

EARLY CHRISTIAN MONUMENTS IN PHRYGIA :
A STUDY IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE CHURCH.

V.

BUT our immediate interest in the epitaph is the light it throws on the legendary biography of Avircius. It shows us the foundation in historical fact, and enables us to trace, at least in outline, the process by which the legend was formed. The memory of the historical Avircius was kept alive, not only by tradition, but also by religious ritual on the twenty-second of October, the anniversary of his death. In the various *Menæa*,¹ brief notes of different tenor are attached to his name: the titles "Equal of the Apostles" and "Miracle-worker" occur in some cases; in others an outline of his life is given in prose or metre. In one instance two obscure iambic lines are given: "Aberkios, rendering earth to earth, according to the law of mortals, accedes a God by adoption to Him who is God by nature." References which occur on other days to an "Aberkios, bishop and martyr," seem to be due to some confusion of names.

Round this nucleus of fact gathered a mass of popular legend. The remarkable natural features of the district were attributed to the miraculous power of the saint; he became the hero in popular witticisms and in tales that had once been told of the pagan deities. But through all this accretion the main facts of the period when he lived and his wide travels and great influence at home shone forth. The writer of the biography, a man possessing a fair amount of education, set to work about A.D. 400 to give literary form to the legend. The epitaph was still before his eyes, and

¹ The *Menæa* are indeed all later than the biography, but they may be taken as an indication of the amount of information preserved by the Church ritual about him.

he copied it, complaining of the faintness of the letters,¹ though at the present day they are clearer than three-fourths of the local inscriptions. He expanded and filled up the outlines of the popular legend, using his rather inaccurate historical knowledge for the purpose. He shows himself well acquainted with the geography of Phrygia, but absolutely ignorant of that of the world beyond Asia Minor, and is thus proved to be a native of the country.

To illustrate the gradual progress of investigation, it is not without importance to describe the way in which the evidence bearing on the epitaph of Avircius was accumulated. In October, 1881, when wandering among the villages of a wide and fertile plain in central Phrygia, we observed the following inscription on a stone at the door of a mosque. The inscribed side was towards the wall, and so close to it that it was very hard to read it by sidelong glances. The surface is mutilated, and the following text is completed by the aid of the biography. When I published the text in 1882 I was ignorant even of the name of that Phrygian saint.

30. "*Citizen of the select city, I have, while still living, made this (tomb), that I may have here before the eyes of men a place where to lay my body; I, who am named Alexander, son of Antonius, a disciple of the spotless Shepherd. No one shall place another in my tomb: and if he do, he shall pay 2,000 gold pieces to the treasury of the Romans, and 1,000 to our excellent fatherland Hierapolis.*

"*It was written in the year 300 (A.D. 216) during my lifetime. Peace to them that pass by and think of me.*"

This epitaph alone would furnish indubitable evidence as to the epitaph of Avircius, from which it quotes five lines, spoiling the metre by substituting for the name Avircius "Alexander son of Antonius." It also proves that the original is earlier than A.D. 216. These inferences were drawn by Di Rossi and Duchesne immediately on the pub-

¹ Hence are to be explained perhaps some variations such as *καυρῶ* for *φανερωῶ* in line 2.

lication of the epitaph of Alexander. In June, 1883, I again found time to visit the valley, accompanied by an American friend, Mr. Sterrett; and again in October, 1883, I made another visit alone to clear up some further difficulties. The result was the complete proof that the valley bore in ancient time the name Pentapolis,¹ from the five cities which it contained, Eucarpia, Hierapolis or Hieropolis, Otrous, Brouzos, and Stectorion, and the discovery of part of the actual tombstone of the saint, which has since been brought home to this country as a precious historical document.

Literature has not utterly lost trace of the Phrygian saint. From the tract against Montanism, written by a presbyter of the Pentapolis, and addressed to the saint, in the year 192, we learn that his name was Avircius Marcellus, and we gather an idea of the respect in which he was held, as well as of the position he took up on the great ecclesiastical question of the day. Even the form of the name is important. The later form Aberkios produces a false impression about it. Every element of Avircius is Italic, and we are not surprised to find Avircius and Avircia occurring several times in the inscriptions of Rome and of Gaul.² On the other hand, it has none of the Anatolian character about it, and the few examples of it that are known in Asia Minor are due solely to the influence and fame of the saint. Now Roman names are, it is true, not very rare in Phrygia; but the great majority are names of emperors; and of the remainder some few are due perhaps to the popularity of provincial governors, one or two such as Gaius and Quintus are taken as typical Roman names (if they do not really belong to the imperial class), and the others come from Italian settlers in the great cities. Such a distinctively Italian name as Avircius Marcellus, belonging to a Phrygian

¹ This name is preserved to us only in one authority; viz. the signature of a bishop at the Council of Chalcedon.

² *Corpus Inscr. Lat.*, vi. 12,923-5 (Avircius), xii. 1,052 (Avercius).

born about 120-130 A.D., appears to any one that studies the character of Phrygian names to be explicable only on the supposition that the bearer belongs to an Italian family settled in Phrygia. The noble name Marcellus might be adopted in a purely Phrygian family; but not such a plebeian and almost unknown name as Avircius. This Phrygian saint then is an instance of the return influence exerted by the West on the East; and may be set against the more usual influence of the East upon the West.

The name Avircius lasted in central Phrygian nomenclature. The Bishop of Hierapolis who was present at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. signs himself Aberkios (with the later Greek spelling), a clear proof that the saint was still remembered in the district; and according to the interpretation given above, the biography shows that he was remembered about 400. Inscriptions support the same conclusion. The first which I have to quote belongs to Prynnessos, a city and bishopric distant about twenty-seven miles by a very circuitous road from Hierapolis.

31. "*Aurelius Dorotheos, son of Abirkios, constructed the heroön for himself and for my mother Marcellina, and for my own children and for my cousins. Fare ye well who pass by.*"

Above the inscription are the Christian symbols *A P Ω*.

In this inscription the general form, the pagan word heroön, and still more the salutation at the end are characteristic of the third century, while the symbols might incline us rather to a fourth century date. The monument may probably be dated about or soon after 300. Abirkios was married to Marcellina;¹ the conjecture suggests itself that Marcellina belongs to the family of Avircius Marcellus, and that the cousins who are included in this almost unique fashion belonged to the same family.

I have already alluded to the possibility that Marcella,

¹ Bishop Lightfoot, who quotes this text in his *Ignatius and Polycarp*, i., p. 485, by a slip speaks of Marcellina as mother, instead of wife, of Abirkios.

the "highly respected and beloved" wife of Aurelius Eutyches Helix, senator of Eumeneia, may have belonged to the same family.¹

The next inscription which I have to quote belongs also to Prymnessos. As it mentions a deacon, it must be later than the time of Constantine; but the style of art in the relief that accompanies the inscription seems to be not later than the fourth century, so that the date of the monument is about 320-400 A.D.

32. "*Abirkios, son of Porphyrios, deacon, constructed the memorion to himself and my wife Theuprepia and the children.*"

The word *memorion* in the sense of tomb and the form *διάκων* for *διάκονος* are both marks of lateness, so that a date near 400 may be considered probable. A later date seems to me unlikely on account of the style of art in the relief, which is carved beneath the inscription. In the centre is a standing figure, slightly turned to the right, dressed in a mantle, and holding the right hand in front of the breast in the attitude of warning or admonition, thumb and first two fingers extended, and third and fourth fingers closed.² The figure is rather awkwardly shortened. The face, seen in profile, is youthful, beardless, and of a conventional Greek type. Right and left are busts, on a rather larger scale, both shown in profile. That on the right is female, in remarkably good style, obviously a portrait of a matron of middle age and decided beauty, with slight indication of a double chin. The bust on the left is made in the same conventional Greek style as the head of the central figure. The two faces look towards the central figure. The intention of the artist seems to be to show the Saviour admonishing Abirkios and Theuprepia. On early Italian Christian sarcophagi the Saviour is represented as

¹ THE EXPOSITOR, Dec., 1888, p. 422: the epitaph contains a veiled reminiscence of a phrase in the opening line of Avircius's epitaph.

² The same position of the hand which is employed in benediction.

a young and beardless man very similarly to this relief. This monument is, I think, the only early representation of its kind left us by the Eastern Church.

In one of the letters of Basil of Cæsareia, a person named Abourgios is mentioned. It is not improbable that this is a Cappadocian corruption of the same name, in which case we have a proof that the fame of the Phrygian saint extended far to the east. I have observed no other example of the name, but the three instances from the fourth century, and one from the fifth, of such a peculiar name, show the persistence of his fame at the very time when I have argued that his biography was written.

One point more remains. Is it possible to recover a clearer idea of the position and influence of this Phrygian, who, after having been forgotten for many centuries, has recently risen to fresh reputation? If the cause of which he was the champion had been thoroughly popular in Phrygia, it is probable that his name would have occurred more frequently, and his fame would have remained in the popular memory much longer. But it has been stated already (*THE EXPOSITOR*, Feb., p. 147) that the orthodox party was undoubtedly the weaker side in the Phrygian Church, being kept in power by the pressure from the Church in general, and at a later time by the power of the State. Thus it has happened that the fame of Avircius has not been proportionate to the glowing account given in his biography. He was the champion of a minority in Phrygia, and while "they who thought with him" cherished his name and exaggerated his actions, the world, which is rarely deceived by the passionate admiration of a minority, practically forgot him. But, while we must reduce his personality to its true dimensions, which fall far short of the pretensions of his biographer, he remains none the less a most interesting character, and his epitaph a document of real importance.

We have seen the probability that Avircius belonged to a foreign family from the West settled in Phrygia. The district where he lived is in the basin of the Mæander, the part of Phrygia which was most open to external influence and most closely connected with the rest of the world. His wide travels further brought home to his mind the power and extent of the Church, and his epitaph shows what an impression was made on him by the fact that everywhere he found the Christians united in the same belief and practice with himself. His whole experience conspired to make him the champion of the Church Catholic against the individualizing tendency of Montanism. A less bigoted and more tolerant spirit might perhaps have avoided the dissension that occurred, as was the case at a later date in Cappadocia,¹ and might have retained within the Church the national tone and fervour of the Montanists.

Montanus, on the other hand, belonged by birth to north-western Phrygia. He was a convert, first heard of at a village Ardabau, on the frontier between Mysia and Phrygia, a description which points to the same neighbourhood where we have found clear traces of the north-western Phrygian Church. Does Montanus represent the tone of that Church; and does the beginning of the Montanist controversy correspond to the time when the christianizing influence spreading from the north-west met that which was penetrating from the south-west? If we can see any reason to answer this question affirmatively, our investigation will have gradually led us to something like a distinct view of the general character of that north-western Phrygian Church which was detected and described in the first of these papers. The following arguments show that the answer in all probability must be affirmative.

¹ I hope to describe the episode at some later time: it has remained practically unnoticed by any modern writer, as topographical accuracy is necessary for the understanding of the few recorded details.

The Church of south-western and central Phrygia, connected closely with Laodiceia and the Lycus valley, and originally founded therefrom, is naturally more catholic and less Phrygian in tone; whereas everything that we can learn of northern Phrygia shows it to have been the special stronghold of heresy and of the specially Phrygian type of religion. In the fourth century, Cotiaion was the chief centre of Novatianism in Phrygia: now Novatianism revives one of the tenets of Montanism,

“—that unpitying Phrygian sect which cried,
Him can no fount of fresh forgiveness lave,
Who sins, once washed by the baptismal wave.”

Under the Arian Valens and the tolerant Valentinian Phrygian heresy flourished free, but in the beginning of the following century, under Theodosius II. and his sister Pulcheria, a determined effort seems to have been made to force Cotiaion into orthodoxy. Four bishops in succession were murdered by the people, and we may gather that they were bishops of the orthodox faith, imposed by the party in power on an unwilling people, and that the resistance of the latter was carried to bloodshed. At last Cyrus, a man trained in civil government and administration, was made a priest and sent to rule the Church of Cotiaion; and by a dexterous address he gained a footing in the city. Again at Pazos, near the source of the Sangarius, a Novatian synod was held; and Amorion is always famous as a heretical centre. Now I have already shown that Cotiaion was the centre during the third century of the north Phrygian style of Christianity, and that in later time it preserved its separation from the rest of Phrygia as metropolis of the surrounding district. The district was remote from intercourse with external civilization, and infinitely less exposed to influence from contact with the Church in general than the basin of the Mæander. It is by later ecclesiastical writers spoken of sometimes with

contempt for its ignorance, sometimes with hatred for its heresy. Attempts to force it into orthodoxy result even in bloodshed. The conclusion seems necessary that the same characteristic and exclusive Phrygian tone characterized it from the beginning, and that Montanus, born in the midst of it, represents its tendencies in conflict with the catholicism of the south Phrygian Church.

This investigation has given a very different view of the position and action of Avircius from the biography. In the latter he is the apostle of Christianity in a pagan land; he is adored by his people, and no hint is dropped of dissension or controversy among them. The epitaph, whose real meaning has been obscured to modern scholars by the tone of the biography, has now been interpreted to show Avircius, not as the missionary of a new religion, but as the leader of a party in a Church already well established, and now divided against itself. His party was victorious, after a keen and bitter contest, in his own neighbourhood, but in the greater part of Phrygia the opposite sect was far stronger.¹ The Phrygian heretical tendency, vouched for by the hatred of the orthodox historians in later times, has now been traced back, through the inscriptions of the third century (Nos. 1 to 12), to its origin in an isolated current of christianizing influence; and has been shown to be a vigorous form of religion, redolent of the soil where it was rooted, spreading unchecked towards the south till it met the Catholic Church. The first passages in the long struggle between nationalism and universalism in Phrygia are connected with the respective leaders, Montanus and Avircius. To the fact that controversy divided those who ought to have felt that they were really of one mind must be attributed the extirpation of Christianity in Phrygia.

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¹ This is exactly the tone of the account given by Eusebius.