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THE HERESY OF THE PHRYGIANS.¹

IT may be well at the outset to make clear the purpose with which this paper has been written. For some time the suspicion has forced itself upon me that a good deal that has been published on the subject of Montanism has been based on investigations which proceeded on a faulty method. I propose to set forth the reasons which have led me to entertain this suspicion. My hope is that, if my argument is not accepted, it may elicit criticism which shall suggest a truer interpretation of the evidence which is here presented.

The most illustrious adherent of the Montanist movement was undoubtedly Tertullian of Carthage. And for the purpose of the enquirer into the inner meaning of Montanism Tertullian has the advantage of being a voluminous writer, of whose treatises moreover many have survived. The later writings of Tertullian are in fact—if we except a few oracles of the Phrygian prophets not quoted by him—the only source from which we can acquire a first-hand knowledge of Montanist principles and practice. Historians can scarcely be blamed if they have given them a very high place among the materials now available for ascertaining the character of the Phrygian heresy. And the procedure usually adopted by investigators has, if I am not mistaken, been suggested by an unquestioning assumption of their primary authority for the purpose in hand. It has been assumed that what Tertullian reckons as Montanist doctrine and custom is really such. The evidence supplied by him has been accepted as indisputably reliable: the statements of Catholic writers which appear to conflict with it have either been tortured into agreement

¹ A paper read before the Cambridge Theological Society on Friday, January 31, 1908.

with his *dicta*, or have been rejected as calumnies. It has thus come to pass that what passes current as Montanism is in the main identical with the later theology of Tertullian. We seek a description of a system which penetrated from its first home in Phrygia into many regions; and we have been content to accept instead an account which we have no assurance for believing to be more than the picture of a local development of the movement, or even of its embodiment in a single individual.

The hypothesis which is the ground of this method is the homogeneity of Montanism. Phrygian Montanism and African Montanism are assumed to be, in great measure, the same thing. But is this assumption justified? Was Montanism really homogeneous?

It seems to me that *a priori* we should scarcely expect this to be the case.

The movement began, as we learn from early documents preserved by Eusebius and Epiphanius, at an obscure village called Ardabau in Mysia, not far from the border of Phrygia. There, probably in the fifties of the second century, Montanus, a new convert to Christianity, who had been a priest of Cybele, began to prophesy. And his prophesying was accompanied by strange phenomena closely resembling those associated with demoniacal possession. He spoke in an ecstasy, as his followers would have expressed it.

Montanus was soon joined by two women, Maximilla and Priscilla or Prisca, who also claimed to possess the prophetic charisma, and whose utterances were similar in matter and in manner to those of their leader. Before long the movement acquired a local centre at Pepuza and Tymion, villages of Phrygia, to which the name of Jerusalem was given. Its adherents were by and by excommunicated by many synods, and Montanism became a sect with a definite organization. The prophecies of Montanus, Maximilla, and Priscilla were committed to writing, were widely circulated, and were regarded by friends and foes as authoritative statements of all that distinguished the Montanistic teaching from current Christianity. By the Montanists themselves the prophetic oracles were placed at least on a level with the Gospels and the Apostolic Scriptures.

Now it is evident that the moment the oracles of the original

exponents of the New Prophecy were written down, and read without the explanations of the prophets, they became, as truly as the Scriptures which they in part superseded, 'a nose of wax'. All depended on their interpretation. And as Montanism spread into different countries, and was accepted by men of different environment and mental training, the interpretations put upon them were certain to be diverse. From this we have ample warrant for the expectation that Montanism would, in some degree, display a divergent type in each country to which it gained admission.

It may, perhaps, make the meaning of what I have said clearer, and at the same time justify the conclusion which I have reached on *a priori* grounds, if I proceed to give what may be termed an example of the forces of disintegration at work.

Didymus of Alexandria,¹ or rather the early and valuable document on which he bases his account of the sect, charges the Montanists with three errors. The first of them is, that on the plea of a prophetic revelation, supported by certain passages from the latter chapters of the fourth Gospel, they affirmed (*ἀπομαντεύονται*) that there is one *πρόσωπον* of the three divine *ὑποστάσεις*. That is to say, they taught what later came to be known as Sabellianism. The oracle on which they relied for this teaching, according to Didymus, was a saying of Montanus, 'I am the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost.' This certainly sounds like Monarchian heresy. So also does a saying of Maximilla recorded by Asterius Urbanus,² 'I am Word and Spirit and Power'—for the words *ῥῆμα*, *πνεῦμα* and *δύναμις* must be taken as equivalent to Montanus's Son, Spirit, and Father. And in support of the inference drawn from these, appeal might have been also made to some other oracles among the few that remain. If we had only the statement of Didymus and the oracles to which I have referred we might have confidently classed the Montanists with the Sabellians. But we turn to Tertullian. There is no need to say that he, whether as Catholic or as Montanist, did not deviate from orthodoxy. He was an ardent opponent of the Monarchian Praxeas. And he declares that it was exactly his Montanism which specially fitted him to be the champion of the true faith.³ For the Paraclete had made

¹ *De Trin.* iii 41.

² *Ap. Eus. H. E.* v 16. 17.

³ *Adv. Prax.* 13, *De Carn. Res.* 63.

use of expressions which, without any such ambiguity as was found in the phrases of Scripture, denounced the teaching of Praxeas as false. It is true that the only oracle which he quotes in this connexion rather tells against his contention;¹ but he refers to another, which, if his paraphrase of it is reliable, must have been emphatically orthodox.² Moreover he vouches for the orthodoxy of the entire body of the Montanists. No one, he assures us, had ever accused them of heresy.³ Their rules of discipline—such is his argument—cannot be corrupt, for error in doctrine always precedes error in discipline.⁴

The fact is that, in spite of the vehemence of Tertullian, the Montanists were as much divided as their opponents on the question of the Divine Monarchy. Besides the orthodox party among them, to which Tertullian himself belonged, known as the Cataproclians, there was a heterodox party, which he was ignorant of, or, more probably, chose to ignore—the Cataeschinites. This we may gather from the *Philosophumena* of Hippolytus, and from the treatise *Against Heresies* of Pseudo-Tertullian, who, no doubt, here as elsewhere, derives his information from Hippolytus's *Syntagma*.⁵ It is unnecessary to cite other authorities in confirmation of the statements of Hippolytus. The remarkable fact is that both the orthodox and the heterodox parties among the Montanists sheltered themselves behind the oracles of the prophets.

But it was not only the difficulty of interpreting the oracles, and applying them to controversies which did not belong to the place and period of the original prophets, which tended to divide the Montanists. There were at least three other influences, all closely related to each other, which might well lead to this result.

The first of these was the oracles of later prophets. For the charismata were by no means confined to the first three. Theodotus, 'the first steward of the New Prophecy,' was a fellow-worker of Montanus, and he was almost certainly a prophet.⁶ Apollonius, about the year 200, mentions both a prophet and a prophetess;⁷ and, notwithstanding the opinion of so eminent a historian as Harnack,⁸ one can hardly suppose that they are to be identified with Montanus and Maximilla or Priscilla.

¹ *Adv. Prax.* 8.² *Ib.* 30.³ *De Ieiun.* 1.⁴ *De Monog.* 2.⁵ Hippol. *Philos.* 19, Ps.-Tert. *Haer.* 7.⁶ Anon. *ap. Eus. H. E.* v 16. 14.⁷ *Ap. Eus. H. E.* v 18. 4, 6, 7, 10.⁸ *Chronologie* i 370.

In any case Apollonius implies that Maximilla and Priscilla had successors by his remark that they were the *first* prophetesses to abandon their husbands.¹ Firmilian, in his letter to Cyprian, speaks of a prophetess (probably a Montanist) who appeared in Cappadocia about 236 A.D.² And finally Epiphanius tells of a prophetess named Quintilla.³ Whether she was one of those already mentioned we cannot determine.⁴ She was certainly not a member of the original group. There is no evidence that the inspired utterances of these later prophets were circulated in writing. Certainly none of them is quoted in writings now extant. They probably had no more than a local celebrity. The same remark may be made about Themiso, whose Catholic epistle, written 'in imitation of the Apostle',⁵ claimed, we cannot doubt, to have been inspired. But that they furthered the development of Montanism in the districts where they were known it is impossible not to believe. And the narrower the sphere of their influence so much the more their sayings tended to generate purely local forms of the system.

In the West, so far as I know, there is no mention of later prophets. But Tertullian several times refers to the visions of sisters,⁶ and he appeals on one occasion to the vision of Saturus, which we can still read in the Acts of Perpetua.⁷ In each case the vision is used as giving authority to a disciplinary custom or a doctrine advocated by the writer. Thus in the West, as in the East, the means was at hand of explaining or adding to the original deposit of the New Prophecy by an authority which was held to be divine.

A second agent of development which must be taken into account is the weight of influence exerted by prominent members of the sect, who were not themselves prophets, or possessed of charismata which involved the capacity for receiving revelations by visions or otherwise.

¹ Eus. *H. E.* v 18. 3 δεικνυμεν οὖν αὐτὰς πρῶτας τὰς προφήτιδας ταύτας . . . τοὺς ἄνδρας καταλιπούσας. ² *Cyp. Ep.* 75. 10 (Hartel, p. 817). ³ *Haer.* 49.

⁴ Bonwetsch (*Die Geschichte des Montanismus*, Erlangen, 1881, p. 171) suggests that she may have been the prophetess mentioned by Firmilian, Salmon (*Dict. of Christ. Biog.* iii 939) that she was the prophetess referred to by Apollonius.

⁵ Apollonius *ap.* Eus. *H. E.* v 18. 5. ⁶ e. g. *De An.* 9, *De Virg. Vid.* 17.

⁷ *De An.* 55.

Tertullian, in his own person, notably illustrates the power of this influence. He nowhere claims to have had revelations. He was simply, in his own view, an adherent of the Paraclete. Yet his influence in determining the form of Montanism in Africa must have been immense. Dr Rendel Harris and Professor Gifford, in the introduction to their edition of the *Acts of the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*,¹ direct attention to 'the difficulty with which any of his writings, except a very few tracts, can satisfactorily be labelled non-Montanist'. They have themselves transferred what previous writers had regarded as 'probably Tertullian's earliest existing writing'² to the Montanistic period of his life. The fact is that the unquestionably Montanistic treatises are recognized merely by more or less explicit allusions to the revelations of the Paraclete. The doctrines and practices advocated in his latest works are, for the most part, essentially the same as those upheld in the earliest now extant. If there is any difference between them it is amply accounted for by the development of opinion which would inevitably take place in a man of Tertullian's character. They are presented from new points of view and under new sanctions, but in their main substance they are unchanged. Of this fact it is superfluous to give proof, and the inference from it is irresistible. Tertullian brought far more to Montanism than he found in it. It is an inference which might have been drawn if we knew nothing more of the man than what his writings reveal of his masterful personality. But if African Montanism was largely made by Tertullian, it must have differed widely from the Montanism which in his day, or at any other time, existed in Phrygia.

We have from Tertullian himself a story which well illustrates how the influence of later revelations and the influence of personality helped each other in producing the local development of Montanism. In his treatise *de Anima* 9 he speaks of a certain sister, who had the charisma of revelations. The material for visions was often supplied by the lessons, psalms, discourses, &c., of the church service. During service, on one occasion, when Tertullian was discoursing on the soul, the sister fell into an ecstasy and saw a vision. Subsequently, when service was over, and the congregation dismissed, she was invited to describe her vision.

¹ Cambridge, 1890, p. 28 ff.

² *Dict. of Christ. Biog.* iv 822.

Among other things she declared that she had seen a soul which displayed all the signs of a corporeal nature. Thus was established a favourite doctrine of the preacher, on which he had no doubt been insisting in his sermon. I shall have occasion to refer to this story again. For the present it is sufficient to observe that the preacher obviously, though he was unconscious that he had done so, produced the vision, while the vision in its turn was adduced to impart divine sanction to the preacher's doctrine. A new tenet was thus added to the official teaching of African Montanism, nominally by a revelation, really by the personality of Tertullian.

The third power which co-operated with revelations and personal force in the moulding of Montanism need only be mentioned—the power of local environment. This always exercises its subtle influence on a transplanted faith. It has in no small degree affected Christianity itself. And wherever its influence is effective it produces a change of form.

The conclusion to which these considerations compel us is, I believe, that any large measure of homogeneity in Montanism is a thing which could not be looked for beforehand. Any method of investigation which assumes it must therefore be radically wrong. The only way to arrive at a true conception of Montanism is to begin by examining Phrygian Montanism and African Montanism apart. It may be urged that the only Montanism of which we can learn anything is a developed or a decadent Montanism. That may be in part true. But we can reach a knowledge of its inner principle in no other way than by a preliminary study of the later forms, each by itself, and by tracing them back to their common root. By combining them merely we can attain no sure result. And for this purpose an enquiry into Phrygian Montanism—the heresy of the Phrygians in its original home, shaped only by its original environment—scanty and unsatisfying as the materials for such an enquiry are, is immeasurably more important than an enquiry into the exotic Montanism of Tertullian.

It remains to point out one or two very striking instances of dissimilarity between Phrygian Montanism and the current conception of Montanism, mainly drawn from Tertullian, which such a study seems to me to reveal.

Let us note, in the first place, what we may learn from the

earliest documents as to the conception which was held in Phrygia of the nature of the New Prophecy. It is well known that Montanus and his companions prophesied in ecstasy, and that their utterances were accompanied by strange ravings.¹ The Catholics laid hold of this fact as demonstrating that they were inspired by an evil spirit; and the defenders of Montanism replied that being in a state of ecstasy was a condition of the exercise of the prophetic gift. But all this seems to me to have been an afterthought. The Catholics made much of the frenzy of the prophets merely as a way of evading an argument of the Montanists which, without bringing in this other issue, was not easily disposed of. This earlier argument is revealed by the anonymous writer quoted by Eusebius.² The Montanists, he says, evidently quoting from one of their books, boasted of Agabus, Judas, Silas, the daughters of Philip, Ammia of Philadelphia and Quadratus; and from the last two they claimed to have received the prophetic gift *by way of succession* (διεδέξαυτο).³ That is to say, they received their charismata as successors in the line of New Testament prophets, which all believed would remain until the end, just as the Bishops had received their office from a line of predecessors which went back to Apostolic days. They were the last prophets, no doubt; they had the gifts in a pre-eminent degree; in them was fulfilled the promise of the Paraclete. All Montanist writers maintained that position. But still, they were the last and the greatest *in a line of succession*.

It is hazardous to assert a negative. But I cannot recall any trace of this notion of a prophetic succession in the West. Tertullian seems consistently to ignore all prophecy between the Baptist, or at any rate the Apostles, and Montanus.⁴

And I may here observe that the impression left by a perusal

¹ Eus. *H. E.* v 16. 7, 9.

² Lightfoot (*Ignatius* i 482 f) and Harnack (*Chronologie* i 364 f) agree in dating the anonymous treatise A. D. 192-193. It was undertaken at the request of Avircius Marcellus of Hieropolis in the Phrygian Pentapolis (Eus. v 16. 3), and the writer speaks of Avircius and Zoticus of Otrous, a neighbouring town, as his fellow presbyters (§ 5). It is probable therefore that all three were bishops of the Pentapolis, and that Miltiades, against whose followers the treatise was directed, was a Montanist leader of the same district.

³ Eus. *H. E.* v 17. 3, 4.

⁴ *De An.* 9, cf. *De Virg.* Vol. 1, *De Monog.* 3, *De Ieiun.* 12.

of the extant passages of Tertullian¹ in which he refers to ecstasy as a condition of prophecy is that the ecstasy which he contemplated was something very different from the violent and uncontrolled ravings of the Phrygian prophets as reported (possibly not without exaggeration) by the Anonymous.² Epiphanius says truly that the word *ἔκστασις* has different meanings,³ and I am inclined to think that Western Montanists used it in one sense, and their Phrygian brethren in another. The account of the sister whose ecstasy was kept so well in hand that she could wait patiently till service was over before relating her vision stands in curious contrast to the narrative of the proceedings at Ardabau.

A comparison of these two stories recalls also another marked difference between the Montanism of Phrygia and that of Africa. In Phrygia women were given a high position in the native cults. And among the Montanists they retained it. Montanus evidently prophesied in the midst of a congregation. There were large numbers present (*ὄχλοι*), some of whom would have silenced him, while others opposed their efforts. And it seems to be suggested that Maximilla and Priscilla likewise addressed a Christian assembly.⁴ But however that may be, Firmilian, as we have seen, makes mention of a third-century prophetess, probably a Montanist, of whom he states that she baptized and celebrated the Eucharist.⁵ Epiphanius describes a curious service of the Quintillians (who were obviously the Montanists under another name) at Pepuza, in which the officiants were seven virgins, who prophesied to the people; and he declares that they had female bishops and priests.⁶ We are not surprised to find Catholics

¹ See especially *De Anima* 45, where he makes use of the favourite Montanist text, Gen. ii 21. The whole chapter should be compared with Epiph. *Haer.* 48. 3, 4. In several respects Tertullian appears to be more in harmony with the Catholic writer used by Epiphanius than with the Montanist opinions which that writer combats. See also *De Anima* 11, 21, *De Ieiun.* 3.

² *Ap. Eus. H. E.* v 16, 7, 8; 17. 2. It will be observed that the Anonymous substitutes for *ἔκστασις* the stronger word *παρέκστασις*. ³ *Haer.* 48. 4.

⁴ They spoke in the same way as Montanus (§ 9). And it is added, by way of explanation, that they did so *ἐκφρόνως καὶ ἀκαίρως καὶ ἀλλοτριότηρως*. There is nothing corresponding to the second adverb in the description of Montanus's utterances. It may perhaps indicate that they spoke during a Church service; which would be an improper occasion for speech for women, though not for a man.

⁵ Cyprian *Ep.* 75. 10 (Hartel, p. 818 f).

⁶ *Haer.* 49. 2, 3.

indignantly quoting St Paul's injunction about women keeping silence in the Church.

This peculiarity of Montanism certainly never found its way into the West. It is not a Catholic, but Tertullian, in one of his most distinctly Montanist writings, who says, 'It is not permitted to a woman to speak in Church, nor yet to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer, nor to assume any office which belongs to a man, least of all the priesthood.'¹

Not much is known of the penitential discipline of the Eastern Montanists. But there is ground for believing that in this matter also they differed from the Africans. Apollonius² discusses the case of one Alexander, whom the sectaries regarded as a martyr, but whom he affirmed to have been tried not for the Name but for robbery.³ After his release he spent some years with a prophet. Apollonius sneers after his accustomed fashion: 'Which of them forgives the sins of the other? Does the prophet forgive the robberies of the martyr, or the martyr the extortions of the prophet?' This implies that prophets were supposed by the Montanists to have the power of absolution. And in this insinuation Apollonius is confirmed, not only by Tertullian, but also (which is more to the purpose) by an oracle which Tertullian quotes.⁴ We have therefore no reason to doubt the further insinuation that martyrs were regarded as possessed of the same power.⁵ But the African Montanists allowed no such prerogative to the martyrs. In Carthage it was only the Catholics who admitted the validity of their absolutions, and Tertullian heaps much scorn upon them for so doing.⁶

But we must now proceed to discuss two questions which will be recognized as of fundamental importance. Did Montanism

¹ *De Virg. Vel.* 9.

² Apollonius says that he wrote forty years after the beginning of Montanism (*Eus. H. E.* v 18. 12). Hence Harnack (*Chronologie* i 370-375) dates his treatise A. D. 196-197. But, though it is probable that Montanus prophesied for the first time in 156, we cannot be sure that Apollonius was accurately informed on that point, neither are we certain that he did not use round numbers when he spoke of the forty years that had elapsed since the New Prophecy began. The recrudescence of prophecy to which he bears witness seems to indicate a longer period than four years between the Anonymous and him. Possibly therefore he wrote as late as A. D. 200. He was certainly an Asian, and possibly, as Prædestinatus says, bishop of Ephesus.

³ *Ap. Eus. H. E.* v 18. 6-9.

⁴ *De Pud.* 21.

⁵ Cf. Bonwetsch, p. 112.

⁶ *De Pud.* 22.

inculcate asceticism? No one can doubt that, as expounded by Tertullian, it did. But we are concerned with Phrygian Montanism. What evidence have we as to asceticism among the adherents of the New Prophecy in Phrygia?

The writer who gives us most help in answering this question is Apollonius. In the passages quoted from him by Eusebius he insists that the lives of the Montanist martyrs and prophets do not conform to the requirements of the Gospel. He roundly charges them with covetousness. Montanus himself, he tells us, appointed *πρακτῆρας χρημάτων*, agents for the collection of money (Eus. *H. E.* v 18. 2), and out of the fund raised by them he actually paid salaries to the teachers who propagated his doctrine. Moreover he devised a system of receiving gifts under the name of 'offerings'. Accordingly the prophets took gifts (*ib.* § 11), and both prophets and martyrs made gain not only from the rich, but from the poor and orphans and widows. Prophets and prophetesses and martyrs, unmindful of the saying of our Lord: 'Ye shall not take gold or silver or two coats,' accepted offerings not only of gold and silver, but also of costly garments (§§ 4, 7). Themiso, a leader of the sect, who claimed to be a 'martyr', or as we should say, a 'confessor', was rich enough to purchase his liberation from prison with a large sum of money (*πλήθει χρημάτων*). Themiso was, in fact, clothed with covetousness as with a garment (§ 5). Another, who was counted as a prophet, was a money-lender (§ 11). And, finally, Apollonius asks the scornful questions, 'Does a prophet dye his hair? Does a prophet paint himself? Does a prophet delight in self-adornment? Does a prophet play with tables and dice? Does a prophet lend money at interest?'; and he offers to prove that all these things were done by the Montanist prophets (§ 11).

In some of these statements and insinuations—those namely which relate to the financial organization of the sect—Apollonius is confirmed by the Anonymous. For when he calls Theodotus the 'first steward' of the new prophecy (*τὸν πρῶτον τῆς . . . προφητείας οἶον ἐπίτροπόν τινα*¹) I do not see why we may not take his words in their literal sense. And indeed the very innocency of some of the things laid to the charge of Montanus is a strong guarantee that the accusations are true. For who nowadays

¹ *Ap. Eus. H. E.* v 16. 14.

would find fault with a man who provided preachers with salaries, or who organized the collection of money for the purpose? And we shall not greatly blame prophets and confessors for taking the gifts which were offered to them, nor be greatly surprised if the more eminent and popular leaders became rich. There is really no need for Bonwetsch's suggestion that what Montanus aimed at was the establishment of a community of goods.¹ The statements about salaries and the wealth of certain individuals is quite inconsistent with such a supposition.

What scandalized Apollonius was perhaps the fact that Montanus was making the clerical and even the prophetic office into a profession. His preachers no longer worked at secular trades, as, in all probability, most bishops and priests at that period did: they derived their income solely from the payment made to them for the exercise of spiritual functions. One who is not a member of an established Church may perhaps be allowed to express sympathy with him if he also felt that absorption in financial organization is not conducive to the highest spiritual interests of Church or sect.

We may take it, at any rate, that Montanus desired that the officials of his sect should live, not indeed in luxury, but in ordinary comfort.

The remainder of Apollonius's charges Bonwetsch² asks us to disbelieve, on the ground that Socrates (iv 28) bears testimony to lack of zeal among the Paphlagonians and Phrygians of his day for the hippodrome and the theatre. The argument is scarcely convincing. He further reminds us, indeed, of Jerome's statement that in the lost work *De Ecstasi* Tertullian exposed the falsity of all Apollonius's assertions.³ But even if we are bound to interpret rigorously the words of Jerome, we must still remark that an Asian writer is more likely to have known the facts than one who lived in Africa, and that if the probable prejudice of Apollonius is to be taken into account, the prejudice of Tertullian must not be left out of consideration. The explanation devised by Bonwetsch, for the benefit of those who are not disposed utterly to reject the witness of Apollonius—that the

¹ p. 165.

² p. 100.

³ *De Vir. Ill.* 40 'septimum [volumen] proprie adversus Apollonium elaboravit in quo omnia quae ille arguit conatur defendere'.

Montanists, in order to express their spiritual joy as Christians, indulged in an 'apparent worldliness' which as the symbol of mere earthly merriment would not have been permitted; and that the gay clothing of the prophetess served only to enhance her dignity, and to enforce the festive character of her utterances—need not detain us.

I am willing to grant that the statements of Apollonius are exaggerated. But is it possible that such charges could have been publicly made in Asia, and have been accompanied by an express challenge to the Montanists to disprove them, if they had not considerable foundation in fact? Could they have been made at all by him against the leaders of a numerous Asian community, of which asceticism was one of the most prominent characteristics? And would Tertullian have answered them if they were so contrary to the truth that no one could have believed them?

But Apollonius makes two statements about Montanus which may seem to imply that he inculcated an asceticism which exceeded that of the Catholic Church. 'This,' he says, 'is he who taught dissolutions of marriages, and made laws of fasting' (ὁ διδάξας λύσεις γάμων, ὁ νηστείας νομοθεήσας).¹ It is scarcely probable, indeed, considering the context in which this sentence occurs, that it was intended to convey the idea of special austerity on the part of Montanus. For it is immediately followed by accusations of extortion and gluttony. But let us examine the statements in their order.

1. Montanus taught 'dissolutions of marriages'. It is quite certain that in the East as in the West, Montanism was so far ascetic as absolutely to reject second marriages (Epiph. *Haer.* 48. 8, 9,²

¹ Eus. *H. E.* v 18. 2.

² Epiphanius evidently bases this part of his account of Montanism on a very early document. Bonwetsch (p. 36) argues, not altogether convincingly, that it was a treatise of Hippolytus. Its date seems to be earlier than the work of Apollonius, for the writer still asserts (§ 2) that there have been no prophets since the death of Maximilla, a statement which in the time of Apollonius would have been untrue. To connect it with Phrygia we have the statement (§ 11): 'Immediately after Montanus had said this'—viz. an oracle which he had quoted—['God] gave us a suggestion to remember the words of the Lord', &c. (ὅτε γὰρ εἰδὼς τοῦτο εἶπε Μοντανὸς ὑπόνοιαν ἡμῖν δίδωκεν ἀναμνησθῆναι κτλ). This seems to imply that the writer had actually heard Montanus. Moreover, several of his arguments resemble those of the Anonymous.

Tert. *De Monog.* 3, &c.). But this can hardly be referred to here. The words *λύσεις γάμων* have sometimes been rendered 'dissolution of marriage', leaving one to infer that Montanus was so strenuous an advocate of virginity as to lay it down that married couples on their acceptance of the new prophecy were bound to separate for the purpose of living in strict continence. And there is certainly an oracle of Priscilla, which Tertullian quotes and understands as a commendation of chastity.¹ We only know it in Tertullian's Latin rendering, which is not free from ambiguity. But it certainly does not enjoin the annulling of marriages already contracted. And if Apollonius had wished to indicate the sanction by Montanus of such an annulling in all cases, would he not have used the singular, *λύσις*? At any rate his language is easily explained as a rhetorical allusion to the fact, for which a somewhat later passage in his treatise² is our sole authority, that Maximilla and Priscilla (and probably other women also) deserted their husbands when they became prophetesses. Montanus must of course have sanctioned their conduct: he could not well have done otherwise, if it was his wish that prophetesses as well as preachers should give undivided attention to their spiritual work. But abandonment of married life under such circumstances does not necessarily imply an ascetic view of the relation between the sexes. It is true that it seems to be implied by Apollonius that the Montanists recognized an order of virgins. For after asserting that the prophetesses had left their husbands to join Montanus, he adds, 'How then did they speak falsehood, calling Priscilla a virgin?' But the existence of such an order did not strike the anti-Montanist writer as unfitting: what he counted outrageous was not the ascetic tendency of his opponents, but their laxity in giving one the rank of a virgin who had been married. So far as these indications go it would seem that the Montanists were *less* ascetic in their opinions about marriage than the Catholics.

2. But then Montanus 'made laws for fasting'. Does not this imply an unusually rigorous asceticism? Tertullian in his *De Jeuniis* contrasts the Montanist fasts with those of the Catholics, and actually accuses the latter of gluttony because their fasts were less frequent and less severe. But how much meaning there

¹ *De Exhort. Cast.* 10.

² *Eus. H. E.* v 18. 3.

is likely to be in such rhetoric may be judged when we find Apollonius making the same accusation against the Montanists because they had salaried preachers. The truth is that when we fix our thoughts on the facts which Tertullian mentions and not on the rhetoric beneath which they are buried, we perceive that the difference between him and the Catholics concerned far less the frequency and duration of fasts¹ than the principle on which they rested. The Catholics held that, with certain exceptions, they were 'ex arbitrio', Tertullian held that they were 'ex imperio novae disciplinae'.² And similarly in Epiph. *Haer.* 48. 8, where apparently Montanists and Gnostics are classed together, there is no allusion to difference in the amount of fasting, but only to difference in the principle which lies behind it. And nothing more is implied in the words *ὁ νηστείας νομοθετήσας*. The fasts were reduced to rule, no doubt by command of the Paraclete; but it does not follow from this that they were increased in number or in severity. That would depend on the frequency and rigour of fasting in the already existing usage of Catholic Christians. The Montanist rule may even, in this matter, have fallen below the standard of Phrygian Catholic custom. It is at least remarkable that when Sozomen enumerates the local differences as to the duration of Lent, the shortest Lent which he mentions is that of those who 'minded the things of Montanus', and who kept but two weeks.³

The remark about marriage and fasting therefore leaves unimpaired the impression produced by the charges of greed and worldliness brought by Apollonius against the Montanists. We cannot regard those whom he had in view as an ascetic community.

Not unconnected, in the mind of Tertullian, with the question of asceticism, was the eagerness for martyrdom to which as a Montanist he urged his readers. It is necessary therefore to enquire what we can learn as to the attitude towards martyrdom of the Phrygian Montanists.

Tertullian quotes oracles of the prophets in favour of his view

¹ Bonwetsch (p. 96) scarcely succeeds in proving that in these respects the Montanists (in Africa) differed to any considerable extent from the Catholics. He shows (p. 95) that Jerome exaggerated the number of fasts peculiar to the Montanists.

² *De Ieiun.* 2, 13.

³ *H. E.* vii 19.

that Christians should seek rather than evade martyrdom ;¹ but they are not appreciably stronger than words spoken by our Lord, upon which at least one of them is plainly founded. Both alike are patient of different interpretations by different men. What then was the actual practice of the Montanists of Phrygia? Did they court martyrdom or did they avoid it? The answer must be, I think, if we are to be guided by the available evidence, that they behaved much in the same way as Catholic Christians did under similar circumstances.

A passage of the Anonymous has been interpreted to mean that the Montanists had no martyrs. 'Is there any,' he asks,² 'of those who began to speak, from Montanus and the women on, who was persecuted by Jews or slain by lawless men?' And he answers, 'Not one.' It is instructive to observe the use which has been made of these words, and some others like them which follow. Mr McGiffert, in the notes to his English translation of Eusebius,³ affirms that 'there is a flat contradiction' between them and a subsequent passage of the same writer, in which he admits that the Montanists had many martyrs; and he infers that the Anonymous had 'no regard whatever for the truth'. He adds that 'we know that the Montanists had many martyrs, and that their principles were such as to lead them to martyrdom even where the Catholics avoided it', referring to Tertullian's *De Fuga*. In the latter remark he assumes that African and Phrygian Montanism were identical in principle. And all that precedes it is based on a misinterpretation of the Anonymous.

For that writer is answering the argument—based on Matt. xxiii 34, 'I will send unto you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them ye shall kill and crucify'—that because the Catholics had not received Montanus and his companions they were slayers of the prophets. Any one who reads the whole passage with attention will perceive that his answer amounts to this: The text must be taken literally; and in its literal sense it has not been fulfilled in the Montanist prophets. None of them has been put to death by any one, still less by the Jews, to whom Christ was speaking. Montanus and Maximilla and Theodotus were all dead, but not one of them had died as a martyr. The

¹ *De Fuga* 9; cp. cap. 11; *De Cor.* 1.

² *Ap. Eus. H. E.* v 16. 12.

³ p. 232 f.

Anonymous makes no reference to the general body of Montanists. He neither denies nor affirms that they had martyrs. Hence his words cannot contradict the later passage in which he allows that the sect had numerous martyrs.

But it is not without significance that, if we may believe him—and I see no reason why we should not—none of the early Phrygian prophets had suffered for the faith. Is it likely, if they preached, with the vigour of a Tertullian, that the glory of martyrdom should be eagerly sought, that all of them should have passed through the persecution of Marcus Aurelius unscathed?

But let us proceed to consider the second passage of the Anonymous to which Mr McGiffert refers. In it he tells us that when all other argument failed them the Montanists fell back on their martyrs. And he admits the truth of their contention that their martyrs were many in number.¹

What was the argument based on this fact? The Anonymous only says that they regarded it as 'a proof of the power of the prophetic Spirit that was among them'. We may perhaps guess that what they meant was something of this kind. The Anonymous plainly refers to the persecution of Marcus Aurelius; for after it according to him the Church had enjoyed continuous peace up to the time when he wrote.² Now the martyrs of Lyons had during that persecution testified by their letters in favour of the Catholic party in Phrygia.³ Their judgement would have had great weight with all Christendom. Just in the same way we cannot doubt that the arguments of Praxeas against the Montanists were the more readily listened to by the Bishop of Rome because of his 'martyrdom' of which he made such proud boasting, and the reality of which Tertullian so eagerly disputed.⁴ By way of reply the Montanists may have appealed to their own martyrs: 'We too had then many martyrs who testified on our behalf.'

But, however that may be, the Anonymous gives us no reason to suppose that there was any balancing of one set of martyrs against another in regard either to their number or their eagerness and steadfastness. As yet we have nothing to guide us to a sure

¹ *Ap. Eus. H. E.* v 16. 20 f.

² *Eus. H. E.* v 3. 4.

³ *Ib.* § 19.

⁴ *Adv. Prax.* 1.

judgement about the attitude of the Phrygian Montanists towards martyrdom.

We turn to the treatise of Apollonius. Here at length we find a hint. Apollonius tells us that Themiso purchased his liberation from bonds with a large sum of money, and thereafter boasted as a martyr.¹ This statement may of course be false; but it is not proved to be false because Tertullian in his *De Fuga* denounced the practice of purchasing release.² And it is worthy of remark that in this case it is not a Montanist but a Catholic who says that Themiso's act of cowardice ought to have humbled him. Moreover the statement (whether true or false) would hardly have been made if it had admitted of an easy retort. So far as it goes it indicates that in Phrygia the Montanists were more inclined to avoid martyrdom than the Catholics.

This is confirmed by a document of later date. Under Decius one Achatius, apparently bishop of Melitene in Armenia Minor, was examined by a governor named Martianus. The record of the examination was printed by Ruinart,³ and has many marks of genuineness. In it the governor is represented as urging Achatius to sacrifice by an appeal to the example of the Cataphrygians, 'homines religionis antiquae,' who had in a body abandoned Christianity and made their offerings to the gods. This address cannot have been put into the mouth of Martianus by an orthodox writer. For such a one would not have made him speak of the Montanists as men of an ancient religion; and still less would he have made him immediately afterwards contrast their faith with the 'nouum genus religionis' of their Catholic rivals. The governor is struck by the difference between the faint-heartedness of the Montanists and the courage of the Catholics.

Another indication of the position taken by the Eastern Montanists in the matter of martyrdom remains to be noticed. The sect which was commonly known as 'the heresy of the Phrygians' must have included among its members a large number—perhaps the majority—of the Christians of Phrygia. And we have direct testimony that this was so even as late as the

¹ *Ap. Eus. H. E.* v 18. 5.

² Bonwetsch, p. 163.

³ *Acta sincera*, ed. Amsterdam, 1713, p. 152.

fifth century (Soz. *H. E.* ii 32). But Sir William Ramsay¹ points out that in Phrygia as a whole martyrdoms in the latter part of the second, and throughout the third, century were rare. From a study of the inscriptions he is able to suggest a reason for this fact. The Christians lived on good terms with their heathen fellow countrymen, and did not obtrude their Christianity unnecessarily; and, speaking generally, a spirit of compromise and accommodation in matters religious prevailed. If this description is at all near the truth the attitude of the Phrygian Christians towards paganism and towards persecution must have been as different as possible from that which is enforced in Tertullian's Montanist treatises, and, for that matter, in many other writings which have never been suspected of Montanist leanings. So far from courting persecution the Phrygian Christians sought to avoid it, and succeeded. If the Montanists had not been in this point in agreement with the Catholics such a result would have been impossible.

But this paper must be brought to a close. Professor Harnack, following many other writers, has said that 'what is called Montanism was a reaction against secularism in the Church'.² The considerations which I have now adduced seem to me to prove that, if this be true, Montanism, in the place of its birth, must have departed from its original standpoint far more rapidly than the Montanism which, in the last years of the second century, established itself at Carthage, and is represented, for us, by Tertullian.

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¹ *Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia* ii (1897) chaps. xii, xvii, esp. p. 501.

² *Encycl. Brit.* xvi 777.