ecclesiastical student, the *sentiments* of Vigilantius are familiar: and their *complete identity* with those of the Vallenses, in all ages, cannot have escaped his notice. But, when this remarkable individual quitted Barcelona, *from what part of the world* did he publish the very seasonable Treatise, which called forth such vulgar and offensive vituperation from the superstitious and exasperated Jerome?

His antagonist tells us: that *He wrote from a region, situated between the waves of the Adriatic and the Alps of King Cottius*; from a region, that is to say, which formed a part of what was once styled *Cisalpine Gaul**.

Now this district, on the eastern side of the Cottian Alps, is the precise country of the Vallenses. *Hither* their ancestors retired, during the persecutions of the second and third and fourth centuries: *here*, providentially secluded from the world, they retained the precise doctrines and practices of the Primitive Church endeared to them by suffering and exile; while the wealthy inhabitants of cities and fertile plains, corrupted

* Ego vidi hoc aliquando portentum: et, testimoniis Scripturarum, quasi vinculis Hippocrotis, volui ligare furiosum. Sed abiit; excessit; evasit; erupit: et, inter Hadria fuctus Cottique Regis Alpes, in nos declamando clamavit. Hieron. Epist. liii. Oper. vol. ii. p. 158.

by a now opulent and gorgeous and powerful Clergy, were daily sinking deeper and deeper into that apostasy which has been so graphically foretold by the great Apostle: and, *here*, as we learn through the medium of an accidental statement of Jerome, Vigilantius took up his abode, at the beginning of the fifth century, among a people, who, Laics and Bishops alike, agreed with him in his religious sentiments, and joyfully received him as a brother *.

* The wisdom of God works not miraculously, when the natural operation of second causes may serve as the substratum of his high purposes. Seclusion within a mountainous district has a physical tendency to preclude change and innovation. Opinions and practices are handed down from father to son: and, until an intercourse is opened with the lower world at their feet, one generation is but the faithful reflection of another. Hence, in the course of God's providence, the alpine mountains and valleys were selected as the retreat, where, unchanged from the first ages, pure Christianity was to be preserved.

When persons, immutatively nurtured in these solitudes, first emerge into an ever-fluctuating world, their feelings are not unlike those of the fabled sleepers of Ephesus. Retiring, like the ancestors of the Vaudois, from the persecution of Decius, they concealed themselves in a spacious cavern. Here they were overpowered by a sleep of one hundred and eighty-seven years. When they emerged, they themselves remained consciously the same, faithfully reflecting the feelings and habits and opinions of a period long since passed away: but, meanwhile, what a change in the world! Christianity, trampled upon and persecuted, was now triumphant. Every thing was new: every thing was strange. Their tale of the Primitive Church was recited: their benediction was bestowed: and,

of Apostolicity *. But, alas, in his subsequent Tractate against the audacious heretic, the unwelcome *truth* comes out: and the *reason* of such forbearance stands forth, upon the historical canvass, most prominent and most abundantly manifest. The two superstitious bigots, indeed, Riparius and Desiderius, who seem to have dwelt upon the frontiers of the spiritual Goshen of the Valleys, complained heavily to Jerome, that their neighbouring Parishes or Dioceses were *polluted*, forsooth, by such an unsavoury vicinage: and it was charitably added, that, with Satan's own banner in his hand, Vigilantius, albeit, in the punning phraseology of the facetious Saint, a very Dormitantius, was making, from his aerial station, successful inroads upon the slumbering Churches of the Gauls†. But with respect to

ried away with them from pagan persecution, had become rank heresy; and that they had only to bear their testimony to the doctrines and practices of the Primitive Church, and then, like the seven resuscitated sleepers of Asia, meekly bow down their heads in death.

* *Miror, sanctum episcopum, in cujus parochia esse presbyter dicitur, acquiescere furori ejus, et non virga apostolica virgaque ferrea confringere vas inutile, et tradere in interitum carnis ut spiritus salvus fiat.* Hieron. Epist. liii. Oper. vol. ii. p. 158.

† *Auctores sunt hujus dictationculæ meæ sancti presbyteri Riparius et Desiderius, qui parochias suas vicinia istius scribunt esse maculatas: miserantque libros per fratrem Sisinnium, quos inter crapulam stertens evomuit: et asserunt, repertos esse*

In his Epistle to Riparius, Jerome thinks it expedient to marvel: that the holy Bishop, within whose Alpine Diocese Vigilantius was then residing as a Presbyter, did not crush so useless a vessel with a well-aimed blow from the iron rod

their appointed task being accomplished, they forthwith expired. The application of the tale is easily made: and the Cottian Alps are not the only land of mountains, in which it has been practically exemplified.

When, in the eighth age, the Roman world had fallen deeper and deeper into the wretched superstition of image-worship, the person, who strenuously opposed this odious and unscriptural corruption, was the Emperor Leo Isauricus. In his unsophisticated native mountains, the practice had as yet obtained no footing: and Leo, at Constantinople (surely the name is destined to be fatal to Popery), was shocked and surprised to find a system of idolatry, so utterly unlike that primitive and simple form of Christianity to which he and his fathers before him had been accustomed.

Such were the natural feelings of this iconoclastic Sovereign. Now, unless I altogether mistake in what, subordinately to God's providential dispensation, may be called the *philosophy* of the matter, the unchanging character of the secluded Alpine Mountaineers is accurately exhibited in the similarly unchanging character of the Mountaineers of Isauria. The inhabitants of the cities and of the richer provinces of the Roman Empire gradually apostatised from the sincerity of the Gospel: but the very character of their country was, in the hand of God, the secondary cause which led the sequestered Vallenses to persevere in the unadulterated faith of the Primitive Apostolic Church. Unchanged themselves, when at length they emerged from the figurative sleep of their allegorical Ephesian cavern, they marvelled to find: that the Gospel, which they had car-

the Bishops, evidently the Bishops of the alpine district where the zealously active Leonist sojourned; *they*, however nefarious it might appear to Jerome and his correspondents, however it might elicit a piteous groan from the heaving bosom of the sorely distressed Father, however it might provoke a lamentable *Proh nefas* duly to be re-echoed by Desiderius and Riparius: *they*, the Bishops of the country between the Adriatic Sea and the Cottian Alps, perfectly agreed with the misnamed heretic; and, on one special point of difference between the controvertists, actually *preferred* the ordination of husbands to the ordination of batchelors; nay, if we rigidly interpret the inflated language of Jerome, absolutely made antecedent matrimony a *sine quo non* to the ordination even of a Deacon *.

But this is not all: Rome herself, towering in her sacerdotal potency, was not to escape unscathed. In the Tractate of Jerome, we have a

nonnullos, qui, faventes vitis suis, illius blasphemis acquiescant. Hieron. adv. Vigilant. c. ii. Oper. vol. ii. p. 159. Alas, poor Vigilantius, that his whole heresy should have been produced by an unlucky fit of indigestion!

Incurset Galliarum Ecclesias, portetque nequaquam vexillum Christi, sed insigne diaboli. Hieron. adv. Vigilant. c. ii. Oper. vol. ii. p. 159.

* *Proh nefas! episcopos sui sceleris dicitur habere consortes: si tamen episcopi nominandi sunt, qui non ordinant diaconos, nisi prius uxores duxerint.* Hieron. adv. Vigil. c. i. Oper. vol. ii. p. 158.

case, perhaps the earliest case upon record, of a Leonistic Presbyter, *himself* the long remembered and long venerated *Leo* of Vallensic tradition, supported by the Bishops of a whole people, and, in that support, standing directly opposed to the Roman Pontiff, and to all those other Bishops who were blindly following him in his now-rapidly developing predicted apostasy.

Jerome, nurtured in the adulterate Christianity of opulent cities and fanatic monks and lordly prelates, is amazed, yea horrified, at the alpine audacity of Vigilantius. That stubborn son of the Pyrenean Lyons, who seems to have troubled his head very little about any doctrinal authority save that of Scripture, was unable thence to discover the vital importance of consecrating the Eucharist over the bones of Peter and of Paul, that rich and boasted treasure of Rome Ecclesiastical: whence, *a fortiori*, he could not be expected to entertain any very particular reverence for the less holy fragments of less important dead men and women. *What*, cries Jerome, scandalized to the last pitch of endurance, *does the Roman Bishop, then, do ill, who offers sacrifices to the Lord over the bones of dead men; the bones, I trow, of Peter and of Paul: bones, in our estimation, venerable; bones, in thy estimation, a mere worthless portion of dust? Does the Bishop of Rome do ill, who deems their tombs the altars of Christ? Are the Bishops, not merely of a single city, but of the whole world,*

all mistaken: because, despising the huckster Vigilantius, they reverently enter into the stately cathedrals of the dead.*

Truly, a rapid declaimer ought to be blessed with a good memory. Only two pages before, and in the course of the very same Tractate, Jerome had been groaning over *Bishops*, not indeed (as he remarks) to be called *Bishops*, who were the sworn allies and associates of the desperately wicked Vigilantius: and now he discovers, that *all* the Bishops of *all* the world, with the Pope of Rome at their head, are flat against the heretic. But, though Jerome may forget the important fact which he has recorded, others will remember it. Those, who adhere to the catholic doctrines of the Primitive Church as they stand broadly opposed to unscriptural popish additaments, will recollect, that Vigilantius was not an insulated and unsupported witness to the sincerity of the Gospel. A whole people, with their Bishops and Clergy at their head, were his associates: and the recorded abode of this whole people was *a mountainous district between the Adriatic Sea and the Cottian Alps.*

* Male ergo facit Romanus Episcopus, qui super mortuorum hominum, Petri et Pauli, secundum nos ossa veneratione, secundum te vilem pulvisculum, offert Domino sacrificia, et tumultus eorum Christi arbitratu altaria: et non solum unius urbis, sed totius orbis, errant episcopi, qui, cauponem Vigilantium contemnentes, ingrediuntur basilicas mortuorum? Hieron. adv. Vigil. c. iii. Oper. vol. ii. p. 160.