

THE
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ART. I.—CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM.

IT is no longer necessary, thanks to the ample discussion of the subject at Church Congresses and Church Conferences of late years (and an exposition of it at the Carlisle Church Conference quite recently by one of the veterans engaged in the discussion), to begin by defining the two terms which stand at the head of this paper, and to show their connection. The interest taken in the widely-spread movement called "Socialism" has been steadily growing from year to year. It holds intellectual Germany enthralled by its theories, and has never lost its grasp on France, the country of ideas. It celebrates its triumphs not only among the warm-blooded peoples of the South of Europe, but also among the sober and stolid peoples of the Netherlands and Scandinavia. In the British Isles, where a score of years ago Socialism was almost unknown, it is now represented by two or three bodies professing its doctrines and their variations; and even the Anarchists, like the rest, manage to have their organ in the press. From the report of the ninth annual conference of the Social Democratic Federation, held last August, we learn that the Socialist vote, which in the elections for the London School Boards was 8,532 in four constituencies in 1885, had risen to 49,830 in seven constituencies last year; also of the progress of Socialist ideas among trades unionists, apart from the fact that "during the past twelve months the Social Democratic Federation has done more international work than at any other period of its existence."¹ It would seem, therefore, that the sturdy common-sense of the labouring classes of this country does not prove such a powerful barrier against the advances of the movement as was once supposed. Even America does not enjoy immunity from Socialistic organization

¹ *Justice* (official organ of the Federation), August 17th, 1889.
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and agitation, notwithstanding its widely diffused wealth and industrial progress and prosperity. It is natural, therefore, that the Christian aspect of such a vastly important movement should force itself upon the attention of Churchmen on both sides of the Atlantic. And what is Christian Socialism but an attempt to solve the social problem in accordance with the principles of Christianity?

To give, then, shape and form to this idea which is "in the air"—to present in a tangible manner its leading features, so as to enable those who have the will and the power to grapple with the social question—is the object of this paper. Its tendencies are practical, and to help our readers to seize on its main points and to give them their attentive consideration, we will dwell, in the first place, on the attempt of "Christianizing Socialism," which was one of the aims of the Christian Socialists in this country, headed by Maurice, in 1848; and next, after pointing out the Christian duty of studying the social problem, will indicate some of the methods of solving it on the part of the ministers of religion, men of business, Members of Parliament, and Ministers of the Crown, all of whom have their share in the work of social amelioration, either in the way of voluntary effort or legislation. The aim of all ought to be to reduce social abuses to a minimum, to introduce social reforms, to improve and increase the number of social institutions, so as to remove as far as possible the just causes of discontent with the existing social arrangements.

It is with this aim before them that both in Roman Catholic and Protestant countries bodies of Christian Socialists have formed themselves into a sacred phalanx to oppose anti-Christian tendencies in Socialistic agitation as carried on in the present day, whilst encouraging various forms of combination and co-operation for social ends on Christian principles with a view to conduct the Socialist movement into safe channels.

I. *What is it to Christianize Socialism?*—The task, to begin with, might appear hopeless, since Socialism professes to be a new gospel to supersede the old faith, and its leaders and many of its adherents tend to atheism, agnosticism, and other forms of unbelief. To say to such, as has been done often of late—as, notably, the Bishop of Derry did at a Church Congress one or two years ago—that "the spirit and aspiration of Socialism has a Christian aspect," would seem to be little to the point. But what is meant here and in such-like phrases is this: That Socialism, as an ideal of society, as a protest against the selfish tendencies of individualism carried to excess, as an appeal to the social instincts of humanity, as an accentuation of its corporate life with corresponding duties of Christian men to each other, as an adumbration of a harmonized social order, in which

there would be room for the full and free exercise of social functions, as a combined effort to insure the common welfare—that Socialism, as a conception of a more perfect social state, where the maximum of social happiness and the minimum of social misery could be reached—in short, that Socialism, as a collective term, embracing every form of philanthropy and every scheme of social improvement, is not inconsistent with Christianity; that, on the contrary, any attempt to realize its ideals must fail unless it has Christian principles for its basis and Christian love for its moving force. In reference to the latter, the father of Modern Socialism, and, in a sense, of Christian Socialism too, the Duke of St. Simon, said to his disciples on his death-bed: "Remember, to do great things you must have enthusiasm." It may be interesting to inquire what is the opinion of those most concerned on this matter. We will quote two utterances from *Justice*, which express upon the whole the prevalent sentiment on this subject among Socialists at home and abroad:

The English Christian Socialist is but the embryo Federation Socialist. Nay, more than this, he is the Socialist actually emerged from the chrysalis of bourgeois habits of thought and aspiration, but whose wings are limp and heavy from his long imprisonment, and unable for the time to endure that sustained flight which shall carry him once and for ever away from the shell he has quitted.

The Christian Socialist insists upon the necessity for a Christian basis to one's Socialism. He demands that as Socialism is more in accord with Christian ethics than is capitalism, all men should first be good Christians. Social Democrats reason the other way about. They say that man as an animal is a creature of circumstances, that his whole being is moulded by his surroundings, but that, alone among animals, he has the power to modify his surroundings, and that in a social state, where the conventional morality is bad, and all the nobler religious teachings are degraded, effort should be directed, not to moralizing or Christianizing the individual, but to changing his surroundings.

But, in allusion to the last quotation, we may say, How are the social surroundings to be changed? All such changes of any importance have resulted from the previous spread of ideas. As far as Europe is concerned, it was the spread of the Christian ideas, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, which freed society from slavery and serfdom and secured civic liberties; which led to the formation of those trade co-operations, guilds, and fraternities for mutual succour and defence, of which the emblems still survive in the insignia of the more ancient of our friendly societies in the present day, with their Christian mottoes, indicating the strong yearning for equality and the claims of Christian brotherhood. Wickliffe and his poor priests in this country and Luther in Germany were in full sympathy with the movement for agrarian reform and the reformation of trade guilds from becoming oppressors of the poor handicraftsmen, though

the Reformers soon felt that caution and correction were needed in the expression of their sympathies, as when Melancthon pointed out that to deduct the principles of Communism as of universal application from the communism of the early Christians would be as rational as to infer the duty of killing all the sons of wealthy men because Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his only son Isaac. In the same way, those least in sympathy with the Evangelical revival in its distinctly religious aspects have pointed out its close connection with the humanitarian efforts to improve the condition of the masses of that period. Lord Shaftesbury, in this sense, was a Christian Socialist.

So, too, the recent revival of spiritual activity in the Christian world, and not least so in this country, is accompanied by earnest discussions of social problems in every representative meeting, not only of the Church of England, but the Nonconformist bodies. Witness the recent utterances at the conference of Congregationalists and Baptists. The former devoted themselves to the land question, as the synod of the "Free Church" in Scotland a few years ago pronounced in favour of the Crofters. The president of the Baptist Union, taking for his subject "Christian Citizenship," addressed himself to the consideration of "the conflict between capital and labour," reminding his hearers "that the hard toiler with horny hand is a member of the commonwealth, as is the wealthy merchant or the millionaire," etc. In America a circular has been recently issued by a clergyman of Boston, proposing to start a society of Christian Socialists, "basing our Socialism on the Fatherhood of God, and the resultant brotherhood of man, and trying to carry it out in the spirit of Him Who was the First-born among many brethren." All these signs of an awakening of Christians to a higher sense of social duty show at least that Christianity is now, as in former ages, working through its ideas as a leaven in society, and in this manner Christianizing the Socialistic ideas of the age we live in. The encyclical letter from the Lambeth Conference last year refers to this subject, and in this sense of approaching it:

No more important problems can well occupy the attention—whether of clergy or laity—than such as are connected with what is popularly called Socialism. To study schemes proposed for redressing the social balance, to welcome the good which may be found in the aims or operations of any, and to devise methods, whether by legislation or by social combinations, or in any other way, for a peaceful solution of the problems without violence or injustice, is one of the noblest pursuits which can engage the thoughts of those who strive to follow in the footsteps of Christ.

At the same time, it must be confessed that so far official utterances have not gone much beyond the expression of safe

generalities, which, true enough in themselves, do not help much in grappling with the subject energetically and effectually, or convincing gainsayers in the ranks of Socialism. What, then, remains to be done by way of Christianizing Socialism?

To put it briefly, we should say something, if not much, may be done by way of judicious advice and gentle admonition to restrain the "social passion," and this by showing the importance of patient waiting for the final triumph of social ideas culminating in social improvement, remembering that all great changes are brought about gradually, and not by slap-dash revolutions, accompanied by force and violence, and, like the French Revolution, leaving in the end many social disappointments behind them. Much might be done by way of pointing out the importance of moral improvement in the individual as the antecedent to social amelioration; the cultivation of social virtues, such as self-devotion and self-denial, for the common good, without which mere mechanical alterations in the recasting of society would be useless, as they have proved to be worthless even under the most favourable conditions in the attempts of Socialistic colonization made on American soil about fifty years ago, and this under the guidance of able and earnest leaders, eminently fitted, mentally and morally, for their task. Again, something might be done by well-considered discussion, conducted dispassionately, with toleration on both sides. The Bishop of Rochester made the attempt a few years ago; the Guild of St. Matthew, before which he preaches annually, and of which he says that "its aims, if not its methods, are among those which the Lambeth encyclical emphasizes with significant commendation," and others have tried this plan; and we have been informed by a lady friend acting independently, and holding discussions among the wilder sort of Continental Socialists who meet at their Soho Square Club, that even here she received a patient and respectful hearing. And if it is permissible, without incurring the charge of egotism, in such a paper as this to refer to the writer's own experiences, we may add that in our correspondence with leading Socialists in various countries of Europe and America, most of them, like the late Karl Marx, utterly unknown to the writer, and all occupying a standpoint opposed to his, he has invariably received most valuable information, given with the utmost courtesy, whilst not a few, attracted by his writings on Socialism, have put themselves of their own accord into communication with him, and have corresponded freely with him since; which at least shows that when the controversy is carried on with intelligent sympathy and fairness, and where the points of contact between Socialism and Christianity are honestly recognised and the contention between Christians

and Socialists is courteously put, arguments receive their due weight; though immediate conviction and conversion to opposite opinions from those held for years with all the ardour of strong natures, honest, however misguided, and suffering cheerfully like martyrs for their opinion—we speak of some, not all—must not be too sanguinely expected.

But in order to direct others and discuss problems of this nature, those who make the attempt should be well equipped by previous study of the subject before they enter upon their task. We would therefore, in the next place, and before we point out the social duty of Christian men towards the so-called masses, dwell for a few moments on the obligation of studying the social problem, and this especially as far as Christian ministers are concerned. Taking refuge in pious commonplaces, and trying to persuade others without full conviction arrived at after conscientious study, cannot do any lasting good, and may do immediate harm. Any attempt to deal with the subject presumes a fairly competent knowledge of its schemes. To correct its errors, to encourage its lawful efforts for the amelioration of the people's condition "without violence and injustice," the subject must be approached *sine ira*, though not *sine studio*. And such a study implies a previous knowledge of the outlines, at least, of political economy. Here, as the German Christian Socialist Todt remarks, we have a system of social anatomy, Socialism itself is a system of social pathology, and the Gospel, he adds, is the system of social therapeutics to heal the sores of humanity. The same writer, in a separate pamphlet, suggests the importance of making the study of political economy part of the curriculum of every theological student. The ignorance of the clergy on this head is certainly remarkable. To mention one or two instances in point: Some years ago we received the visit of a young fellow-curate, who, seeing some books in German on political economy lying on our writing-table, inquired with engaging simplicity whether it was the political economy of *that* country we were studying, evidently misled by the word "political," and imagining that, as each country has its political constitution, so, too, it has a science of economy all to itself. On another occasion an incumbent, coming in just at the moment when we were completing a biographical sketch of a well-known Socialist of the past, and seeing a number of books and pamphlets lying open on the table for reference, was astonished to find that the history and theory of Socialism could not be written, like a fairy story, "right out of one's own head." These are only glaring instances of clerical ignorance on the subject. Yet how important in the present day is some slight knowledge of the outlines of economics! Even if it were for no other reason but an intelligent understanding of such hotly-discussed questions in connection with it as whether

self-interest is the prime or sole motor of economic production, consumption, and exchange, or whether it is more in keeping with our Christian view of it that there is an ethical aspect as well—that egoism must be augmented by altruism, and selfishness modified by sympathy, unless the competition struggle is to end in class conflicts. A mere acquaintance with the commonplaces of the science will show how far-reaching the tendencies are of that economic theory which makes material wealth, instead of the moral development of man, the chief aim of the science. And in special relation to the subject before us, how important is it to decide whether competition and individual enterprise, as a purely natural process, as some economists affirm, end in the survival of the fittest, or whether Socialists are not to some extent justified in saying that in this struggle the weakest go to the wall, and all do not start fair at the beginning—*i.e.*, on equal terms as to natural and inherited advantages: Are not Christian pity and benevolence to come in here, so as to soothe and soften the severity of the struggle, and to supply the spiritual cement without which society could not cohere?

It may be said that divines have no business with studies of this nature, and no time for them. We fear those who use the argument as an excuse for neglecting a duty requiring a certain amount of intellectual effort are very far from learned in the "science of sciences," indolence and want of interest being the more likely reason for the omission.

II. But the duty of ministers does not stop here. We proceed, then, to indicate what may be done by way of personal work and influencing others in the performance of social duties and the settlement of social questions.

1. It is plain that the general attitude of the *Christian ministry* ought to be that of benevolent neutrality where differences between employers and employed are concerned. If there be any leaning, it should be towards the weaker side—"Christ's poor." To give what might seem to be a tacit support to any acts of even apparent injustice, to withhold sympathy from the aspirations of the people, even when they may be slightly unreasonable, would be fatal to clerical influence. On the other hand, officiously aiding or abetting popular dissatisfaction where it is for the purpose of gaining popularity, to back up ecclesiastical pretension by meddling and interfering as a laudable device of "priestcraft," cannot be recommended. But as mediators between employer and employed in town and country the attitude of the clergy, naturally sympathizing with all classes, is clearly marked out. Their actual activities in this respect must be guided by prevailing circumstances. As dispensers of parochial and private charities in alleviating distress, as organizers and promoters of associations, clubs, and other institutions for

the purpose of encouraging thrift, independence, self-respect, and effecting security against accidents, occasional loss of employment, and unforeseen calamities or sudden death, they are in their right place as the virtual, if not official, guardians of the poor. We are not among the number of those who counsel making friends with democracy as a wise measure of ecclesiastical politics, but everything should be done to clear the Church from such charges as those quoted from *Justice* in the note below,¹ of siding with the classes against the masses. When so many would-be saviours of society look for new forms of faith to supersede Christianity, as incapable of application to the social needs of the present day, those who believe Christ to be the Saviour of the world, as His ministers, ought not to despair of saving the social world by the power of Christianity.

2. *Christian men of business* have clearly defined duties in their direct relation with the men under their employ. As lovers of men, they have ample opportunities of raising the level of material comfort and moral tone among those under their employ. By means of profit-sharing and provident schemes in connection with the firm they have ample opportunities of raising their income and rendering it more secure. By means of technical instruction of the younger operatives and opportunities afforded for mutual improvement during the hours of leisure and in a multiplicity of ways, they have opportunities of showing a personal interest in the comfort, competency, and culture of the labourers and their families who depend on them for their daily bread, whereby the relationship might be rendered much more friendly and parental than it is in nine cases out of

¹ Did you ever read the so-called Church Catechism? No! Then don't, unless you want to see how, as Gibbon Wakefield said, it teaches slavishness as the first duty of man. That is the main object of the Church of England—to keep the multitudes down “in that state of life” in which it has “pleased” [it reads “*shall* please”] “God to call them.” In the Catholic Church, with all its many and great defects, there is at least the tradition of equality. In the Church of England the idea of equality never has existed, and never will. It is essentially the Christianity of the confiscating classes, the religion of the money-bag, the creed of the man of great estate. A few, a very few, there are in its midst who, recognising the signs of the times and actuated by really high motives, are trying to turn this great subsidised organization of mammonites and their hangers-on to some better use than acting as the mere chloroform agent of the upper classes.—Oct. 8th.

Nor is this to be wondered at; drawn from the classes who live and thrive upon the misery of the workers, many of them too stupid for any other calling—while inflated by their extensive system of training with an exaggerated notion of their own importance and superiority—the ministers of the Established Church are permeated with ideas based on all the errors of the old Toryism allied to the brutal theories of the Manchester School of Liberalism, and without any of the redeeming features of either.—Oct. 15th, 1887.

ten. And it is the absence of such patriarchal relations which renders trade disputes and strikes so virulent in the animosities they breed. What we recommend is actually done by Harmel Bros., in their lace factory, near Reims, and to some extent by Price and Son, in their candle manufactory, in this country; but the number of such cases ought to be much larger than it is, whilst numerous instances of hard grinding down of the poor tell a sad and serious tale as to the unsatisfactory relation of capital and labour, which, after all, is the principal cause of discontent, and sends those who smart under it into the social camp of Adullam, which is Socialism. Such cases as that of the match-box makers (males) working 16 hours a day, and of poor women of the same trade receiving $2\frac{1}{4}$ d. a gross, whilst the company pays a dividend of 20 per cent.; of married women with young families, left to themselves in their absence, wielding heavy hammers for 12 or 14 hours a day; of chain-makers working 12 hours a day, at the rate of 10s. to 11s. per week; of pallid, horny-skinned young women working from 6 to 9 o'clock at night, and remaining clean, civil, honest, and respectable at 5s. 4d. per week; of men working from 6 in the morning to 8.30 at night for 4s. a week—cases like these, vouched for by Mr. Burnett in his report as labour correspondent of the Board of Trade, and others brought out in connection with the inquiry instituted into the "sweating system" in London and Paris, where "competition, pitiless and incessant, determines the lowest rates of wages"—they are termed "starvation wages"—are crying instances of inequality and injustice, which cannot fail to move Christian hearts to yearning pity and resentment almost, as dark spots on our much-boasted civilization, pointing out the sad lesson how much has yet to be done by way of "moralizing capital," and infusing the spirit of Christianity into the daily transaction of business.

3. Next to men of business, *statesmen, Ministers of the Crown, and Members of Parliament* are in a position of being able to further the cause of social reform, and therefore incur a solemn duty; whilst nothing is more difficult than to steer a safe middle-course between State Socialism, or too much Governmental interference with matters of social import, and complete non-interference, leaving things to settle themselves as best they may, according to the leave-alone theory, which is fast becoming discredited, after a century's trial. From the Christian point of view the State is responsible for the social well-being of all classes, and is the natural protector of the weak. A Christian Government is in duty bound, not only to safeguard and maintain the sacredness of property, but also the sanctity of the household. But excessive hours of labour on the part of delicate women and children, which destroy the health of body and soul alike, the

dull drudgery of agricultural labour as now carried on through all the long and weary hours of week-days, and even on the day of rest as far as many of the young are concerned, interfering sadly with the work of education and spiritual training, week-days and Sundays, all these destroy the sacredness of family life, and become the source of moral degeneration and degradation in the individual. Here the duty of the Christian State of watching over the spiritual as well as the temporal interests of all classes becomes evident. The very existence of a National Church implies the acceptance of this theory. For this reason the officers of such a Church, her appointed ministers in their character as citizens, as well as in the discharge of their special duties in the commonwealth, are bound, by way of instruction, correction, and exhortation, to form public opinion and bring its pressure to bear on public authority. This may be done by means of resolutions passed in Convocation and conferences, or memorials presented to the Queen or to Parliament by the Church in her corporate character, or Churchmen associated in given localities for that purpose. In Germany, where the progress of Socialism has been so rapid and extensive in recent years, this has been done to a considerable extent, and the effect of such action, in addition to other causes no doubt operating in the same direction, has been that both the Emperor William I. and his grandson have expressed themselves in the most unequivocal manner in favour of social reform on strictly Christian principles.¹ In this country similar ends are compassed by different means. In the absence of paternal government, Parliamentary inquiries do the work of promoting and preparing measures of social legislation; and a special association, consisting entirely of members of Parliament, has been formed of late for the purpose of facilitating and stimulating this kind of Parliamentary action. Much help might be afforded to such a body of legislators by clergymen individually or collectively in furnishing the requisite information on the

¹ Take, *e.g.*, the following quotation from the present Emperor's speech from the throne on succeeding his father: "Especially I appropriate to myself to its full extent his message of November 17th, 1881, and in the sense of that declaration shall continue striving to make Imperial legislation continue in the future to afford to the working population the protection which it can extend, in conformity with the principles of Christian morality, to the weak and distressed in the struggle for existence. I hope that it will be possible in this way to come nearer to the equalization of unhealthy social contrasts, and I entertain the confident hope that in solicitude for our domestic welfare I shall meet with the unanimous support of all true friends of the Empire, and of the Federal Governments, without division or party differences. In the same way, however, I consider it necessary to support our national and social development within the paths of legality, and to oppose firmly all efforts having the aim and tendency to undermine public order."

social condition of the poor among whom they labour, and the suggestion of remedies for their just grievances. More trustworthy information would be obtained, and ideas for social improvement elicited, from the clergy and the church-workers employed by them in their respective parishes than is done in the ordinary course of hearing evidence by Parliamentary Commissions officially conducted, often not without party bias, both in the selection of the Commission and the witnesses heard before it. But this only by the way.

Christian Socialism, however, is not so much a social theory for immediate application in the parish, in the workshop, in the factory, in the field, at Government boards and departments of State, as it is the expression of the general truth that Christianity is the salt of the earth which is to save society from corruption; that the Christian ministry are a body of peace-makers, promoting concord, by virtue of their office, in the conflict of selfish interests, thus preventing dangerous collision, and a body of public instructors, teaching mutual forbearance and gentleness by means of Christian education, and forming character and shaping indirectly the conduct of the social units, fitting them for the performance of their social functions in the aggregate; that the power of Christianity works from within rather than from without, and, like the heart, sending blood, and with it life-vigour, throughout the whole body, strengthening head and hands and all the organic parts, infusing the renovating power of Christian faith, hope, and love, which, permeating the whole body of society, from the centre to the extremities, is capable of producing healthy and harmonious action in the exercise of all the social functions. Thus, *e.g.*, a firm faith in social providence would naturally help in stimulating cheerful activity and diligent care, whilst indolence, indifference, aimless lethargy and despairing discontent would as naturally result from a relapse into social fatalism.

Two dangers are to be avoided—over-much fussiness to do everything for the people at the present juncture, when interest has been roused on their behalf. Good-natured people, in their indiscriminate acts of charity as well as in their ill-considered plans of social tinkering, may have cause at times to say with Benvolio in Marlowe's "Faust":

"My heart's more ponderous than my head."

But there is the opposite danger, and especially after the first effervescence of feeling has passed away, as it will sooner or later, after the public mind has been moved in any cause profoundly, to be followed by a national reaction—namely, the feeling, so pleasant to the comfortable, to be satisfied with things as they are, as if they were divinely appointed as social anomalies to

exercise our faith, rather than facts to be faced in a manly fashion. Let everything, say such, be done by the people and self-help; there is no need meddling with social arrangements which are apt to rectify themselves if sufficient time is permitted to elapse. It is of no use quarrelling with Providence and the nature of things. To this we reply that it is the intention of Providence that by means of human effort and energizing enthusiasm improvements should be effected. Given conditions cannot be altered, but other elements may be introduced, modifying and sometimes entirely transforming them. Spiritual destitution is thus provided for by extraordinary special spiritual agencies and machinery. Social defects must be capable of similar treatment. The example of our Lord, combining the humane and spiritual acts of healing, feeding, and comforting those suffering in the body with acts of teaching, preaching, revealing, in His appeals to the higher spiritual nature of man, should teach all such to do likewise. It is in this way of fulfilling her social as well as her spiritual mission that Christianity triumphed in the past; in the same way more splendid triumphs still are reserved for her in the future. "If Christianity," says Cabet somewhere—and Cabet himself was an earnest, single-minded Socialist of the old type—"had been interpreted and applied in the spirit of Jesus Christ; if it had been well known and faithfully practised by a vast majority of Christians, imbued with sincere piety, who only need to know the truth to follow it—a Christianity such as this, with its morals, its philosophy, its precepts, would have been sufficient, and will still prove sufficient, for the establishment of a perfect social and political organization to deliver humanity from the ills which afflict it, and to assure the happiness of the human race on the globe. In that case no one could refuse to call himself Christian."

M. KAUFMANN.

ART. II.—AMONG THE VAUDOIS AT THE BICENTENARY.

IN the summer of this year I had the privilege of receiving an invitation to be present at the bicentenary celebration of the most remarkable event in a very remarkable history—the "Glorieuse Rentrée" of the Vaudois.

Now, who were these Vaudois? They have been a good deal heard of in this country at different times. They were the peasant inhabitants of a few parishes in the Italian Alps; but they have a history which for interest surpasses every other, except that