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JAMES SPRUNT, LL. D.

The UNION SEMINARY REVIEW takes pleasure in presenting to its readers a cut of Dr. James Sprunt, whose article on *The Restoration of Jerusalem* appears in this number, and proposes, without his knowledge or permission, to publish herewith a brief sketch of this versatile man of affairs and large hearted Christian gentleman, to whom our institution is so deeply indebted.

ANCESTRY.

In 1812 Laurence Sprunt, a farmer in Perthshire, Scotland, married Christiana McDonald, daughter of a Highland family, whose brother, John McDonald, was a prosperous planter in Jamaica. They had three children, Alexander, James Menzies, and Isabella, all of whom were educated in Edinburgh. After his graduation, Alexander became a partner in the firm of Reed, Irving & Co., of London and Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, off the coast of Venezuela. As junior partner he had personal charge of the business at Trinidad, where his sterling qualities were promptly recognized. As early as 1841 he is spoken of as a merchant of high standing, a Queen's commissioner, or magistrate, and a ruling elder of the Presbyterian Church in Trinidad. Through reverses following the British emancipation of slaves, his property was swept away, and after some ineffectual efforts in Scotland to re-establish himself, he moved to North Carolina, whither his brother, Rev. James M. Sprunt, D. D., afterwards well known as pastor at Kenansville, principal of

THE WALDENSES, "THE PROMISE OF ITALY."

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In the year 1911, in company with my wife, I visited the Waldenses in their valleys. We went as far as we could by train, then took horses and carriage, and traveled as far as there were roads. When there were no more roads, we took to our feet and climbed the mountains to the "Church in the Cave," where the Waldensians were compelled to worship when persecutions were at their height.

Now, some people do not know who the Waldensians are. Not long ago I inquired of the two attendants in the reference department of one of our city libraries for some books on the Waldenses, only to be asked whether they were ancient or modern people. When my wife submitted to a Smith College graduate a poster she had prepared to advertise a lecture I was to give on this subject, the young lady suggested that it might be well to tell who the Waldenses are. And the two gentlemen who brought me home from a certain Washington church, where I had spoken on this subject recently, confessed that that was the first time they had ever heard of Waldenses. So it might be well for me to tell you at the beginning who these people are.

The Waldenses are Italian Protestants, who live, for the most part, in the Cottian Alps, in Northwest Italy, bordering on France. It is a small district which they inhabit, not more than 22 miles long by 16 miles wide, made up of three principal valleys, deep and narrow, the Luserna, the Perosa and the San Martino, all of it dominated by lofty Mt. Viso, 12,000 feet in altitude. But that little corner of Europe, with its humble community of mountaineers, has been the scene of a struggle which, whether you consider the principle involved, the inequality of the opposing forces or the long duration and ter-

rible details of the successive conflicts, rises to a tragic height and dignity that has never been surpassed, if, indeed, it has ever been equaled.

The principle involved was religious liberty. The number of the Waldenses was never more than 25,000. But those few people stood for two hundred years against the combined Powers of Europe, banded together by the Pope; and, then, for another one hundred years against the combined Catholic Powers, under the leadership, first, of Philip II of Spain, and then Louis XIV of France. During that long period they were subjected to every cruel torture and every grievous wrong which it is possible for one man to inflict upon another. And that the descendants of that outraged people dwell in the Valleys today is due to a feat of arms for which you will search in vain to find a parallel in the military annals of the world's greatest and most warlike people. Of their retreat from Switzerland and their defense at Balsille in 1689 Napoleon said it was the most brilliant military event in the history of the world.

Of all the mediaeval sects or religious bodies the Waldenses are, at the same time, the most ancient and the most evangelical. Indeed, they are the primitive Christians, descendants of those early martyrs who fled from Rome to the mountains under the persecutions of Nero and Caligula. And they are also the original Protestants.

Now, we have always been accustomed, necessarily accustomed to associate Protestantism with some kind of a reformation. But here is a body of Christians, Protestant Christians, who never were reformed, who never needed to be reformed. When Pope Innocent VIII commanded that they return to the Church, they told Pope Innocent VIII that they had never left the Church, but that the Church had left the faith once delivered to the saints, and itself should return.

When the Church assumed temporal power and took on pagan rites and ceremonies, they protested. They protested against the worship of the Virgin and of saints and relics. They protested against the making of pilgrimages to sacred places. They protested against auricular confession and the celibacy of the

clergy. They protested against the doctrine of the eucharist, believing, as do we, that the Lord's Supper is a simple memorial service. And, of course, they protested against those modern doctrines, promulgated in our time, the doctrines of Immaculate Conception and the Infallibility of the Pope.

Indeed, as far back as 1517, the very year in which Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the doors of the church at Wittenberg, the Archbishop of Turin made these charges against the Waldenses:

"They receive the Scriptures as the only rule of faith.

"They reject doctrines introduced by popes and priests.

"They deny that man needs the intercession of saints.

"They reject the doctrine of purgatory and masses for the dead.

"They deny that priests have power to forgive sins.

"They oppose the confessional.

"They protest against the worship of the Virgin and of saints.

"They reject the use of holy water.

"They condemn indulgences.

"They ascribe the doctrine of purgatory to the covetousness of priests.

"They abhor the sign of the cross and the worship of images.

"They deny that wicked men can be representatives of Christ.

"They disown the authority of the Pope.

"They believe that private prayer is as acceptable to God as prayer offered in churches."

Why, these are almost identically the theses which Luther nailed to the Wittenberg church doors that same year. And the Waldenses had been preaching these doctrines for 400 years, not only over Italy, but over France and in Germany and Bohemia. Indeed, I have sometimes thought that Luther, when he went down to Rome in 1510, must have come in contact with some of these Waldenses and imbibed his doctrines from them.

Now, no one could hold such doctrines as those in Italy at that time or at any time and escape persecution. From 1489,

when Pope Innocent VIII gave their lands to Catholics and promised absolution to all who would slay the heretics, down to the Revolution of 1848, they were persecuted almost continually. From 1489 to 1730 there were 37 distinct persecutions of the Waldenses, the aim of many of which was their extermination. Every torture mentioned in the 11th chapter of the Hebrews they suffered. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were slain with the sword. And then everything which the devilish ingenuity of man could conjure up in fifteen centuries was visited upon them. They were stripped naked, and, with their heads bound between their knees, they were rolled down the mountain side and over the precipice. Sulphur was introduced underneath their finger nails, in their nose and ears and under their skin, and the torch applied. Their bowels were removed and a live cat bound up in their place. Scarcely a stone in those valleys that was not reddened with their martyr blood.

But it was in 1655 that these persecutions reached their height. In that year priests were sent into the Valleys who commanded the Waldenses to attend their services. None of them went. The Pope promised plenary indulgence to all who would renounce their faith. No one accepted the invitation. At Bobbio the priest went into the church, set up his altar, placed images of the saints about the wall, and commanded the people to attend his services on pain of death if they refused. They went, but they tore down the altar, threw the images out the window, and then listened to a vigorous sermon by one of their own pastors from the text, Isaiah 45: 20, "Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a God that cannot save."

At another place the priest commanded the Waldenses to attend mass on pain of death if they refused. They replied that they preferred death a thousand times, since it could not be shown that either the Saviour or His disciples had instituted the mass. And their grand old hero, Janavel, when the number of his followers had been reduced to 17 and he was warned that his

wife and daughters would be burned at the stake if he did not recant, replied: "There is no torture so cruel, no death so barbarous but that I welcome them gladly rather than deny my Lord. You may send my wife and daughters through the flames; the fire can but destroy their poor bodies. Their souls I commit unto God, as also mine own should it please Him to permit me to fall into your hands."

Well, to such a height did the persecutions arise that the conscience of Europe was aroused. And Cromwell, the great Protector of England, sent letters of protest by the hand of his secretary, John Milton, to the different Protestant Powers, and a special messenger to the Duke of Savoy, the arch persecutor. He raised the sum of \$200,000 for Waldensian relief, himself contributing \$10,000, and invited them to make their home in Ireland. Great generals offered their services. And it was at this time that Milton wrote his famous sonnet:

"Avenge, O Lord! Thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountain cold.
Even them who kept Thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,
Forget not. In Thy book 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 martyred blood and ashes sow
O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway
The triple tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who, having learned Thy way,
Early may fly the Babylonian woe."

These remonstrances were successful for a time, or until the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, in 1685. In that year Louis XIV, seeking to curry favor with the Pope, and to atone for his many sins, promised that he would drive all the Waldenses from the Valleys. Two armies were sent against them,

one from France and one from Italy. These killed 13,000 of the Waldenses, then drove like cattle the remaining 12,000, mostly women and children, across the Piedmont plains to the prison of Turin, 30 miles distant. Here they were piled one upon another, sleeping on the bare brick floor, given black bread to eat and foul water to drink, freezing in winter, melting in summer, until 8,000 of their number had died. Then the order came for their exile to Switzerland. It was read to them at 5 o'clock one winter's afternoon. But immediately the 3,500 remaining of them—500 had been sent to the galleys of Louis—arose, and went forth into the bitter cold, marching 10 or 12 miles that wintry night. Clad as they were in rags, poorly nourished and enfeebled by their long imprisonment, many of them perished on the way. But the Pope and Louis issued the proclamation: "Heresy is extirpated. The Waldenses are no more. Their name and faith are forever proscribed in Italy."

Well, in less than three years they started back, that is, the 800 men remaining of them, to wrest again their beloved Valleys from the mightiest monarch in Europe. It was a sublime frenzy of patriotism—a combination alike of supreme devotion to religious truth and consuming love of country that is without a parallel. They were furnished money by William of Orange; their leader was Henri Arnaud, at the same time their military leader and their pastor.

Harassed on all sides by the armies of France and Italy, and now by those of Switzerland, for the Swiss had engaged to prevent their return, but 400 of them arrived in the Valleys. But those 400 valiant men withstood, for an entire winter, the combined armies of France and Italy, numbering not less than 25,000, winning from Napoleon the encomium: "The most brilliant event in the military history of the world."

Fortunately for them, Louis and the Duke quarreled and turned their guns on each other. And henceforth the lives of the Waldenses were comparatively secure. But their sojourn in Switzerland had worked this hardship upon them in that it ever afterward identified them in the public mind with the German Reformation; so that persecution continued. They were

not allowed to establish their churches outside the Valleys, or, for a time, to leave the Valleys. They could not bury their dead within enclosed cemeteries or mark their graves with any hope of the resurrection. It was not permitted them to purchase lands or receive inheritances. To receive degrees at the university or commissions in the army was denied them. They were classed with Jews in that citizenship was withheld from them as well as religious liberty. Their Bibles having been destroyed, for they had translated the Scriptures into the vernacular of the people, boys and young men would stand before the pulpit and repeat from memory the portion for the day. They were called "Vaudois" in derision; Joan of Arc, you remember, was called a "Vaudoise." We know them as "Waldensians," from a word which means "Dwellers in the valleys." Many people think they get this name from Peter Waldo, a French Protestant, who fled to the Valleys for protection in the twelfth century. But it is quite as likely, as the Waldensians contend, that Peter Waldo became "Peter the Waldensian" from dwelling among them.

In 1848, as one of the results of the Revolution, religious liberty was granted to all the people. And as the armies of Italy went up to Rome, to march in triumphal procession before the king, Charles Albert, in celebration of the victories, it was universally conceded to the Waldenses the privilege of marching first in the procession.

Immediately their churches sprang up all over Italy, for they had carefully planted the seed, disguised as merchants and beggars. Two colonies were sent to South America, and settled in Uruguay and Argentina. I saw some of these when traveling in those countries in 1916. In 1893 Pastor Tron, whom I met in Torre Pellice, brought over a colony to the United States, and settled them in North Carolina, 70 miles east of Asheville, on the Southern Railway. There were 40 families then, there are 60 now. They are mostly farmers, cultivating grapes. But they have, also, cotton mills and factories for the manufacture of hosiery and embroidery. Three colonies were settled in Texas, near Texarkana, Brownsville and

Gainesville; one in Missouri, near Monnett; another in Utah, near Provo, and still another in California, near Santa Ana. This I visited in 1919. And the 500 Waldensians in New York City, mostly waiters in the great hotels, like the Martinique and the Waldorf Astoria, have banded themselves into a society which holds regular religious services.

The faith of these people, as I have intimated, is that of the Reformed Church. They accept the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice. They are governed by synods, presided over by moderators. And while their churches in the large cities are self-supporting, the churches in the Valleys are supported from a common fund, one-third of which goes to the pastors, one-third to the poor, and one-third to missions—a very equitable arrangement, it seems to me. It is a stern, Scotch Puritanism that governs the life and faith of these people. But that severity is modified by the warmth of the Italian nature, and softened and sweetened by Italian graciousness and amiability.

In character they have always been highly esteemed. Victor Immanuel, grandfather of the present king, and his son, King Humbert, were their warm friends, the latter calling them "The promise of Italy." The present king and queen have always employed them to the exclusion of others, as nursemaids and governesses in the royal palace, there being five so employed today. Among the Waldenses have been some of the most eminent men of Italy. Marconi, the inventor of wireless telegraphy, is a member of their church at Leghorn, and, until he went up to Rome to become a senator, was a teacher of a large Bible class in that Sunday school. Mme. Marconi is the only Protestant woman to be made a "Lady of Honor" at the royal court. Cavour, the great Italian statesman of the last century, perhaps the greatest of his time, was a descendant of the Valleys.

The center of their work is at Torre Pellice, called La Tour, in French, at the entrance of the Valleys. It has a college, a normal school, a hospital and a home for the aged. Their theological seminary is at Florence. And in Rome they have two

great churches, the Second, dedicated in 1914, the finest Protestant edifice in southern Europe, the best equipped for institutional work of any church anywhere in Europe. It was built at a cost of \$200,000, the gift of Mrs. John S. Kennedy, of New York. Located on the Piazza Cavour, it is not far from the Vatican, and in plain sight of the spot where, in 1560, John Louis Paschal, one of their pastors, was burned at the stake in the presence of the Papal court. Every stone in the foundation of this church was drawn from the Valleys, reddened, many of them, at times with the blood of Waldensian martyrs.

The Methodists have an important work in Rome and some other cities, and the Baptists support a printing press which sends out the best Protestant literature published in that country. But most of us believe that the best way to do Protestant work in Italy is through the Waldenses, the original Protestants. They are Italians, possessing the confidence of the best people. They are the best educated people in Italy; for, whereas the general illiteracy is 55 per cent., there is no illiteracy at all among the Waldenses. They speak French as well as Italian; for, since 1630, when 15 of their 17 pastors died of the plague and their places were filled by pastors from Switzerland, their preaching has generally been in French. So that they are fitted to do Protestant work in France as well as in Italy. Their pastors are educated in Florence, hence speak the purest Italian. And many of them complete their education in England or Scotland, marrying English or Scotch wives, so speak good English.

And these are the people who did the Protestant work in Italy during the war. When the Y. M. C. A. entered Italy they were compelled to stipulate that they would do no religious work. But the government appointed nine Waldensian pastors as chaplains, three to work among the Austrians and Germans who were Protestants, and six among the Alpini, those Italian soldiers who defended the high mountain passes against the Austrians, many of whom were Waldensians.

They suffered greatly during the war. Scarcely a family but has lost one or more members. And there are many or-

phans. Now the Italian Government would willingly support and educate these orphans, but in Catholic orphanages, under the direction of priests and nuns. Naturally the Waldenses are not willing that this should be done. So they have built their own orphanages, five of them. But they are a very poor people, confined, as they are, for the most part, in those narrow and unproductive valleys, and the sufferers from persecution during the centuries. So they appeal to us for help, help to carry on their Protestant work, help to support their orphans.

Now, has it ever occurred to you how greatly indebted we of America are to Italy? It was an Italian who discovered our country, Christoforo Colombo. It was another Italian who named our country, Amerigo Vespucci. And it was still other Italians who made the first explorations and prepared the way for colonization, John Cabot, an Italian, employed by England, and John of Verezzano, an Italian, employed by France.

As I have read the annals of the Waldenses, I have been impressed with the conviction that a people with so great a history in the past must have a great history in the future. And I have been led to join my prayers to those of John Milton, that their martyr blood, sown so deep and wide in the soil of Italy, may spring up into an harvest a hundredfold.