

SOME MONUMENTS OF THE GREAT PERSECUTION.¹

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THE struggle between the Roman State and the Christian Church is abundantly illustrated in the literature, historical and controversial, of the two opposing parties ; and many a grim footnote to the story may be found in the records of Roman legislation and in the Christian martyrologies. In this lecture I will place before you some less familiar records of the struggle, some of them new, from the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire.

The ecclesiastical historians have pointed out that a new stage in the struggle of the Empire with its Christian subjects was reached in the persecution of Decius, which began in A.D. 249. During the preceding 200 years, if we except the initiative of individual emperors like Domitian and Marcus Aurelius, persecution had been largely haphazard and spasmodical, generally undertaken at the instigation of the mob in this or that city, and urged on an unwilling or indifferent government. Trajan's instruction to Pliny that the Christians were 'not to be hunted out' expressed the usual attitude of the Roman government ; and the records of many individual martyrdoms show us the Roman officials doing their utmost to save accused Christians from the consequences of their obstinacy. But with the persecutions of the latter half of the third century all this is changed, and the persecuting Emperors, Decius, Probus, and Diocletian with his associates now appear as active instigators of persecution.

We have hints in literature that the religious policy of some of

¹A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on 13 February, 1924. References, mainly to recent work, have been added.

these persecutors was not merely destructive, but constructive as well ; with the attempt to stamp out the Christian religion went an attempt to revive and give fresh energy to the decaying pagan cult. Maximinus II organised a pagan priesthood on the model of the Christian hierarchy, a plan which was repeated on a more elaborate scale by Julian fifty years later. In the inscriptions of Asia Minor we can trace some of the effects of this attempted revival. I shall refer to some inscriptions which reveal the movement at work ; but before doing so I would invite you to glance at another pagan document, more than a century earlier in date, which stands in an interesting relation to the early Christian mission.

Recent work on the papyrus rolls discovered at Herculaneum has thrown much light on the activity of the philosophical schools in the earlier Graeco-Roman period, and we are entitled to assume a similar activity for a couple of hundred years later. Throughout the early centuries of the Roman Empire, there were Epicurean fraternities in many of the eastern cities, one of whose main concerns was the discussion and elucidation of this or that phrase used by the founder of their sect. The fraternities were in continual communication with each other, controversy over the meaning of the *ipse dixit* went merrily forward, and you had a Rhodian and an Athenian interpretation just as at a later period you find an Antiochene confronted by an Alexandrine exegesis. Complaints were rife that the disputants did not even take the trouble to check their references ; 'they say "Epicurus wrote this," but cannot say where.' The writer of a recent account of these disputants compares them to Socialists of different colour, disputing as to the meaning of a dictum of Karl Marx.¹ A more pertinent parallel, for our present purpose, may be found in a letter of that muscular Christian Bishop Synesius of Cyrene, who tells a correspondent that 'he cannot remember the exact words, but can assure him that such and such an expression is attributed to God in the Bible.' The mentality of the Epicureans of Asia Minor about A.D. 150-200 is set in a better light by the quaint action of an Epicurean of Oenoanda in Lycia, named Diogenes. This man built a large *stoa* and had engraved on

¹ Prof. J. L. Stocks in Powell and Barber's *New Chapters in Greek Literature*, p. 22.

it an inscription on the scale of the *Monumentum Ancyranum* in which (he tells us) the whole gospel of Epicurus was placed before the eyes of citizens and strangers 'that no man might perish for lack of the medicine of salvation'—a phrase which reminds us of Ignatius' description of the eucharistic bread as 'the medicine of immortality.' This is the true missionary spirit, and the inscription, of which large fragments have survived, reveals a most interesting character, who is somewhat shaky in his *History of Philosophy*, but conveys his earnest message in vigorous Greek. We recall that at this very period the Pauline churches in the Lycus valley, to the north of Lycia, were actively engaged in missionary work, and that a Roman road, about 80 miles in length, led from Laodicea to Oenoanda; and we find ourselves wondering whether the influence of Diogenes and his fellow-Epicureans in the cities of Asia Minor did more to help or to hinder the work of the Christian missionaries. Lucian, writing about the same time, classes Christians with Epicureans, and sneers at both alike. And the Christian inscriptions of Phrygia betray more than one trace of Epicurean influence. 'In Phrygia,' says Ramsay, 'there was no chasm separating the Christians from Greek culture, and it is natural that some should go further than others in the adoption and assimilation of Greek philosophical sentiment.'¹ Similar inscriptions in Gaul perplexed Le Blant, who regarded them as epitaphs of Christians who had given way to debauchery, and mention the fact on their tombstones to win merit by confession. It is true that the early Christians often described themselves on their tombstones as 'sinners,' but they were not apt to particularise. One of the Gaulish examples: 'Here lies in peace Mercasto, who lived a prosperous life of sixty years; and a jolly life it was,' has been compared by Ramsay with an epitaph of Eumeneia in Phrygia, which threatens the violator of the tomb that he will have to reckon with the living God both now and on the day of judgment, and closes with three lines of marked Epicurean cast, which recall the philosophy of Horace. Such inscriptions show how broad was the way which led from enlightened philosophic thought to Christianity.

These inscriptions, pagan and Christian, help us to focus our eyes

¹ *Cities and Bishoprics*, p. 517.

to the picture of pagan activity presented by the memorials of a priestly family of Akmonia, which Ramsay has brought into relation with the persecution of Maximinus II.¹ The head of this family was one Aurelius Epitynchanos, who is mentioned on two inscriptions, one belonging to the Imperial estate of the Tembris Valley² or its immediate neighbourhood, the other, dated A.D. 313, belonging to the city of Akmonia. Its date places the latter inscription in the last stage of Maximinus' struggle against Christianity. In the former inscription, Epitynchanos is described as an astrologer and diviner, honoured with the citizenship of many cities, and leaving sons who were equally skilled in his arts. The second inscription—that dated A.D. 313—runs as follows: 'In the year 398, and observing the commands of the immortals, I that speak all things³ am Athanatos Epitynchanos, initiated by an honourable priestess of the people bearing an honourable name Spatale, whom (ᾗν) the immortal gods glorified both within and beyond the bounds (of Akmonia); for she redeemed many from evil tortures (ἐλυτρώσατο γὰρ πολλοὺς ἐκ κακῶν βασάνων). The high-priest Epitynchanos, glorified by the immortal gods, was buried by Diogas Epitynchanos and his bride Tation and their children' (names follow). An addition runs: 'Athanatos Epitynchanos, son of Pius, glorified by Hecate first, secondly by Manes Daos Heliodromos Zeus, thirdly (by) Phoebus leader and prophetic, truly I received the gift prophetic of truth in my own city and in its territory, and to give laws' (? : the text is obscure at this point). 'In the sight of all I have this gift from all the immortals, etc.' None can mistake the note of artificiality in this inscription of the pagan revival: 'the profusion of divine names and epithets, the revival of old cults, the respect for prophecy, and the confidence in divine favour and guidance—all are characteristic of the pagan revival.'⁴ This high-priest was undoubtedly a member of the hierarchy instituted by Maximinus II in imitation of and in opposition to the Christian priesthood. And his claim to a knowledge of astrology, a mixture of science and quackery

¹ *Pauline Studies*, p. 109 ff.; *Cities and Bishoprics*, II, p. 566.

² On this estate, a centre of Montanism, see *Bulletin*, 1923, p. 319 ff.

³ ἐγὼ ἵμε ὁ λαλῶν πάντα: cf. *John*, IV, 26 (Ramsay).

⁴ Ramsay, *Pauline Studies*, p. 111. Ramsay's view (*ibid.*: repeated from *Cities and Bishoprics*, II, p. 568) that ἐλυτρώσατο πολλοὺς ἐκ κακῶν βασάνων is a parody of the Christian zeal for conversion hardly does justice to the historical interest of this phrase, which refers to the activity of the

like the mediæval alchemy, shows how the revival addressed itself to the educated classes of the cities whose interest in philosophy, whether they were pagans or Christians, we have already remarked on.

But it is not only in the cities of Asia Minor that we can detect traces of the third century revival of paganism. Far more striking are the memorials of this movement which have survived on the territories occupied in the Roman period by the great Imperial estates.

In the beginning of the first century of our era, Strabo, an Anatolian Greek, painted a picture of the political geography of Asia Minor. The foreground of his sketch is occupied by the numerous Greek cities which had been founded in every part of the peninsula by the successors of Alexander the Great and other kings; in the background loom the vast Imperial estates, formerly the property of the temples which must at one time have been large land-owning concerns, now, in those parts of Asia Minor which had been incorporated in the Roman Empire, the private property of the Roman Emperors. Strabo had visited one of these estates, that of Comana in Cappadocia (still a vassal kingdom), and he describes it in some detail. It covered a large extent of territory, tilled by 6000 serfs, who were in a general way subject to the Kings of Cappadocia, but took their orders chiefly from the priest. The priest was the absolute lord (κύριος) of the temple and the serfs, and was second in honour in Cappadocia to the King. As a rule, priests and kings were of the same family.

As the Empire absorbed province after province of Asia Minor, these estates passed into the *patrimonium*, the private property of the reigning Emperor and his successors. The *coloni* or tillers of the soil on the estates thus passed into a relation of special dependence on the Emperor; on inscriptions of Asia Minor such *coloni* address petitions to the Emperors, and describe themselves as 'your own farmers'¹ As the heir of the Hellenistic King and the associate of the god in the

pagan priestess in granting certificates (*libelli*) to those who recanted, or were falsely suspected of Christianity, in the persecution. See *J.R.S.* 1912, p. 240, where it is shown that the βίσαντοι are the tortures of the persecution. The same word is used by Bishop Eugenius of Laodicea, who suffered in the persecution, *J.R.S.* 1920, p. 42 ff.

¹ See Anderson in *J.H.S.* 1897, p. 419: γεωργοὶ οἱ ὑμέτεροι, χωρίον ὑμέτερόν ἐσμεν ἱερώτατον (in a petition to Philip Aug. and Philip Caes. A.D. 244-246).

absolute ownership of the estates, the Emperor, who was himself worshipped as a god over the Empire generally, and had temples built to him in the cities, would naturally inherit or share the god's rights to the worship and obedience of his people. It is clear that in such a situation the Emperors' power to maintain, control, and direct the pagan cult was immense, and that if an individual Emperor, say a Decius or a Maximinus, wished to revive and organise paganism as a fighting force against Christianity, the cult associations on these estates lay ready to his hand as an instrument which he could wield with effect. Tertullian, at the end of the second century, described the Jewish synagogues as the *fontes persecutionum*, the sources of the persecutions; and we have an Anatolian complaint to the same effect in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*. In late-third-century inscriptions of Asia Minor we have evidence that the pagan associations on the Imperial estates became, if not the originating sources of persecution, at any rate the *foci* in which the anti-Christian spirit of oriental paganism was fostered, and the channels through which persecution was directed, by the persecuting Emperors.

It is of course in accordance with analogy that the *coloni* on the Imperial estates of Asia Minor should be organised in associations for the worship of the ancient god of the temple, with whom the reigning Emperor or Emperors were now associated. Such religious organisation underlay or accompanied all ancient forms of association.

Such an association has been proved to have existed on the large group of estates which have emerged into the light of history in the course of recent exploration in the Phrygian highlands of Asia and South Galatia.

Pisidian Antioch—a Phrygian town which derived its epithet from its proximity to the border of Pisidia—is famous in Christian History as the city in which Paul began his mission to the Galatians. At first sight, the Apostle's choice might seem unpropitious. Crowning the hill which looks down on the city from the east, stood the temple of Mên Askaênos, one of the largest land-owners in Asia Minor. Soon after B.C. 300, Seleucus Nicator carved a demesne out of the god's estate, and made it the territory of his new foundation Antiochia. The extent of this demesne is unknown; what is certain is that when Paul visited the city it was bounded on at least two sides by land belonging to the divine estate, cultivated by Phrygian-speaking

rustics who were the god's own people and who had passed seventy-five years earlier, along with the land they tilled, into the private possession of the Roman Emperors.

For a century and a half after Paul's visits to Antioch, the inscriptions of the citizens and residents of Antioch itself are our chief evidence for the history of the valley. But early in the third century of our era the Imperial estates suddenly became vocal, and their story can be read on a remarkable series of documents whose discovery went on, step by step, throughout the thirty years preceding the war.

These documents are the inscriptions of the Tekmoreian guest-friends, a religious society formed or revived to foster the worship of the pagan god, with a membership drawn from towns and villages scattered over the whole of eastern Phrygia, and the Pisidian borderland. Many of the villages can be identified on Imperial estates, and even the dwellers in some of the cities were drawn into the movement. Some of the inscriptions are long subscription lists, detailing the sums contributed by members for various purposes connected with the cult. Others appear to correspond to certificates of baptism and confirmation, and show that the performance of an act of ritual was a condition of membership of the society. Many examples of the latter class have been found on the wall of the *peribolos* of Mên, and here the town population of Antioch is largely represented in the dedications. What the act of ritual consisted in, we do not yet know. The Imperial character of the association is clearly reflected in one inscription, which informs us that the *procurator* and an *actor* who managed the estate for the Emperor were priests in the cult.¹

Now there is nothing revolutionary in all this. Similar societies are known to have existed on Imperial estates elsewhere in Asia Minor and in other parts of the Roman Empire. The value for our purpose of the Tekmoreian inscriptions is, firstly, the large amount of information they contain regarding the purpose and organisation of the society, and, secondly, the impression they convey, both from their language and from the local circumstances which provide their setting, that the whole movement was artificial and engineered from above.

Among the traces of artificiality remarked on by Ramsay we may point to the name of the society itself and of the ritual act

¹ Ramsay, *J.H.S.* 1912, p. 151 ff.

from which it was derived. The verb which denotes the central act in the cult occurs only here, and is never heard of elsewhere before or after. There is no doubt that it was expressly invented for this pagan revival. From the old poetical word τέκμωρ, 'a sign,' a verb τεκμορεύειν was coined, and the participle τεκμορεύσας was used of an initiate who had performed the ceremony. The initiates as a body were called Ξένοι Τεκμορεῖοι, or 'Friends of the Antient Order of the Sign.'

I may mention one more trace of artificiality in the activities of this association. Greek, as is well known, was the language used in inscriptions of the Imperial period in Asia Minor, in both town and country. Greek was the language of educated society and of Roman administration ; all official and private documents were composed in Greek. This does not mean, however, that the native languages, spoken by the various peoples settled in Asia Minor when the Pergamene and Seleucid penetration was effected, had ceased to be spoken. Strabo indeed tells us that in his day Lydian was no longer spoken in the thoroughly hellenised district of Lydia ; but we have evidence that the Galatian, Phrygian, Pisidian, Lycaonian, and Cappadocian languages were spoken as late as the fourth century of our era, and in some cases even later. These languages were spoken, as is natural, in the country districts, and therefore on the Imperial estates, down to about A.D. 350 at least. We have many late-third and fourth century inscriptions from these districts, but, with one exception, not a scrap of any of these languages appears to have been committed to stone. The exception is the Phrygian language. Phrygian inscriptions dating from early in the first millenium B.C. can still be read on the tombs of the Phrygian kings in the 'Monument Country' around Kümbet. Thereafter, for about a thousand years, not a word of Phrygian has been found carved in stone. Then suddenly, about A.D. 250-300, the peasants on the Imperial estates which we have been discussing began to use Phrygian in the formula by which they warned trespassers off their burial-grounds. This revival of the use of the language of the mother goddess for a religious purpose is clearly part of the 'revivalist' policy of the Tekmoreian association ; amid the various methods employed by the Roman Empire for fostering loyalty through religion, it is, I think, unique. Similar linguistic revivals in our own day have as their motive the

feeling of nationalism. It is characteristic of ancient society that the only linguistic revival of which we have any record should have a religious motive.

Such are a few aspects of the pagan social background of the third century persecutions in Phrygia. We now proceed to study some of the Christian monuments of the same region and period. But first let us pay a flying visit to the Crypt of the Popes, in the Cemetery of Callisto at Rome.

The accidental preservation of a vast amount of artistic and epigraphical evidence in the Roman Catacombs has led to the formulation of a body of doctrine which, while it has been of immense service to Christian archæologists working in other parts of the Roman Empire, has not been without its pitfalls. Josef Strzygowski has called attention to some of these pitfalls in the domain of early Christian Art ;¹ and similar caution is required in applying rules deduced from the practice of the subterranean engravers of the Catacombs to the early Christian burial custom of Asia Minor. Texts like Matthew x, 18-20 have been invoked to explain the extreme brevity, simplicity, and 'other worldliness' of the epitaphs of the earliest Roman Christians ;² but the totally different character of the earliest Christian inscriptions of Asia Minor compels us to seek a different explanation, and reminds us that an epitaph on one of the thousands of serried *columbaria* in this vast city of the dead need be no more than a label or 'identity disc ;' here there was no need to mention the fact of burial, or the extent of the burial ground, or (in a family crypt) the family relationships—a bare name was enough. With these considerations in our minds let us enter the famous Crypt in which the Popes of the third century were laid to rest, and glance at some of their epitaphs.

Here we see the epitaph of Fabianus, Pope of Rome from A.D. 236 till his martyrdom in A.D. 250. It is in Greek, and consists of the words *Φαβιανὸς ἐπίσκοπος* followed by a monogram meaning 'martyr.' But the monogram is not so deeply cut as the rest of the inscription : it was manifestly a later addition. De Rossi maintained that the suppression of the title 'martyr' can hardly have been necessary as an act of prudence, since another inscription in this same crypt,

¹ *Origin of Christian Church Art*, Ch. I.

² See Le Blant, *Manuel d'Épig. chrét.* p. 6 ff.

that of Pope Cornelius, exhibits this title, as also does the epitaph of St. Hyacinthus in the Catacomb of St. Hermes. He therefore suggested that the addition of the title in the case of Pope Fabianus was delayed for eighteen months, in consequence of the Holy See remaining vacant during this period ; that Fabianus, though actually a martyr at the time of his burial, was not *martyr vindicatus*. This theory, which appeared convincing, has been exploded by the subsequent discovery (in 1909) of the epitaph of Pope Pontianus, Ποντιανὸς ἐπίσκοπος μ(ά)ρτυς, on which the monogram for 'martyr' is again clearly a later addition. Pontianus died in exile in Sardinia during the persecution under Maximinus I, and his body was brought to Rome some three years later. Obviously, he must have been technically a 'martyr'—*martyr vindicatus*—before his burial ; and we find ourselves inclining to the hypothesis that the title 'martyr' was carved on the tombs of Fabianus and Pontianus after the legalisation of Christianity. What then are we to think of the epitaph of Pope Cornelius (martyred in A.D. 253), which has the title 'martyr' written in full, and apparently contemporary with the rest of the inscription ? Was this epitaph (the only epitaph in the Crypt of the Roman Popes composed in Latin) a later restoration, or did the practice vary ? Our purpose in visiting the Crypt of the Popes is not to find an answer to this question, but merely to remind ourselves that even in the comparative seclusion of the Roman Catacombs the title 'martyr' was not engraved on a martyr's tomb as a matter of course.

We now return to Asia Minor.

The epitaph of Julius Eugenius, bishop of Laodicea Combusta from about A.D. 315 till about A.D. 340 or later, was discovered in 1908.¹ Eugenius tells us that he had suffered many tortures in the Great Persecution, but had maintained the Christian faith, and had contrived to quit the Roman service on an occasion when Maximinus II had issued a decree that Christians in the army must sacrifice without the option of retiring from the service. This decree (he says) was issued while Valerius Diogenes was governor of Pisidia ; Diogenes is known from other inscriptions, and the mention of him dates the beginning of Eugenius' episcopate within a year or two of A.D. 315.

¹ See *J.R.S.* 1920, p. 42 ff. ; *Anatolian Studies pres. to Ramsay*, p. 70 ff.

He had been bishop of Laodicea for twenty-five years when he dedicated his sarcophagus, about A.D. 340. How long he lived after this date we cannot tell. This is the only accurately dated inscription so far found in eastern Phrygia, and a study of its language and contents, and of the monument on which it is engraved, has thrown much light on the chronology of the undated Christian monuments of this area. One detail recorded by Eugenius is very significant ; his main concern during his episcopate was to *rebuild* the church of Laodicea *from its foundations*. This is the first direct information which has come down to us regarding the sufferings of the Christians of Laodicea in the Great Persecution. The church had been destroyed in the Persecution ; what had been the fate of Eugenius' predecessor in the episcopal chair ?

This question was answered in 1911, when Ramsay and I found a second inscription mentioning bishop Eugenius, and his martyred predecessor bishop Severus.¹ This is the dedication, in five elegiac couplets, of a memorial chapel in which the relics of Severus and Eugenius were laid, towards the end of the fourth century. Severus is described as 'the glorious victor in the contest of the Heavenly Father.' Such language, at this period, was regularly used of a martyr. Eugenius tells us, in his epitaph, that he had suffered many tortures in the Persecution ; we are entitled to infer from the dedication of a memorial chapel to the two bishops that Severus had been put to death. Such a conclusion could not be drawn from such language universally, for the title 'martyr' was sometimes given to those who remained steadfast under torture, like Eugenius, or died broken in health by persecution, like Pope Pontianus. But in the present case the circumstances admit of no other interpretation.

While the names of martyrs, and references to memorial *martyria* abound in Christian inscriptions of the Byzantine period, it is well known that (apart from the Roman Catacombs) contemporary epigraphical records of martyrdom are exceedingly scarce. So far, if we except Laodicea Combusta, Asia Minor has produced at most three such inscriptions. Two of these are epitaphs, to be carefully distinguished from memorial dedications on *martyria* in which the relics of martyrs were deposited some time after their death. The first is

¹ *Anatolian Studies pres. to Ramsay*, p. 70 ff.

the following inscription from the Phrygian Pentapolis, published in CIG. 9266, but first explained by Ramsay (*Cities and Bishoprics*, ii. p. 730).

(α) Εἰρήνη τοῖς παράγουσιν πᾶσιν ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ· Αὐρ. Ἀλέξανδρος Μάρκου ὁ τῶν Ξάν[θ]ου ἀνέστησα εἵνεκα τῆς εἰστοργῆς [κα]ὶ το[ῦ] κάλλους γλυκύτατά μου τέκνα θε[όφιλα] τειμητὰ ἐν ἱρήνῃ τοῦ Θεοῦ· ἔν[ε]κεν τούτου [ἔσ]τησα τὴν εἰ[σ]τί[λλ]ην χάριν μνήμης Εὐγενίῃ καὶ Μαρκέλλῃ καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ καὶ Μακεδόνι καὶ Νόννῃ τοῖς γλυκυτάτοις τέκνοις τοῖς ὑπὸ ἑνα κερὸν [ὀ]νη[θ]εῖσιν τὸ τῆς ζωῆς μέρος. ὃς ἂν δὲ π[ρ]οσκόψῃ ξένος τῷ τύμβῳ τούτῳ, ἄ[ωρ]α τέκνα ἔχωσι.

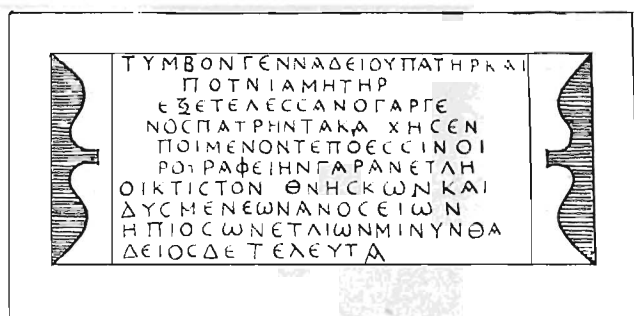
(β) Εἰς τήνδε (or εἰστὴν δὲ) τὸ ἡ[ρ]ῶ[ι]ον κοινὸν τῶν ἀδελ[φ]ῶν.

Ramsay has taken the five children mentioned in this epitaph as having 'won the portion of life in one day' to be the spiritual 'children' of the bishop of a city in the Pentapolis, who had suffered martyrdom together. The language of the inscription dates it in the third century, and Ramsay's hypothesis that it is the tombstone of five Phrygian martyrs who suffered under Decius or Diocletian has been accepted by several good authorities, and must be regarded as highly probable. Like the next instance which we shall quote, the names of Eugenia, Marcella, Alexander, Macedon and Nonna—if, indeed, they were martyrs—are unknown to the martyrologies.

The second inscription is the epitaph of a martyr called Paul found at Derbe, published, with a drawing of the monument, in *Studies in the Eastern Roman Provinces*, p. 60 ff. The form of the monument is that of the commonest type of tombstone in this neighbourhood, and there can be no doubt that Miss Ramsay is right in regarding it as a genuine tombstone, erected over the actual grave of the martyr. The inscription, which runs Νούνηνος καὶ Οὐαλέριος ἐκόσμησαν Παῦλον τὸν μάρτυρα μ(νήμης) χ(άριν), is of the ordinary Isaurian and south Lycaonian sepulchral type. This Paul was a martyr who suffered in the Great Persecution, and had his gravestone erected, probably by two priests, perhaps by two members of his family, immediately after the peace of the Church. Whatever was the case at Rome (and we have seen that the evidence of the underground Catacombs is doubtful) it is very unlikely that the Roman officials would have tolerated the open use of the term 'martyr' in a surface cemetery during the period of persecution. This tombstone must be dated after the close of Maximinus' persecution, or even after the defeat of Licinius in A.D. 323.



No 1.



No. 2.

[To face p. 357.]

In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the letter sent by the Church in Smyrna to the Church in Philomelium in or soon after A.D. 155, there is a sentence (§ 17) which proves that as early as the middle of the second century the Roman government had begun the practice of withholding the remains of martyrs from their fellow Christians. The reason given in the text of the letter, that the Roman officials wished to prevent the worship of the martyr, is doubtless the correct one. St. Augustine, at a later date, was at pains to explain that the cult of the martyrs had nothing in common with pagan worship of the dead. But in Asia Minor the worship of the dead was specially characteristic of the popular pagan religion, and the Romans had as clear a motive for objecting to the erection of Christian *Martyria* as Lord Kitchener had for destroying the tomb of a Sudanese Mahdi. This attitude on the part of the Roman officials no doubt explains the scarcity of identifiable martyrs' tombs even in parts of the Empire where Christianity was vigorous and influential. It also throws light on the circumstances under which relics of the martyr Trophimus of Pisidian Antioch, who suffered under the Emperor Probus in A.D. 281, were deposited in a reliquary coffer dug up by a Turkish peasant at Synnada in 1907, and now in the Museum at Brussa.¹ On the end of this little marble box (see Figure No. 1) shaped like a common local type of sarcophagus, is carved the inscription :

᾽Ωδε · ἐνα · Τρο· -
 φί · μου · τοῦ · μ-
 ἀρ · τυ · ρος · ὁσ · τέ-
 · α ·

‘ Within are bones of Trophimus the martyr ; ’

and on the lid :

Τίς · ἀν · δὲ · ταῦ · ᾽-
 τα · τὰ · ὀστέα ·
 ἐκ · βιά · λη · πο · τὲ
 ἔσται · αὐτῷ
 πρὸς · τ[ὸ(ν)] Θεό-
 ν.

‘ And whoso shall ever cast out these bones, he shall have to reckon with God.’

¹ See Mendel and Grégoire in *Catalogue du Musée de Brousse*, p. 94 ff.

It is obvious that this coffer was not intended for open exhibition ; yet it is inscribed with the very formula by which the Christians of Phrygia, throughout the later third century, warned wrongdoers against interference with the tombs of their dead. The lettering also points to the third century, and the coffer appears certainly to belong to the period of persecution and is contemporary, or nearly contemporary with the death of Trophimus. Trophimus is known from the martyrologies, where he is said to have suffered with Sabazius and Dorymedon at Synnada on Sept. 19th, 281. The dedication of a public tomb to a martyr was precarious ; no doubt the fortunate discovery at Synnada illustrates a practice common during the persecutions, in spite of Roman vigilance.¹

We are now in a position to appreciate the veiled and non-committal language of a martyr's epitaph from the neighbourhood of Laodicea Combusta, which was partially published by Callander in *Studies in the Eastern Roman Provinces*, p. 175, but whose character first became clear with the recovery of the complete text in 1910. It belongs to the ancient site at Suwerek, which was probably a village on the territory of Laodicea Combusta when this inscription was engraved, and was raised to the rank of a bishopric (Psibela) at a later period. The inscription was copied by Callander in 1904 and by Ramsay in 1906 : but neither succeeded in deciphering the important third line. In 1910, our party was detained for two days at Suwerek, and I had ample time to study the text of this and other inscriptions. My reading of the third line was afterwards confirmed by Ramsay, and rests on our joint authority. See Figure No. 2.

Τύμβον Γενναδείου πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ
ἐξετέλεσαν· ὁ γὰρ γένος πάτρην τ' ἀκάχησεν·
ποιμέν' ὄντ' ἐπ' ὅεσσιν· ὁ ἱρο[γ]ραφεῖην γὰρ ἀνέτλη
οἴκτιστον θνήσκων, καὶ δυσμενέων ἀνοσείων
ἥπιος ὢν, ἐταίων μινυνθάδειος δ' ἐτελεύτα.

' The tomb of Gennadius his father and lady mother
constructed, for he grieved his family and native town,

¹ M. Mendel notes that the Turkish report sent to Brussa at the time of the discovery of this coffer mentions that 'ossements de crâne' were found with the coffer. The report does not say whether those bones were inside the box, which is too small to contain a complete skull.

being a pastor over the sheep ; ¹ for he endured (the prediction of) Holy Writ dying most piteously, and among impious foes being gentle, and in years short-lived he came to his end.'

At first sight ² this might pass for an ordinary pagan epitaph, belonging to the late-third or early-fourth century, and composed in the jerky and broken-winded hexameters common in this class of epitaph. But when we look closely into it, we find features which distinguish it sharply from pagan epitaphs. The word 'impious' applied to the 'foes' in contrast to whom Gennadius was so 'gentle' reminds us irresistibly of the Acts of the Martyrs, in which such language is very common. This would of itself suggest that Gennadius was a martyr ; the third line, now fully recovered, places the question beyond doubt. In this line, the expression 'pastor over the sheep' describes the office of Gennadius in terms which were consecrated in this sense from the earliest beginnings of Christianity ; and the obscurely compendious 'he endured Holy Writ,' whatever the exact meaning we attach to the words, describes the conduct of a martyr who was steadfast to the end.³ The close association between these words and 'dying most piteously' in the next line makes it certain that they refer to the martyrdom of Gennadius. They may mean either 'He (did not deny) Holy Scripture but endured (death),' or, more probably, as I have translated them, they are a condensed way of saying 'he endured the prediction of Holy Writ,' in which case this south Galatian epitaph contains a clear reference to the words addressed by Paul to the south Galatians in Acts xiv, 22 '*exhorting them to continue in the faith and that through many tribulations we must enter the*

¹ The accusative ποιμέν' ὄντ' depends on a verb like ἐκόσμησαν or ἀνέστησαν, implied in the first sentence.

² In what follows, I repeat much of what I wrote in reference to this inscription in *Discovery*, Nov. 1923, p. 300 f.

³ Professor H. Grégoire (whose high authority supports me in claiming this inscription as a martyr's epitaph) would read θηροτραφείην γὰρ ἀνέτλη ('il endura d'être livré en pâture aux bêtes'). *C. R. du V^e Congrès international des Sciences historiques*, 1923, p. 86. The same idea had occurred to me, but I prefer a known to an unknown word. The condensation ἱερογραφείην ἀνέτλη finds a close parallel in another Christian inscription of Phrygia : ἰς τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡρώων ἐξὸν εἶναι τεθῆναι Ἀμμία καὶ Τατιανῇ πρὸς τοὺς ἀνδρας ἐὰν τηρήσωσι τὸν Θεόν, *Cities and Bishoprics*, II, p. 530, with which compare κὲ τηρῶν ἐντολὰς ἀθανάτων, *ibid.* p. 566.

Kingdom of God,' or to the south Galatian Timothy (2 Tim. iii. 12) : ' *Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*' Such obscurity of expression is familiar to students of the epigraphy of pre-Constantinian Christianity. During the centuries before Christianity became a legal religion, the Christians had perforce to avoid open profession of their religion on tombstones,¹ and had recourse to a veiled language. This obscurity of expression was both necessary and deliberate.

As regards the date of this inscription, I can feel no doubt that it belongs to the persecution under Maximinus II, which, as we have seen above, weighed heavily on the Christians of Laodicea. The design of the panel, and the lettering, are similar to those on the sarcophagus of Julius Eugenius,² although in this village epitaph the execution is not so careful. The sarcophagus of Eugenius was prepared about A.D. 340 ; the tombstone of Gennadius was dedicated a decade or two earlier, during the Persecution or immediately after it. That it was contemporary with the Persecution is clear from its veiled language ; in the inscriptions of Eugenius and of Severus, carved after the peace of the Church, Christianity is openly proclaimed. In the fourth century, as we have seen, the ancient settlement at Suwerek was a village, probably on the territory of Laodicea Combusta ; its inscriptions betray no trace of an independent city organisation. Gennadius was accordingly a presbyter, or at most a village-bishop (*chor-episcopus*) under Bishop Severus of Laodicea. Eugenius survived his torture ; Severus probably, and Gennadius certainly, ' won the victor's crown.' The Laodicean inscriptions thus remind the Church of three forgotten martyrs.

Neander, arguing from literary sources, and Ramsay, using the evidence of inscriptions, have both drawn the conclusion that Phrygia suffered but slightly in the earlier persecutions, but felt the full force of the massacres under Decius and especially under Diocletian and his associates. In the second and early third centuries persecution was usually instigated, and at times forced on an unwilling government, by the pagan population—or by the Jews ; under Decius and Diocletian it was engineered, as we have seen, by the government itself. The

¹ And even in private letters : see *Class. Rev.* 1924, p. 30 f.

² See *Klio* 1910, p. 232, and *J.R.S.* 1920, Plate I.

picture of Phrygian society which the inscriptions enable us to reconstruct explains both the comparative lightness of persecution in the earlier period, and its severity in the later.

It is a picture, as Ramsay has pointed out,¹ of accommodation and good feeling between the Christians and their pagan neighbours. On the negative side the orthodox Christians (I say 'orthodox' because some of the heretical bodies form an exception) avoided all parade of their religion which would give offence to pagan susceptibility ; on the positive side they appear to have played an influential and patriotic part in the city life of the provinces. Under these conditions, the chief motive of the earlier type of persecution, popular ill-feeling against a body of men who were regarded in the Roman Empire generally as anti-social and unpatriotic, was largely absent in Phrygia ; under these conditions we can understand why the later type of persecution fall with especial fury on the Phrygian cities. Diocletian's policy was war on the Church as such, and good strategy demanded that he should attack the enemy in his strongest positions. It is clear that by the end of the third century many parts of Phrygia were almost solidly Christian. Hence the severity of the Great Persecution in this area.

These are considerations of a general character. But there were special conditions in Phrygia, and especially in the rural districts of eastern Phrygia, which accentuated the severity of the persecution. In this area most of the land was in the private possession of the Roman Emperors, and we have already pointed out traces of the activity of the anti-Christian associations on the Imperial estates in Phrygia. It is perhaps not without significance that Laodicea Combusta, whose inscriptions, as we have seen, preserve a unique record of the sufferings of its inhabitants in the Great Persecution, lay close to an Imperial estate, and that the bureau from which the estate was managed was located in the city.

A further consideration which must be borne in mind is the strength in Phrygia of a type of Christianity which actually courted persecution ; and we may hazard the guess that many of the martyrs, both of the earlier and of the later period, represented this type. Phrygia was the home of Montanism ; and I have already attempted, in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*,² to reconstruct the

¹ *Cities and Bishoprics*, II, p. 502 ff.

² 1923, p. 309 ff.

local history of this Phrygian movement. The Montanists, as readers of Tertullian will remember, insisted on open profession of Christianity even at the risk of martyrdom; and on their tombstones in Phrygia they carried this principle into practice. And here again local information from Laodicea Combusta allows us to guess at one of the causes of the trials which the local Christians had to undergo. The inscriptions show us that this city was deeply affected by sectarianism of the Montanist-Novatian type in the later fourth century, and the dedication to bishop Severus itself informs us that the church over which he presided was unorthodox. I have discussed these inscriptions elsewhere,¹ and have shown that the 'Burnt Phrygia' which Epiphanius mentions as a nest of heresies and a centre of the Pisidian Encratites was no other than Laodicea Combusta. The Encratites shared with the Montanists and Novatians a stern attitude to those who 'lapsed' in the persecutions, and communities of these sectarians must have presented a specially tempting target to the organisers of persecution.

I will round off this discursive discourse with a speculation.

Eusebius and Lactantius both refer to a Christian town in Phrygia—neither gives its name—which was destroyed, with its whole population, in the Great Persecution.² Eusebius adds the poignant detail that these Christians perished in the flames 'calling upon the God who is over all.' Ramsay has published an ingenious argument³ identifying this town with Eumeneia or with Attanassus, whose inscriptions give evidence of a thriving Christianity throughout the third century, and suddenly cease at the end of it. But the same is true (in a less marked degree) of other Phrygian towns; and, if the degree is less marked, that may only be because the preservation or loss of inscriptions in Phrygian cities has depended on accidental circumstances

¹ *Anatolian Studies pres. to Ramsay*, p. 67 ff.

² Eusebius, *H.E.* viii. 11, ἡδὲ γοῦν ὅλην Χριστιανῶν πολίχνην αὐτανδρον ἀμφὶ τὴν Φρυγίαν ἐν κύκλῳ περιβαλόντες ὀπλῖται πῦρ τε ὑφάψαντες κατέφλεξαν αὐτοὺς ἅμα νηπίους καὶ γυναιξὶ τὸν ἐπὶ πάντων θεὸν ἐπιβοωμένους. Lactantius, *Inst. Div.* v. 11, sicut unus in Phrygia qui uniuersum populum cum ipso pariter conuenticulo concremauit. Both accounts obviously refer to the same incident, but the language of Lactantius leaves it doubtful whether he is thinking of a city population or only of a congregation.

³ *Cities and Bishoprics*, p. 505 ff.

—it is not always safe to base conclusions on the relative frequency of inscriptions belonging to different places and periods. Moreover, Eumeneia (as Ramsay has shown), was a typical orthodox town, and if an orthodox town had distinguished itself in this manner in the Great Persecution it is unlikely that so good a catholic as Eusebius would have withheld its name. The silence of Eusebius on this point, combined with the details which he gives of this frightful massacre, appears to me to point to a community of Montanist fanatics; and I would point out that Pepouza, in which a section of the Montanists awaited the coming of the Great Persecution and the Descent of the New Jerusalem foretold in the Apocalypse has, in fact, disappeared without leaving a trace. Can this be the true explanation of Epiphanius' reference to Pepouza: '(The Montanists) honour a deserted place in Phrygia, formerly a city called Pepouza, *but now levelled with the ground*, and they assert that the New Jerusalem descends there'?¹ The heretic Aëtius, we know, was banished to Pepouza (if that is the correct form of 'Petousa' which we read in the text of Philostorgius),² in A.D. 356, and it has been argued that this disproves the statement of Epiphanius, who wrote in A.D. 375. But may we not rather enjoy the grim humour displayed in the choice of a place of exile?³ The interesting detail recorded by Eusebius, that these Christians died 'calling upon the God who is over all,' may then be referred to a context which exactly suits the Montanists. I refer to the prophecy of Joel, quoted in Acts ii. 17-21:

*And it shall be in the last days, saith God,
I will pour forth my spirit upon all flesh,
And your sons and your daughters shall prophecy,
And your young men shall see visions
And your old men shall dream dreams. . . .
And I will show wonders in the heaven above,
And signs in the earth beneath
Blood and fire and vapour of smoke. . . .
And it shall be that whosoever shall call on the name
Of the Lord shall be saved.*

¹ *Haer.* xlviii. 14, τιμῶσι δὲ οἱ τοιοῦτοι καὶ τόπον τινὰ ἔρημον ἐν τῇ Φρυγίᾳ, Πέπουζαν ποτε καλουμένην πόλιν, νῦν δὲ ἡδαφισμένην, καὶ φασιν ἐκεῖσε κατιέναι τὴν ἄνωθεν Ἱερουσαλήμ.

² *H.E.* iv. 8 (Bidez, p. 62).

³ The bones of Montanus were honoured in Pepouza till A.D. 550; see Holl, *Epiphanius* (*Anc. u. Pan.*), ii. p. 239.

The faith of the Montanists was founded on their belief in the literalness of the prophecy in the Apocalypse, which foretold that a Great Persecution would precede the Second Advent. A community of these sectarians, when the Great Persecution actually came, would be unlikely to forget the prophecy of Joel.¹ Eusebius suppresses the name of the town which was destroyed in the Persecution ; Epiphanius is silent regarding the circumstances under which Pepouza was 'levelled with the ground.' Neither Eusebius nor Epiphanius had much sympathy either with Montanism or with scientific history ; between the lines of their narratives I am inclined to read the fate which overtook the New Jerusalem of the Montanists in the Great Persecution.

Can a similar faith, and a similar prejudice, be invoked to explain why the Christian martyrs who are gradually being restored to History by the inscriptions of eastern Phrygia are unknown to the Calendar of the Church ? The Calendar has found a place for Perpetua and Felicitas, the Montanist martyrs of Africa, and a recent historian has explained that after all these ladies were ' Church Montanists.'² Perhaps one day, in retrospective homage to Christian reunion, the Calendar—and the historians—may rise to even greater heights of catholicity.

¹ Eusebius has substituted ἐπιβοᾶσθαι for ἐπικαλεῖσθαι in LXX. and Acts.

² See B. J. Kidd, *History of the Church to A.D. 461*, I, p. 286.