CHAPTER NINE

EXILE, INTEGRATION AND EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES:
HUGUENOTS IN THE PAYS DE VAUD*

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The Pays de Vaud, on the northern and eastern shores of Lake Geneva and on the east bank of the upper Rhône, might appear to have been the ideal land of exile for French Protestants. It was conveniently placed for Huguenots fleeing their former strongholds in Languedoc and Dauphiné, yet protected by the Jura and the Alps. French-speaking yet Reformed, it was politically neutral and relatively free from the fickle favours of princes, with their unstable dynasties and shifting alliances. The front door-way to the Pays, the independent but vulnerable republic of Geneva at the western end of the lake, was of course a familiar destination as the training ground of their ministers; some families had established a bridgehead there early on through a son engaged in trade or banking. The back doorways, the mountain passes, provided well-trodden if hazardous escape routes in times of crisis. During the exoduses associated with the sixteenth century wars of religion and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685, many French Calvinists duly took these routes – but then travelled rapidly onwards.

It has been estimated that, in the years around the revocation, about 200,000 of an estimated Reformed population of 850,000 opted to leave France. Between 1680 and 1700 just over half of this number – at

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1 The Pays became, with slight boundary adjustments, what is now the canton of Vaud when it joined the Confederation in 1803.

least 450,000 – passed through the territories of the Swiss Confederation. Protestant Bern, the largest and most powerful canton, bore the brunt of the traffic, followed by Zurich, its neighbour and rival for dominance. These city states of the northern plateau straddled the route to Germany and thence to the Netherlands, and for the vast majority of French emigrants they represented merely transit camps along the way. Only 6,000 at most made a permanent home on Swiss soil, most of them in Vaud, where they settled principally by the lake in Lausanne, Vevey and Morges, but also up the Rhône valley. The indispensable modern study of the statistics and structures of refuge in Vaud found that the number of refugees grew rapidly between 1685 and 1688, reaching a peak in 1690 and 1691. Little impact on figures was made by the so-called ‘Glorieuse Rentrée’ of 1689 which saw the return by Waldensian refugees in the Pays to their valleys in Piedmont, and these people (confusingly also termed ‘Vaudois’) were in any case a distinct religious community, Savoyard rather than French. On the other hand, the end of the war of the League of Augsburg in 1697 saw notable emigration of Huguenots to Germany and the Netherlands, but there was a renewed influx following further persecution in 1698, bringing numbers of refugees again up to about 9,000. More than half then moved on, but later crises like the revolt in the Cévennes again replenished the flow somewhat.

Both economic and political pressures worked to limit severely permanent settlement in Switzerland. Agricultural productivity was barely sufficient to maintain the existing population and imports carried a heavy price of strategic dependency; industrial activity was very modest. This perhaps should not be exaggerated: even at the time observers might detect defensive special pleading; and as one modern

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4 Ducommun and Quadrioni, *Le Refuge Protestant*, chap. 2.