



History of the Waldenses of Italy: From Their Origin to the Reformation (Classic Reprint)

Emilio Comba

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Excerpt from History of the Waldenses of Italy: From Their Origin to the Reformation

"It is a beautiful peculiarity of this little people that it should occupy so prominent a place in the history of Europe." This saying of Michelet expresses so well the opinion commonly held, that a new attempt to write its history may, to some, appear superfluous. It may be urged, that, the history of the Waldenses being well known, there is no need to rewrite it. We reply: The history of the Waldenses is not so well-known as is generally assumed. Their early history has been thoroughly explored and discussed, but has never yet been recounted; indeed a writer of great authority has said, "The history of the ancient Waldenses certainly remains to be written." This is a grave omission indeed, which may well strike us as singular. Was it worth while, it may be asked, to trace their origin so far back and then leave their history unrecorded? There has been a desire on the part of some to extend backward their early history; with this only as a result, that it has been crushed out of all shape. The historian has filled it full of fables and traditions picked up at hap-hazard; then, as if with trumpet-blast and clarion-ring, its antiquity was blazoned forth. But, although the sound re-echoed far and wide, it could not dispel the thick cloud that overhung that people's origin and early days. Flatterers are more to be feared than assailants. The former would have it credited or imagined that the Waldenses are of a patriarchal age - of great duration; that they are apostolic in name and in fact, but barren withal; that they had an existence, but always in the cradle; that they did not live with all the word implies, but slept for three, seven, or even ten centuries! It is quite possible to conceive that such an uneventful existence - if such could be - might well have passed unnoticed; what we deny is that such an existence was possible.

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