

THE CHURCHES OF VAL RENDÉNA AND THE LEGEND OF CHARLES THE GREAT.

The following details as to the churches of Val Rendéna, and the various traces still to be found of Charles the Great having marched an army through the Lombard Alps, are extracted from an article by Dr. N. Bolognini in the 1875 'Annuario' of the Trentine Alpine Club.

The oldest portion of the present church of San Stefano dates from early in the fifteenth century. The choir and nave up to the present door were first erected, probably on the site of the primitive chapel. Owing to the steepness of the rock, it was necessary to build up the western wall from below the level of the rest of the building. The vault thus formed was used as a sacristy; whilst the faithful approached the church by a granite staircase, still existing, which winds round the church from S. to E., and reaches the ancient presbytery close to where an altar to S. Michele now stands.

After 1519, the church was extended about sixteen feet towards the N., bringing it to its present form; and the external staircase, by which the church is now entered, was constructed, to the injury of the façade and of several older frescoes; amongst them, those of the 'Seven Deadly Sins.'

In the valleys of the Trentino the Guelfs constructed the roofs of their bell-towers in the form of a truncated pyramid, the Ghibellines in that of a cone.

The stone campanile of S. Stefano, like that of S. Vigilio, is built 'a Punta Ghibellina.' On one of its bells may be read the date and words '1513 Franciscus campanarum magister Tridenti abitator hanc fecit campanam.'

The frescoes of the eastern façade are of two periods. They are divided into four sections. In the lowest, partly covered by the staircase, and much injured, are represented the 'Seven Deadly Sins.' In the second is a 'Dance of Death,' painted, as inscriptions relate, by Simon de Baschensis and Simon de Averaria in 1519. On the two upper rows the story of the life of S. Stefano is represented.

These frescoes, especially the upper ones, partially protected from weather by the projecting roof, still preserve their colours, and look as if painted but yesterday. Compared with those of S. Vigilio, they make up by vivacity of colour for some slight inferiority in correctness of design.

Internally, the paintings which decorated the whole building have been in great part destroyed. The few that remain, however, are well preserved. The choir is entirely covered with frescoes—a crucifixion, apostles and prophets—attributable to the middle of the fifteenth century.

On the eastern wall is a 'Last Supper,' 17 ft. by 6. Underneath it are five large frames, containing the Virgin and Child, with a man kneeling; and other subjects. The heads, especially that of the Madonna, have a Luinesque air: the date '8 Agosto, 1461,' is still legible.

There are five altars in the church. Near that of S. Michele, traces

may be found in the wall of the church and the rock of the choir of the primitive chapel, which was scrupulously turned to the east.

The fresco representing Charles the Great, with the accompanying inscription, occupies a portion of the N. wall of the church, built after 1500. (?) It is about 16 ft. long by 6 ft. high. The background is a wooded landscape with rocks and forest, the foreground a meadow besprinkled with flowers. In the centre of the composition stands, in the open country, a chapel with an improvised altar, on which are a crucifix and two lighted candles. On one side, the Pope is in the act of sprinkling with his hand holy water on the head of a kneeling convert, clad round the loins with a white cloth; on the other is a damsel, who holds in one hand a basin, and has a towel on her shoulder.

To the right of this central group are Charles, a bishop holding a banner with the red cross on white ground, and two more bishops, one with the pastoral staff, the other with the papal cross. The background is filled by warriors diversely equipped with lances and halberds. To the left are four more bishops with their pastoral staffs, and two other figures—perhaps nobles. Beyond is a crowd of half-naked converts, waiting in various attitudes to receive baptism.

The bishops have all white gloves, wearing over them precious rings on the thumb and forefinger of both hands, some also on the little finger. Such rings on the thumb are represented in every figure of a bishop, both at S. Vigilio and S. Stefano.

Below is the inscription quoted in 'Italian Alps,' written in a kind of Gothic character with many abbreviations.*

That the church of S. Stefano is very ancient and stands on the site of a still older chapel, perhaps the same built by order of Charles the Great, there is no doubt. Its dedication to St. Stephen is itself an argument of high antiquity, since the primitive churches were commonly dedicated to the protomartyr.

That on the same site a castle formerly stood is also certain, although we have no written records of it. The situation is admirably suited for one of these bandit refuges. The hill above is called at this day *Sopra Castello*, and anyone who will carefully examine the ground at a distance of about sixty feet from the present church will discover traces of a very ancient unmortared wall of rude masses, which must have closed on every side the passages easy of ascent. Moreover, on the north, the weakest side, may be noticed a mass of stones, whose presence there can hardly be explained except as the remains of a building now destroyed.

Although history is silent on the subject, why should not Charles the Great in person, as the legend and popular tradition declare, have passed here about the year 775?

In all the principal valleys of the Trentino we find castles and remains of fortresses of every age. The only exceptions are the Val di Fiemme and Val Rendéna. The Val di Fiemme up to recent times governed itself almost as a republic, and preserves the most ancient statutes of the Trentino. Of the fortresses of Bocca di Genova, of Castel Massimo, of Caderzone, of Castel Pelugo in Rendéna, called 'Munizioni dei Romani,' the memory remains, although no other traces have been preserved.

* For additional notes to this inscription see p. 463.

May not these have been amongst those destroyed by an army of Charles the Great, marching on Verona by these passes, then easier and more practicable than the great valleys, which were guarded and closed by the strong fortresses of the Longobards?

Riva, the Giudicarie, and Rendéna were presented to the Church of Trent, then ruled by the Bishop Orso, appointed by Charles the Great. Charles must have conquered, therefore, and may probably have personally known these districts. We find traces of Charles at Trent in a portrait of the Emperor which exists, or lately existed, on the wall of the upper loggia of the old castle of Buon Consiglio. At Castel Stenico we find him again in the inscription, legible between his figure and that of S. Vigilio, which runs thus:—*Carolus Magnus dedit hanc arcem; Sanctus Vigilius accepit; Albertus primus cōstruxit.* We encounter him also at Saone, a hamlet at the foot of Monte Durone, on the road which crosses it, and must have been the one taken by Charles, as it was in his time, and up to a few years ago, the only means of communication between the Val Rendéna and Lago di Garda. In pulling down the old church of San Bricio, in order to use up the material for a new one, there was found in the ancient wall, under several coatings of paint, a figure of Charles the Great in the act of worshipping St. Stephen. The circumstance is mentioned by Cipriano Gnesetti of Storo in his 'Memorie delle Giudicarie,' 1784. It is also noticeable that this is the second church dedicated to S. Bricio which we find on the track of the Emperor. The first is that of Monno, mentioned in the inscription: there is a third still existing on the road which mounts the Durone from Saone.*

It is surely impossible that a chronicle so long and full of details, which has taken root in the legends and inscriptions along the road it relates to, and, if the original is lost, has passed into documents, should be a pure fiction. Even should these contain only an echo of a popular tradition, and although they display various anachronisms—*e. g.* that of the date, and the substitution of Pope Urban for Adrian, which are evidently errors of a copyist ignorant and unversed in deciphering old characters—yet the groundwork of the legend must have a basis in facts.

The 'Vicari Plebanei' who resided in every valley as guardians of the interests of the Church would hardly have permitted such records to be set up with a sort of guarantee for their authenticity if they had not been looked on as true and based on indisputable authorities. On the other hand, had they been pure inventions of religious zeal, some chronicler would have surely protested.

A similar inscription—setting aside some few variations—and with paintings similar to those at S. Stefano, long existed on the outer wall of the church of Pelizzano in Val di Sole. It was damaged by a fire in 1528, and soon after barbarously whitewashed. Fortunately, fragments of the inscription were preserved by a priest.

In Val Camonica also there is a tradition that the pass of Monte Tonale, then an immense forest and refuge of outlaws, was traversed by Charles the Great by the help of fire.

In the church of San Bricio di Monno there is an inscription relating

* San Bricio is Briccius the Dane, who perished and was buried at Heiligen Blut, while returning from a pilgrimage with a phial of the sacred blood.

to the Emperor's passage. In the sanctuary of S. Giovanni di Monte Cala, in the commune of Lovere (Lago d'Iséo), is preserved in the sacristy, in a frame, an ancient parchment,* almost identical in its first part with the inscription of S. Stefano, but accompanying Charles only as far as the head of Val Camonica. It adds several to the fortresses in this valley attacked by the Emperor, and sets right various anachronisms in the S. Stefano account. It gives also the names of the seven bishops who followed the expedition, the name Adrian in place of Urban for the Pope, Turpinus in place of Tripinus, as bishop of Trent, and the date 800 A.D. The mention of the bishops' presence is strongly in favour of the authenticity of the legend, as it was the habit of Charles always to be accompanied by a goodly train of ecclesiastics, who in that age could also use the sword. Moreover, if the statement of Anastasius, the librarian, copied by Muratori, and in the Biblioteca del Comdio, is true—namely, that Charles the Great, during the siege of Pavia, where Desiderius had fortified himself, transferred himself with part of his army to Verona, in order to secure Adelghisius, the son of Desiderius—the track described in the legend would be exactly that likely to be chosen, since the naturally easier routes across Lombardy were assuredly made hazardous by the fortresses and defences prepared by the Lombards, and specially by the warlike Duke of Brescia, Potone, still in power; and this flank march would have been a most natural strategical expedient to avoid an enemy in force on the front, and to fall unexpectedly on his flanks.

Gattamelata afterwards followed the example. Quitting secretly Brescia, and aided by the valiant Conte Paride Lodron, he threw himself into the Giudicarie, and, by Durone, Tenno, and Mori, came suddenly by an unguarded track to the relief of Verona.

Inscription at San Bricio di Monno, Val Camonica :—

SIA MANIFESTO · a · cadavuna ꝑsona · ch · questa · zesia · fece
 fabcare · Re Carlo · al tēpo · ch · lui · andava · cōbatendo p · la
 fede · e · lo · pp · Vrbano · li · ꝓcese 900 · anni · d'indulgen-
 tia · e · 7 · vescovi · li quali · erano in sua ꝓpagnia · li ·
 ꝓcese · 40 · di d'indulgētia p · cadvuno · e · questa ꝓdonanza ·
 ze · ogni · venerdi · e la festa · di S. Britio · patrō · dela ·
 deta · zesia · etiam · nele · feste · di · S. Marie · expletum ·
 fuit · hoc · opus · mense · 7bre · die · 6 · 1470.

Restauratum fuit 16+57.

Inscription at the Sanctuary of San Giovanni di Monte Cala, Com-
 mune of Lovere :—

‘Carolus Magnus de Francia consuluit Domicium suum Consulē
 causa veniendi in Montem Blasiae, et ducebat secum quatuor mille
 Lanceas, et iter faciebat ad civitatem Bergami, de qua erat unus Domi-
 nus, qui vocabatur Dux Lupus, qui erat Paganus, et praedictus Carolus
 certabit secum causa convertendi ipsum. Astitit olim alius Dux Lupus,
 qui coepit Sandrum (S. Alexandrum anno Domini 298) et multos alios,
 et fecit eos decapitare, et quum decapitaverunt Sandrum septem cerei

* The two inscriptions are given at length below.

ardentes, nullo tenente, apparuerunt ipso Duci et Gentibus; campanae, per Dei gratiam, et sine aliquo auxilio humano pulsatae fuerunt, et hoc fuit in signum sanctitatis praedicti Sandri, et viso isto miraculo praedictus Dux Lupus cum tota sua gente conversus fuit ad Catholicam fidem. Quare praedictus Carolus fecit postea edificare ibi in dicta civitate Bergami unam Ecclesiam ad onorem sancti Sandri, et septem Episcopi existentes cum praedicto Carolus concesserunt quadraginta dies Indulgentiae pro singulo die et summus Pontifex Adrianus concessit quinquaginta annos omne die Dominico verae poenitentibus et confessis causa Devotionis et Peregrinantibus dictam Ecclesiam visitandibus. Qui praedictus Dux Lupus (diversus ab illo qui praecepit amputari caput S. Alexandri) post modum venit cum praedicto Carolo Magno ad unum castellum, quod vocabatur S. Ioannes de Calla, in quo morabatur unus, qui nominabatur Allorus. Qui Allorus cum vidit tantam Gentem astantem suo Castello conversus est ad Fidem Christi. Qui Allorus misit unam Monacam ad unum Castellum, quod dicitur Amon, cujus Castelli, erat Dominus unus, qui nominabatur Lancrilexius Iudaeus, et praedicta Monacha tractavit pro ditionem Vallis Oriolae, quae fidelis erat. Hoc gesto Carolus fecit ibi edificare unam Ecclesiam ad honorem S. Ioannis. *Sequono le indulgenze.*

‘ Et praefatus Carolus venit in Vallem Oriolam ad unum Castellum quod vocabatur Iesen, cujus Castelli erat Iudeus qui nominabatur Hercules, quem Carolus interfecit, qui noluit se converti ad fidem Christi, et ibi edificare fecit unam Ecclesiam ad honorem Sant.me Trinitatis. . . . *Sequono le indulgenze.*

‘ Et praedictus Carolus recessit et venit ad pontem Blasium (*Blè?*) et ibi erat unus Castellanus qui nominabatur Iudeus, qui nolebat credere Fidei Cattolicae et Carolus certavit secum, et dextruxit eum et ibi fecit edificare unam Ecclesiam ad honorem S. Stefani. . . *Vengono le indulgenze.* Et post modum praedictus Carolus venit ad unam Contratam quae vocabatur Bersium (*Berzo*) et ibi erat unum Castellum quae vocabatur Castellum antiquum, cujus Castelli erat Dominus unus qui vocabatur Comes Paganus, qui conversus est ad Fidem Christi et ibi fecit edificare unam Ecclesiam ad honorem S. Laurenti... *Le solite indulgenze.*

‘ Et praedictus Carolus venit ad unum Monticulum, Episcopus autem Turpinus ferebat vexillum quod fixit super Monticulum et ibi Carolus fecit edificare Ecclesiam ad onorem S. Petri Zucchi. . . *Sequono indulgenze.*

‘ Et post modum venit ad unum Castellum quod vocabatur Braistinus, in quo morabatur unus qui vocabatur Rex Cornerius et erat Iudeus, qui nolebat ad Christi Fidem se converti, et Carolus certavit secum et dextruxit eum et ibi fecit Ecclesiam in honorem S. Ioannis.... *Indulgenze.*

‘ Et post modum praedictus Carolus venit ad unam Contratam quae vocabatur Cemum (*Cemo*) et ibi fecit edificare unam Ecclesiam in honorem Salvatoris. . . . Et post modum praedictus Carolus venit super unum montem et ibi cum Iudeis et Paganis fecerunt unum magnum praelium et perierunt multi Fideles et plures etiam Infideles. Carolus posuit nomen monti Mortarolus, ed adhuc dictus Carolus ivit ad unam terram quae vocatur Amon et ibi fecit aedificare unam Ecclesiam in honorem S. Michaelis et Georgi et adhuc in capite illius

Vallis fecit aedificare unam Ecclesiam in honorem SS.me Trinitatis, et praedicti septem Episcopi, videlicet Episcopus Turpinus, Corradus Cardiensis Episcopus, Rodulphus Episcopus Colgabiensis, Julielmus Gortugalen Episcopus, Arnaldo de Aristano Episcopus, Majneros de Pisis Episcopus, Antonius Gurdigalae Episcopus, concesserunt singulis diebus *indulgenze*. Carolus Magnus Imperator et Summus Pontifex Adrianus et septem Episcopi praenominati concesserunt Indulgentias suprascriptos praefatis Ecclesis perpetuis futuris temporibus duraturos omnibus et singulis vaere poenitentibus devote genuflectentibus ceram Altaribus et dicentibus quindecim Pater Mater et quindecim Salutationes Angelicas.

‘ Haec omnia gesta fuerunt sub anno DCCC.

‘ Haec fideliter sumpta sunt a me Josepho Presbytero de Guaragnanis de Bienno, Rector Santi Ambrosii Costae Vulpini, Notario Apostolico, de quadam Scriptura Cartae pecorinae Scriptam per quedam Franciscus de Celeriis de Luore sub die 10 Mensis Martii Anno 1512, qui aetiam haec extraxit de quadam Instrumento antiquo, quod hodie difficile legi potest propter ejus antiquitatem ex defecta multorum litterarum, quae legi non possunt, quod meis oculis vidi Die 2 7bris Anno Incarnationis Domini nostri 1605, eadem etiam Die, quando haec mea manu scripsi ad utilitatem et commodum habitatorum Bienni et ad perpetuam Rei memoriam. L. S. *Seguono altre autenticazioni.*’

Such are Dr. Bolognini's facts and arguments. We hope shortly to publish a further note on the old church of San Vigilio near Pieve di Val Rendéna.

REVIEWS.

HIMALAYAN LITERATURE.*

A prediction we ventured to make a short time ago has been quickly verified. The Alps are not yet exhausted—how far they are from being exhausted, every year affords fresh proofs; but, while they continue to be written about, the more remote ranges of the Old World are already supplying material to authors.

In the last few months we have had three works on the Caucasus and four on the Himalaya. The most important in some respects of these books is ‘The Indian Alps.’ Every lover of mountains must feel a certain curiosity about the country surrounding the two loftiest known crests of the world—Mount Everest (or Deodunga, if we use its native name) and Kinchinjunga. We may have formed some acquaintance with this region already from Dr. Hooker's Journal and the descriptions and drawings of the Schlagintweits; but there was plenty of room for a

* *The Indian Alps, and how we crossed them.* By a Lady Pioneer. London: Longmans & Co. 1876.

From the Hebrides to the Himalayas, a Sketch of Eighteen Months' Wanderings in Western Isles and Eastern Highlands. By Constance F. Gordon Cumming. 2 vols. London: Sampson Low & Co. 1876.