

PHARISEES AND HERODIANS IN MARK

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THE initial volume of the new series entitled 'The Beginnings of Christianity', containing the 'Prolegomena' to the volumes on Acts has the following utterance by 'the editors' on this subject:

The Herodians are twice mentioned in Mark iii. 6 and xii. 13 (cf. the parallel in Matt. xxii. 16) as conspiring with the Pharisees against Jesus. The only reason for considering them as a religious sect is the absurd statement of Epiphanius that they interpreted the words of Gen. xlix. 10 ('the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, etc.'), of Herod—presumably Herod the Great; but probability and the form of the word in Latin suggest that they were the partisans of Herod. The Herod of the Gospels being Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee, 'Herodian' would then naturally mean one of his court or of his party. It is noticeable that in Mark these 'Herodians' appear once in Galilee and once in Jerusalem on an occasion when, according to Luke, Herod was in that city.¹

The editors' aim in this excerpt appears to be apologetic. They aim to show that the evangelist may be correct in referring to a group of co-conspirators with the Pharisees as 'Herodians', although, as they later admit (p. 120), 'there is no other evidence as to the existence of a party, much less a sect, of Herodians' at this time. We are therefore asked to understand the word in the sense of members of Herod's 'court', or 'of his party', using the word 'party' in some other sense than the one in which

¹ Vol. I, p. 119.

it could be said that there is no other evidence for its existence. Thus Josephus in speaking of the various delegations to Rome to protest against the carrying out of the will of Herod I, surnamed the Great, 'refers to certain supporters of the claims of Antipas among the relatives of Archelaus as preferring to have Antipas rather than Archelaus, if they could not obtain their first choice of being put under a Roman governor.'² Such a group among Antipas' relatives might have been called by Josephus *οἱ τοῦ Ἡρώδου*, though I am unable to discover any passage either in the *Antiquities* or the *War* where it actually occurs.³ Does the evangelist really refer to a group of this sort?

For two reasons we must refuse to admit a parallel even were the phrase *οἱ τοῦ Ἡρώδου* to be found. (1) Josephus has prepared the reader for mention of a group of supporters of Herod's claims by previous description of the conflict of interests. In Mark no previous description of any kind has been given. 'The Herodians' appear as a group or party with whose aims and ideals the reader is assumed to be familiar. (2) The term *Ἡρωδιανοί* employed by Mark is by no means identical in meaning with *οἱ τοῦ Ἡρώδου*. It cannot mean 'courtier of Herod', as the editors propose, a sense expressed in Jn. 4:6 by the word *βασιλικός*, but requires the sense of 'partisan', or 'adherent'.

The editors we quote betray a sense of the difficulty of finding any such group, or party, in Jesus' time by their effort in the succeeding paragraphs to show that members of Antipas' court might have been in Jerusalem on the occasion of Mk. 12:13, and that Herod I, and even Antipas, sought to conciliate their Jewish subjects, and might therefore (?) be assumed to have their partisans, or adherents, among the people. If such there were would the evangelist be apt to introduce on the first occasion (3:6) without comment so unnatural an alliance as this would be between the Pharisees (!) and disloyal sycophants of a hated and alien court?

Cheyne, on the other hand, in his article 'Herodians' in the

² The passage (*Ant.* XVII, ix. 3) was called to the writer's attention by the kindness of Professor W. J. Moulton, of Bangor, Me.

³ In *B. J.* I, xvi. 6 Josephus speaks of Jews who took sides with Herod I against Antigonus as *Ἡρωδῆων*.

Encyclopaedia Biblica, while he considers the meaning 'members of the household of Herod' 'unsuitable in Mk 12 13', thinks it supposable that there were at this time in *Judea* Jews 'who longed for the re-establishment of the Herodian kingdom in spite of its subjection to Rome, as representing that union of Hellenism and Judaism which seemed to enable Jews to 'make the best of both worlds'. Of the occurrence of the term in Mk. 3 6, however, he says bluntly: 'This is evidently a mistake. In the country of the Tetrarch Antipas there could not be a party called 'Herodians'.

In spite of the single passage where Matthew permits the term to stand in his transcript of Mark we may properly regard it as distinctively a Markan expression; for it never occurs in Luke, and is cancelled in the Matthean parallel to its first occurrence. Moreover, the corresponding expression of Mk. 8 15 'the leaven of Herod', where a few texts also read 'Herodians', is cancelled in both parallels, Matthew substituting 'of the Sadducees', and Luke having 'of the Pharisees' only. At least in this case Matthew must have understood a politico-religious sect to be intended, for he expressly declares that the word 'leaven' was used symbolically of 'the teaching' of the sects referred to. Quite possibly his elimination of the term in 12 14 and substitution of 'Sadducees' here may be due to his belief that no such sect existed at the time. Luke's avoidance of it may be due to a similar cause. Of course it does not follow that this *was* Mark's meaning. So far as the two passages referred to by the editors of *Beginnings of Christianity* are concerned it is quite true that 'probability and the form of the word in Latin suggest that (the Herodians) were the partisans of Herod'. However, we cannot leave wholly out of account the Markan form of the logion. This appears in its simplest and doubtless in its most authentic form in Luk 12 1 as 'Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees'. The Markan context suggests that here too the evangelist who adds 'and of the leaven of Herod' is speaking of the same conspiracies as in 3 6 and 12 13. Now we are indeed under under no necessity of holding (whether Matthew does so or not) that Mark has in mind a 'religious sect'. But it must be admitted that in Judaism the distinction

between religious sects and political parties is a vanishing one, and that the connection made in two (if not three) instances between 'Herodians' and Pharisees implies that to Mark's mind the two groups had something in common. What, then, did Mark mean by 'the Herodians'? and on what ground did he represent them as fellow-conspirators with the Pharisees against Jesus?

In their effort to prove that in some sense of the word a 'party' of 'Herodians' might have existed at this time, the editors of *Beginnings of Christianity* remind us that 'Herod the Great certainly did all in his power to conciliate his Jewish subjects, especially the Pharisaic party', and suggest the possibility that 'some Jews may have fixed their hopes on the Herodian family as saviours of the nation'. They even think it 'possible that Antipas' marriage (to Herodias) was prompted by a politic desire to secure Jewish support by an alliance with a Hasmonean princess'. This belief, however, we cannot share with them, much less the belief that the cause of the Baptist's execution 'may well have been' his disapproval of this policy, and that 'Herod's attitude to Jesus may be accounted for in the same manner'. The least reliable historically of all sections of Mark is the digression in 6:17-29 (omitted by Luke and partially corrected by Matthew) which depicts the prophet in colors derived from the story of Elijah denouncing Ahab and plotted against by Jezebel. In this dramatic tale the authentic scene of the preacher of repentance to the multitudes who flock to him 'in the wilderness of Judea' from Jerusalem and Judea to be baptized in Jordan is suddenly transferred to Tiberias. John is now in the midst of those 'who are in kings' houses'. He addresses not the publicans and sinners who 'went out into the wilderness' to seek the prophet-anchorite, but utters his message to 'the king' like one of the old-time prophets who declare the state policy of Jehovah against that of worldly-minded monarchs. For Mark ignores the unlikelihood of any opportunity before his imprisonment for John to speak his message directly to Herod and declares that he was imprisoned for a rebuke uttered 'to Herod' in person. Moreover he makes the place of incarceration not (as Josephus tells us) the remote fortress of Machaerus near the

scene of John's activity⁴ but the palace at Tiberias, where the prophet can be executed at the demand of the 'little maid'⁵ to please Herodias whom Mark calls 'Philip's wife'⁶ at the 'king's' feast to the nobles 'of Galilee'. No wonder H. J. Holtzmann calls this story 'the very pattern of legend'. We have every reason to prefer the picture of the Baptist in the Second Source, which places in Jesus' own mouth utterances as completely at variance with this dramatic story of the martyrdom of the second Elijah as they are in agreement with the brief and unvarnished account of Josephus.⁷

Mark speaks of Antipas as 'the king', and depicts him as offering 'the half of my kingdom' after the manner of Ahasuerus to Esther. We need not suppose that in so doing he is actually confusing the mere Tetrarch of Galilee with Agrippa I, the brother of his paramour, who shortly after did become a 'king', with dominions extending over the whole domain of his grandfather Herod I. The confusion is more likely to be limited to the matter of title, position and policy. It is true that Agrippa I is spoken of simply as 'Herod' in the story of his execution of James the son of Zebedee and persecution of the Church in

⁴ The idea is expressed in *Beginnings of Christianity* that John was imprisoned in Tiberias for greater safety; because he would be recognized by Aretas, father of the repudiated wife of Antipas, as a supporter, and hence would be liable to rescue by the Nabateans from the border fortress of Machaerus. This hardly calls for refutation.

⁵ A *κοράσιον* according to Mark. In reality the divorced wife, or widow, of Aristobulus, if not already in the position assigned to her mother by Mark as wife of Antipas' 'brother Philip.' She was at this time at least 20 years of age.

⁶ She was really the wife of Antipas' half-brother Herod.

⁷ Lk 7 18-35 = Mt 11 2-19. In Mt 11 2 the evangelist inserts the words 'in the prison' to conform to the representation borrowed from Mark. In Luke there is nothing to alter the impression made by the narrative itself that John is still at liberty, as in the representation of Jn. 3 22-24. The words of Jesus to the crowds in both forms of Q imply a ministry for the Baptist of the type described by Josephus (*Ant.* XVIII, v. 2), and are destitute of anything suggestive of the prophet's turning aside from his message of repentance to the multitudes who 'came forth to him from Jerusalem and all Judaea' (Mk. 1 5), including some 'from the region round about Jordan' (Mt 3 5 = Lk 3 3), to castigate the domestic vices or court intrigues of the non-Jewish Tetrarch of Galilee and Samaria

Acts 12. But Mark must have known that Herod Antipas and Herod Agrippa were not one and the same. We need assume no more than that his ideas of the complicated relations of the Herodian family were vague, and that he conceived of Antipas as exercising some of the royalty of his father, surnamed the Great, or of his despicable nephew and brother-in-law. Perhaps in his mental picture of Antipas he introduced unconsciously traits from that of Agrippa I. or that of Agrippa II. who in Acts 26 28 is 'almost persuaded' by the eloquence of his prisoner 'to be a Christian'. Anyway, giving Mark the benefit of every doubt, it is impossible to deny—and this is the only point we have now to consider—that his ideas of the Tetrarch and his relations with the Baptist and Jesus are strongly tinged by his knowledge of other more conspicuous members of the family to whom the designation 'Herod the King' could properly be applied. Was there a corresponding influence upon his idea of 'the Herodians'?

'Herod' in Acts (that is Agrippa I) is quite correctly depicted as seeking to curry favor with 'the Jews' by his execution of James son of Zebedee and persecution of the Church. He may have overdone the matter, as Nero did after the burning of Rome, and as the high priest Ananus did in putting to death the other James, 'the Lord's brother' in 62 A. D., shortly before his own deposition by Agrippa II. But he certainly proceeded much further than his grandfather in the policy of 'conciliating his Jewish subjects, especially the Pharisaic party,' and as we happen to know with very marked success. The reason both for the policy and for its success is self-evident. Herod I in spite of the detestation of his subjects, could sometimes be conciliatory, though for the most part in vain. Of Antipas we cannot even assert the attempt. For to imagine the lustful Tetrarch as impelled by reasons of state policy in his intrigue with Herodias because of her descent from the Jewish royal stock is a notion which the editors must forgive us for regarding as somewhat fantastic. Antipas did entertain ambitions, suggested according to Josephus by his paramour, of obtaining from Claudius the title of 'king', and lost what he had in the vain attempt to secure it at Rome. But Herodias' only part in the business (aside from kindling the ambition) was to share the exile it entailed as a

punishment upon the intriguer. Antipas was 'fox' enough to know that his relations with Herodias would do far more to make him odious to 'his Jewish subjects, especially the Pharisaic party', than to 'conciliate' them.

But Agrippa's claims to descent from the Jewish royal line were not in the name of a consort who would not even be recognized as a wife by the people whose favor was sought, but in his own right and by legitimate descent. He was the sole male survivor of the ancient stock of the Maccabees, the grandson of Mariamne the Hasmonean and Herod the great, a favorite of the imperial court at Rome from his childhood. And he made the utmost of these facts, especially his Jewish pedigree.

As our editors declare, Agrippa 'was accepted by the Jews as the best of kings, being like his sister Herodias, a Hasmonean on the mother's side.' Schürer, after narrating the acts of religious piety with which the quondam adventurer began his reign, describes its general policy in the following terms:

There were again golden days for Pharisaism; a revival of the age of Alexandra. Hence Josephus and the Talmud are unanimous in sounding forth the praises of Agrippa. 'He loved to live continually at Jerusalem, and was exactly careful in the observance of the laws of his country. He therefore kept himself entirely pure; nor did any day pass over his head without its appointed sacrifice.' Thus runs the eulogistic strain of Josephus; and the Talmud relates how as a simple Israelite he presented with his own hand the first-fruits in the temple. * * * By such displays of piety he gave abundant satisfaction to the people who were under the guidance of the Pharisees. This was shown in a very striking manner when, at the Feast of Tabernacles in A. D. 41, according to the old custom, he read the Book of Deuteronomy, and in the passage, 'Thou mayest not set over thee (as king) a stranger that is not thy brother' (Deut. 17 15), he burst into tears because he felt himself to be referred to in it. Then the people cried out to him, 'Be not grieved, Agrippa! Thou art our brother! Thou art our brother!'⁸

⁸ The passage (from the Mishna, *Sota*, vii. 8) is clearly built upon Deut. 14 15, not upon 23 8, 9. Our editors, accordingly, do it much less

If Pharisaism be taken to mean hypocrisy Agrippa was 'a Pharisee of Pharisees.' But in presence of the fulsome eulogies of Josephus and the Talmud we have no need to prove the success of his policy. And if any New Testament writer had occasion to appreciate the sinister significance of this 'revival of the age of Alexandra' with its unexpected rapprochement between the Pharisees and the ruling circles it was Mark. The example of Josephus in itself is enough to prove how many must at this time have become 'Herodians,' and the effects of the alliance upon the disciples of Jesus are not likely to have faded from the mind of the young man in whose mother's house the persecuted Church was assembled to pray for Peter's escape, when 'Herod' had put forth his hand and slain James the brother of John with the sword, and next, seeing that 'it pleased the Jews', had proceeded to arrest Peter also.

'Pharisees and Herodians' together saw the fruition of their dearest hopes when Claudius at the beginning of his reign (41 A. D.) restored to the protégé of his predecessor Caius the full dominion and sovereignty which Augustus had denied to the heirs of Herod I. Their expectations were fully met when the new king gave proof of his policy by this 'affliction' of the Church. If, then, Mark in the Gospel had been speaking of the times when the Book of Acts first brings Agrippa I to our notice nothing could have been more natural than to think of 'Pharisees and Herodians' as conspiring against the life of the leaders of the Church. Unfortunately for the accuracy of the record the facts are as stated by our editors: 'There is no other evidence (that is, outside the Gospel of Mark) as to the existence of a party, much less a religious sect, of Herodians' in the time of Jesus.

Our second evangelist, whom tradition asserts to be no other than the John Mark of Mary's house in Jerusalem, but whom it credibly reports as composing his Gospel only later at Rome, after the death of Peter, with whom he had once companied as 'interpreter', must therefore be understood to mean by those

than justice in merely adopting the statement of Schürer that 'the declaration of the people could *also* be justified' on the basis of the latter passage, as if this were the only one.

'Herodians' whom he represents as conspiring with the Pharisees against the life of Jesus something more than mere members of the Tetrarch's court. Probability and the form of the word in Latin suggest that they were at least 'partisans' of Herod, and if not a 'religious sect' as near to deserving the name as those whose aims, ideals and policies are revealed by Josephus and the Talmud in the times of Agrippa I.

But if there were 'Herodians' in this sense of the word in A. D. 37—44 why should our editors reject as 'absurd' the testimony of Epiphanius to their existence, and to the fact that they took as their slogan the words of Gen. 49 10: 'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come,' or however else they may have rendered the famous passage.

Few critics will covet the task of vindicating Epiphanius against charges of 'absurdity' when he makes his own applications of otherwise reliable Palestinian tradition, or expresses his own opinion. But in this case the tradition he cites is independently attested more than a century before by Tertullian. And neither Church father appears to be attempting either interpretation or addition. Epiphanius merely tells us that the Herodians were a Jewish sect who took Herod (our editors here interject 'presumably Herod the Great') as the ruler promised in messianic prophecy, applying to him in particular the passage from Gen. 49 10. Tertullian gives a similar definition of the Herodians without specifying the particular messianic prophecy. Now we are quite willing to grant that Epiphanius could be guilty of the 'absurdity' of applying this tradition to 'Herod the Great,' though there is nothing to show that he did. But why interject 'presumably Herod the Great' when Tertullian attempts to tell us that there was a sect or party of 'Herodians' in this sense of the word? And why, above all, interject it as the meaning of the original authors of the tradition? Gen. 49 10 is exactly the passage to be appealed to by adherents of the man whom the Book of Acts refers to simply as 'Herod,' and of whom it has nothing else to relate save his blasphemous pretensions, and his attempts to curry favor with his 'brothers' the Jews by a murderous assault upon the Church. It is just the passage to

sound the key-note of Agrippa's philo-Judean policy. If we think of it as applied to him no one would for a moment question its appropriateness, nor the likelihood that there were in his time partisans, if not a quasi-religious sect, who because they hailed Agrippa as a restorer of the sceptre to Judah might well be called 'Herodians,' especially by a writer whose Latinisms are noticeably common.

But is it supposable, finally, that our second evangelist has lapsed into such an anachronism? Has he introduced as conspirators with the Pharisees against Jesus a sect or party as to whose existence at the time there is no other evidence, and who could hardly originate before the time when some prince of native stock had prospects of attaining the throne which since Pompey's day had passed into the hands of aliens?—Possibly not, if the tradition of Markan authorship is to be taken strictly *au pied de la lettre*. Certainly not if we are to abandon the date established by second century tradition for the composition in favor of a date within Agrippa's own reign, as we have recently been invited to do. But what of this writer's story of the Baptist's fate? Surely in view of the inaccuracies of Mk. 6 14–29 we must be prepared for somewhat unhistorical conceptions on this evangelist's part of the Herods, their doings and their relations. If the assumption seem incompatible with the idea that the Gospel was written throughout in just its present form by the quondam companion of Peter, then it would be well to ask whether we are under any necessity of taking the superscription 'According to Mark' in so strict a sense.

On the other hand there is no need to think of the evangelist as arbitrarily introducing new elements into the story. The Lukan tradition, which often seems to represent the authentic form more closely than Mark, brings the Pharisees into relation with 'Herod' as against Jesus when they report the Tetrarch's threatening attitude. According to the special source of Luke (Lk. 13 31) the Pharisees tried to rid themselves of Jesus by reporting, 'Get thee out and go hence: for Herod would fain kill thee.' Indeed the part played by *Herod* in the special Lukan source (perhaps the same which in Acts tells the story of Peter's miraculous deliverance) takes on larger proportions as the stream

of Petrine tradition descends. In the *Gospel of Peter* 'Herod' is even the prime agent in the tragedy of Golgotha. There is nothing improbable in the supposition that a Roman evangelist, writing after the death of Peter, one who, even if he be John Mark himself, has very vague ideas of the Herods and their intrigues, should ante-date the policy which led to the martyrdom of the son of Zebedee in 41 A. D. Such a writer would be quite capable of introducing 'Herodians' as fellow-conspirators with the Pharisees against the life of Jesus in contexts which did not admit the presence of Herod himself. Those, therefore, who have been inclined to reject off-hand Cheyne's suggestion of a 'mistake' in Mark's first introduction of 'Herodians' into the story will do well rather to ask whether in all three cases of this Markan peculiarity we should not rather infer from the testimony of Epiphanius and Tertullian, no less than from probability and the form of the word in Latin, that we have to do with a slight anachronism on the part of the Roman evangelist.

Additional Note to p. 110. If the editors of *Beginnings* are correct in their supposition that Epiphanius refers to Herod the Great that tradition which Tertullian cites simply as of "Herod". Epiphanius' blunder will be exactly paralleled by that of the Argumentum prefixed in the Vulgate codices HΘ to the fourth Gospel. In this Argumentum Jerome's statement that "John the son of Zebedee and brother of the Apostle James was beheaded by Herod" (*de vir. ill. ix*) is emended to: "John the son of Zebedee and brother of the Apostle James *relates that John the Baptist* was beheaded by Herod". "Herod" was taken to be "presumably Herod the Great".