

THE PASSION OF THE SCILLITAN MARTYRS

by Anonymous (Early Church)

One of the earliest authentic records of Christian martyrdom in North Africa, dating to AD 180. The text preserves the trial proceedings of a group of Christians from Scillium who refused to recant their faith.

5 Chapters

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The Passion Of The Scillitan Martyrs

The Passion of the Scillitan Martyrs. Introduction.

The Scillitan Martyrs were condemned and executed at Carthage on the 17th July, a.d.180. The martyrs belonged to Scili, a place in that part of Numidia which belonged to proconsular Africa. The proconsul at the time, who is said by Tertullian to have been the first to draw the sword against the Christians there, was P. Vigellius Saturninus. The consuls for the year were Præsens II. and Condianus. Marcus Aurelius had died only a few months before. The exact date of the martyrdom was long under dispute, and the question has recently arisen whether the Acts were originally written in Latin or Greek. Baronius placed the date as late as 202. The text had become corrupt in passing through various Latin and Greek versions and transcriptions, and it was long impossible to recognize the names of the consuls for the year in the first line of the piece. But M. Leon Renier conjectured that the word *bis* pointed to a consul's name underlying the word preceding it, and suggested the year 180, when Præsens and Condianus were consuls. This conjecture was confirmed by Usener's publication in 1881 of a Greek version from a ninth century ms. in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, though even here the names, though recognizable, were in a corrupt form. Usener believed this version to be a translation from a Latin original, and his theory has been confirmed by Mr. Armitage Robinson's discovery of a Latin ms. of the ninth century in the British Museum, containing the Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs in a form briefer than any of the other versions and believed to be the original. Mr. A. Robinson's translation which follows, is from the Latin which he discovered, and which is printed in *Texts and Studies*, vol. i., No.2.

The Passion of the Scillitan Martyrs.

When Præsens, for the second time, and Claudianus were the consuls, on the seventeenth day of July, at Carthage, there were set in the judgment-hall Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus, Donata, Secunda and Vestia. Saturninus the proconsul said: Ye can win the indulgence of our lord the Emperor, if ye return to a sound mind. Speratus said: We have never done ill, we have not lent ourselves to wrong, we have never spoken ill, but when ill-treated we have given thanks; because we pay heed to our Emperor. Saturninus the proconsul said: We too are religious, and our religion is simple, and we swear by the genius of our lord the Emperor, and pray for his welfare, as ye also ought to do. Speratus said: If thou wilt peaceably lend me thine ears, I can tell thee the mystery of simplicity. Saturninus said: I will not lend mine ears to thee, when thou beginnest to speak evil things of our sacred rites; but rather swear thou by the genius of our lord the Emperor. Speratus said: The empire of this world I know not; but rather I serve that God, whom no man hath seen, nor with these eyes can see. [4443] I have committed no theft; but if I have bought anything I pay the tax; because I know my Lord, the King of kings and Emperor of all nations. Saturninus the proconsul said to the rest: Cease to be of this persuasion. Speratus said: It is an ill persuasion to do murder, to speak false witness. Saturninus the proconsul said: Be not partakers of this folly. Cittinus said: We have none other to fear, save only our Lord God, who is in heaven. Donata said: Honour to Cæsar as Cæsar: but fear to God. [4444] Vestia said: I am a Christian. Secunda said: What I am, that I wish to be. Saturninus the proconsul said to Speratus: Dost thou persist in being a Christian? Speratus said: I am a Christian. And with him they all agreed. Saturninus the proconsul said: Will ye have a space to consider? Speratus said: In a matter so straightforward there is no considering. Saturninus the proconsul said: What are the things in your chest? Speratus said: Books and epistles of Paul, a just man. Saturninus the proconsul said: Have a delay of thirty days and bethink yourselves. Speratus said a second time: I am a Christian. And with him they all agreed. Saturninus the proconsul read out the decree from the tablet: Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus, Donata, Vestia, Secunda and the rest having confessed that they live according to the Christian rite, since after opportunity offered them of returning to the custom of the Romans they have obstinately persisted, it is determined that they be put to the sword. Speratus said: We give thanks to God. Nartzalus said: To-day we are martyrs in heaven; thanks be to God. Saturninus the proconsul ordered it to be declared by the herald: Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus, Veturius, Felix, Aquilinus, Lætantius, Januaria, Generosa, Vestia, Donata and Secunda, I have ordered to be executed. They all said: Thanks be to God. And so they all together were crowned with martyrdom; and they reign with the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, for ever and ever. Amen.

Commentaries of Origen. Introduction.

For a general account of Origen and of his works we may refer to Dr. Crombie's *Life of Origen*, in vol. iv. of this series (xxiii. in Clark's issue). The principal facts of his career are as follows: He was born of Christian parents at Alexandria about the year 185 a.d., and from his earliest youth devoted himself to the study of Scripture in such a way as to suggest that he was destined for a great career. His father suffered martyrdom in the year 202, and Origen very soon afterwards succeeded the great Clement as head of the school at Alexandria. Thirteen years after, the persecution of Caracalla drove him from his own country to Cæsarea, where though still a layman he preached at church meetings. Recalled to Alexandria, he laboured there for fifteen years further as teacher and author, till in the year 231 his ordination at Cæsarea to the office of presbyter drew upon him the condemnation of the bishop of Alexandria and became the occasion of his permanent withdrawal from the place of his birth. At Cæsarea he now formed a new school of Christian training similar to that from which he had been driven. At this time, as well as in the earlier period of his life, he made various journeys to different parts of the world. His death was brought about by sufferings inflicted on him in the persecution of Decius, and took place at Tyre, probably in the year 254. Part of the Commentary on John, the first great work of Christian interpretation, and part of that on Matthew, written by the father at a later period of his life, are here presented to the reader; and a few words of introduction may be added on Origen's work as an expositor and on these two works in particular. Though Origen was the first great interpreter of Scripture in the Church, commentaries had been written before his. He speaks of those who had preceded him in this activity; and though but little survives of the labours of these earlier expositors, we know that the work of commenting on Scripture was zealously carried on in the Gnostic churches in the latter part of the second century, and several of the older exegetes in the Church are also known to us by name and reputation. Heracleon the Gnostic commentator on John, who is often cited and often rather unfairly dealt with by Origen, as he follows him over the same ground, belonged to the Valentinian school. Many of his comments the reader will find to be very just and shrewd; but the tenets of his school led him into many extravagances. Of Pantænus, head of the catechetical school at Alexandria in the end of the second and early years of the third century, we hear that he interpreted many of the books of Scripture. We also learn that he preceded Clement and Origen, his successors in office, in the application of Gentile learning to Christian studies; the broad and liberal tone of Alexandrian theology may be due in part to his influence. Much of his exegetical work was still extant in the days of Jerome, who, however, reports that he did more for the Church as a teacher than as a writer. Only fragments of his Commentaries now remain. In Clement's works, on the contrary, we find, if not any set commentaries, various extended discussions of particular texts. We also find in him a theory of Scripture, its inspiration and its nature, which is followed also by Origen, and which determines the whole character of Alexandrian exegesis. In accordance with the general tendency of that age, which witnessed a reaction from the independence of philosophy and an appeal in many quarters to the authority of ancient oracles and writings, the Alexandrian school treats Scripture as an inspired and infallible storehouse of truth, -- of truth, however, not patent to the simple reader, but

requiring the spiritual man to discern its mystic import. Clement discusses the question why divine things are wrapped up in mysteries, and holds that all who have spoken of such things have dealt with them in this way. Everything in Scripture, therefore, has a mystical in addition to its obvious meaning. Every minute particular about the tabernacle and its furniture is charged with an unseen truth. The effect of such a view of Scripture on exegesis is necessarily that the interpreter finds in the inspired words not what they plainly convey, but what most interests his own mind. In assigning to each verse its spiritual meaning, he is neither guided nor restrained by any rule or system, but enjoys complete liberty. The natural good sense of these great scholars curbed to some extent the licence of their theory; but with such a view of Scripture they could not but run into many an extravagance; and the allegorical method of interpretation, which so long prevailed in Christendom and is still practised in some quarters, dates from Alexandria. The roots of it lie further back, in Jewish rabbinical treatment of the Old Testament, and in the Greek philosophy of Alexandria. In Philo, the great contemporary of Christ at Alexandria, rabbinical and Greek learning met, and Scripture being a divine authority and having to furnish evidence of Greek philosophical doctrines, the allegorical method of interpretation was called to perform large services. To Philo's eyes all wisdom was contained in the Pentateuch, and many an idea of which Moses never dreamed had to be extracted from that ancient record. The method was older than Clement and Origen, but it was through them that it became so firmly established in the Church. In Origen we first find a great teacher who deliberately sets himself to the task of explaining Scripture. He became, at the early age of eighteen, the head of the catechetical school at Alexandria, an institution which not only trained catechumens but provided open lectures, on every part of Christian learning, and from that time to his death, at the age of sixty-nine, he was constantly engaged in the work of public exposition. At Alexandria his expositions took place in the school, but at Cæsarea they formed part of the church services, so that the reports of those belonging to the Cæsarean period provide us with the earliest examples we possess of the discourse at Christian meetings. In an activity which he practised so much Origen acquired extraordinary skill and facility, and gained the highest reputation, even beyond the limits of the Church. It is no wonder, therefore, if he succeeded in treating nearly the whole Bible in this way, a thing which might no doubt be said of many a Christian teacher since his day; for he was not one who was apt to repeat himself, but was constantly pressing on to break new ground. But the reported homilies form only a part -- and that not the most important part -- of his exegetical works. What he gave in his homilies was necessarily designed for edification; it had to be plain enough to be understood by a mixed audience, and serviceable to their needs. Origen believed, however, that there was very much in Scripture that lay beyond the capacity of the ordinary mind, and that the highest way of treating Scripture was not that of practical application, but that of searching after its hidden sense. In the fourth book of his *De Principiis* (vol. x. of Clark's set) he sets forth his views about the Scriptures. "As man," he there says, "consists of body, soul, and spirit, so in the same way does Scripture, which has been arranged to be given by God for the salvation of man." Scripture, therefore, has three senses, the bodily (somatic) or the obvious matter-of-fact sense, the psychical or moral sense, which serves for edification of the pious, and, highest of all, the spiritual sense. For this latter sense of Scripture Origen has many names, -- as many as forty have been counted, -- he calls it the heavenly sense, the intellectual, the anagogical, the mystic, the hidden. This is what chiefly engages his interest in the work of expounding. Scripture is to him full of mysteries, every jot and tittle has its secret, and to read these heavenly mysteries is the highest object of the

interpreter. In addition, therefore, to his oral expositions (homiliai) and the short notes (semeioseis) which are generally reckoned as a third class of his exegetical works, we have the written commentaries, books, or tomoi of Origen, in which he discusses Scripture without being hampered by the requirements of edification, according to the method which alone he recognizes as adequate. He was enabled to devote himself to this labour by the generosity of a rich friend, Ambrosius, who urged him to undertake it, and provided funds for the payment of shorthand writers and copyists. We are told that seven of the former were at one time placed at his disposal. The work which he was thus led to undertake Origen felt to be very responsible and burdensome; it was not to be approached without fervent prayer, and he sometimes complains that it is too much for him, and that it is only the urgent commands of Ambrosius that make him go on with it. (See the opening chapters of the various books on John.) What has been said will to some extent explain the nature of these commentaries, parts of which are now for the first time presented to the English reader. There is a side of them, however, of which we have not yet spoken. Origen was a great scholar as well as a great theologian; and he thought it right, as the reader may see from the letter to Gregory also here given, that scholarship should contribute all it could to the study of Scripture. Of his multifarious knowledge and of his easy command of all the science and philosophy of his day, the reader may judge for himself even from what is now presented to him. His work on the words of Scripture has a value quite independently of his theological views. Some of the most important qualifications of the worthy interpreter of Scripture he possesses in a supreme degree. His knowledge of Scripture is extraordinary both for its range and its minute accuracy. He had no concordance to help him; but he was himself a concordance. Whatever word occurs he is able to bring from every part of Scripture the passages in which it is used. He quotes passages, it is true, which are only verbally connected with the text before him and have no affinity of idea; the wealth of illustration he has at his command does not always assist, but sometimes, as the reader will see, impedes his progress: yet the wonder is not diminished of such a knowledge of all parts of the Bible as is probably without parallel. It has to be added that he is strong in grammar, and has a true eye for the real meaning of his text; the discussions in which he does this often leave nothing to be desired. In defining his terms he often goes far astray; he has to define them according to the science of his day; but he is not guilty of loose construction of sentences. Another matter in which he is distinguished is that of textual criticism. He is the first great textual critic of the Church. That his name occurs more frequently than that of any other father in the digests of early readings of the text of the New Testament, is due no doubt to the fact that he is the earliest writer of commentaries which have been preserved; his commentaries contain complete texts of the portions of Scripture commented on, as well as copious quotations from other parts of Scripture. But he was keenly interested in the text of the New Testament for its own sake. He tells us that many variations already existed in his day in different copies. And he preserves many readings which afterwards disappeared from the Bible. It has also to be said that he often quotes the same text differently in different passages, so that it appears probable that he used several copies of the N.T. books, and that these copies differed from each other. If, therefore, as Tischendorf suggests, Origen made a collation of the various texts of the N.T. with which he was acquainted, as he did with his texts of the O.T. in his Hexapla, he had no strong views as to which text was to be followed. He sometimes expresses an opinion as to which is the true reading (pp.368 sq.), but he does so on grounds which the textual critics of the present day could not approve. It may be stated here that the translators of Origen in this volume have sought to

represent their author's critical position with regard to Scripture by translating his Scripture quotations from his text. As he used the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, many of his quotations from that part of Scripture appear in a form unfamiliar to the English reader. In the New Testament, also, his text is also very different from that which afterwards prevailed in the Church. The weakness of Origen as an interpreter is his want of historical feeling or of any conception of such a thing as growth or development in revelation. His mind slips incessantly away from the real scenes and events recorded in Scripture, to the ideal region where he conceives that the truths reside which these prefigure. Scripture is to him not a record of actual occurrences which took place as they are narrated, but a storehouse of types of heavenly things, which alone are real. He scoffs at the notion that historical facts should be regarded as the chief outcome of a Scripture narrative (John, book x.15-17, pp.389-394). When he does treat the facts as facts he has many a shrewd observation and many a beautiful application. But the facts are to a large extent in his way; they have to give place to something more important. He sees very well how the synoptic narratives clash with that of John; no better demonstration of this need be looked for than he gives in the tenth book of his John; from this, however, he infers not that the books must have had different sources of information, but that the literal meaning of the passages must be altogether disregarded, and their true purport looked for, not in the things of history, but in the things of the Spirit. The water-pots at the feast in Cana (De Principiis), the shoe latchet of the Saviour (John, book vi.17), the ass and foal (John, book x.18), each must receive a transcendent application. It follows from this that the commentaries are deficient in order and sequence. The method which calls the writer to look at every step for spiritual meanings, combined with his own extraordinary fertility of imagination and wealth of matter, makes these books very disconnected. At each point a number of questions suggests itself as to possible meanings; a host of texts is brought at once from every part of Scripture to afford illustration, and these again have to be considered. Very modestly are the questions and themes introduced. The tone is as far as possible from being ex cathedra; it is rather that of a student groping his way, and asking at each step for assistance. And the great mass of the questions thus raised is left, apparently, unanswered. So that the work as a whole is rather a great collection of materials for future consideration than a finished treatise. Such being the characteristics of Origen's commentaries, they have by many been regarded as unsuitable for the general reader, and unfavourably compared with those of later writers, to whom the interpretation of Scripture was not weighted with such difficulties as Origen had to contend with. Our author does not carry us along in his commentaries with a stream of golden eloquence; his interests are intellectual more than literary or practical, his work is scientific rather than popular. Perhaps the historical student has more to gain from them than the preacher. But among the pages which witness chiefly to restless intellectual energy and unwearied diligence, there are also many passages of rare and touching beauty, when the writer realizes the greatness of the Christian salvation, or when the heavenly things to the search for which all his labour is devoted shine by their own brightness on his sight. The Commentaries on John are the earliest work of Christian exegesis which has come down to us, and are therefore placed in this volume before those on Matthew. The first five books on John were written at Alexandria before Origen's compulsory withdrawal from that city to Cæsarea in 231. In chaps.4 and 8 of the first book he speaks of this work as being the first fruits of his activity as a writer on Holy Scripture. The sixth book, as he tells us in vi.1, had been begun at Alexandria, but the manuscript had been left behind, so that a new beginning had to be made at Cæsarea. The work was again interrupted by

the persecution of Maximian in 238; the volumes from the twenty-second to the last were written after that date. At the end of the thirty-second volume, which is the last we now possess, the writer has only reached John xiii.33, but he tells us in his Commentary on Matthew that he has spoken of the two thieves in his work on John. In the time of Eusebius only twenty-two books survived out of the whole number, which seems to have been thirty-nine. We now possess books i., ii., vi., x., xiii., xix., xx., xxviii., xxxii., some of which, however, are not complete, and a few fragments. The thirteenth book begins in the middle of the story of the Samaritan woman. Ambrosius had wished that story to be completed in the twelfth book, but Origen did not like to make his books too long, and on this point disregarded the authority of his mentor. The nineteenth and twentieth books are both occupied with the eighth chapter of John, which, if it was all treated on the same scale, must have occupied two more books in addition to these. The thirty-second book scarcely completes the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel; and if the remaining chapters only occupied seven books, the treatment of these must have been much more condensed. Two Latin translations of Origen's John were made in the sixteenth century, one by Ambrosius Ferrarius of Milan from the Venice Codex, the other by Joachim Perionius. The Commentaries on John and on Matthew are both embraced in several manuscripts. Of those on John, Mr. A. E. Brooke (Texts and Studies, vol. i. No.4; The Fragments of Heracleon, pp.1-30; "the mss. of Origen's Commentaries on S. John") enumerates eight or nine. The Munich ms. of the thirteenth century is the source of all the rest. Huet, the first editor (1668), used the Codex Regius (Paris) of the sixteenth century, which is in many passages mutilated and disfigured. The brothers Delarue (1733-1759) used the mss. Barberinus and Bodleianus, which are more complete, and Lommatzsch (1831) follows his predecessors. The present translations are from the text of Lommatzsch, which is in many places very defective. [4445]

Letter of Origen to Gregory.

When and to whom the Learning derived from Philosophy may be of Service for the Exposition of the Holy Scriptures; with a lively Personal Appeal. This letter to Gregory, afterwards bishop of Cæsarea, and called Thaumaturgus, was preserved in the Philocalia, or collection of extracts from Origen's works drawn up by Gregory of Nyssa and Basil of Cæsarea. It is printed by Delarue and Lommatzsch in the forefront of their editions of the works. It forms a good preface to the commentaries, as it shows how Origen considered the study of Scripture to be the highest of all studies, and how he regarded scientific learning, in which he was himself a master, as merely preparatory for this supreme learning. Dräseke [4446] has shown that it was written about 235, when Origen, after having had Gregory as his pupil at Cæsarea for some years, had fled before the persecution under Maximinus Thrax to Cappadocia; while Gregory, to judge from the tenor of this Epistle, had gone to Egypt. The Panegyric on Origen, [4447] pronounced by Gregory at Cæsarea about 239, when the school had reassembled there after the persecution, shows that the master's solicitude for his pupil's true advancement was not disappointed. 1. Gregory is Urged to Apply His Gentile Learning to the Study of Scripture. All hail to thee in God, most excellent and reverend Sir, son Gregory, from Origen. A natural quickness of understanding is fitted, as you are well aware, if it be diligently exercised, to produce a work which may bring its owner so far as is possible, if I may so express myself, to the consummation of the art the which he desires to practise, and your natural aptitude is sufficient to make you a consummate Roman lawyer and a Greek philosopher too of the most famous schools. But my desire for you has been that you should direct the whole force of your intelligence to Christianity as your end, and that in the way of production. And I would wish that you should take with you on the one hand those parts of the philosophy of the Greeks which are fit, as it were, to serve as general or preparatory studies for Christianity, and on the other hand so much of Geometry and Astronomy as may be helpful for the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. The children of the philosophers speak of geometry and music and grammar and rhetoric and astronomy as being ancillary to philosophy; and in the same way we might speak of philosophy itself as being ancillary to Christianity. 2. This Procedure is Typified by the Story of the Spoiling of the Egyptians. It is something of this sort perhaps that is enigmatically indicated in the directions God is represented in the Book of Exodus [4448] as giving to the children of Israel. They are directed to beg from their neighbours and from those dwelling in their tents vessels of silver and of gold, and raiment; thus they are to spoil the Egyptians, and to obtain materials for making the things they are told to provide in connection with the worship of God. For out of the things of which the children of Israel spoiled the Egyptians the furniture of the Holy of Holies was made, the ark with its cover, and the cherubim and the mercy-seat and the gold jar in which the manna, that bread of angels, was stored. These probably were made from the finest of the gold of the Egyptians, and from a second quality, perhaps, the solid golden candlestick which stood near the inner veil, and the lamps on it, and the golden table on which stood the shewbread, and between these two the golden altar of incense. And if there was gold of a third and of a fourth quality, the sacred vessels were made of it. And of the Egyptian silver, too, other things were made; for it was from their sojourn in Egypt that the children of Israel derived the

great advantage of being supplied with such a quantity of precious materials for the use of the service of God. Out of the Egyptian raiment probably were made all those requisites named in Scripture in embroidered work; the embroiderers working [4449] with the wisdom of God, [4450] such garments for such purposes, to produce the hangings and the inner and outer courts. This is not a suitable opportunity to enlarge on such a theme or to show in how many ways the children of Israel found those things useful which they got from the Egyptians. The Egyptians had not made a proper use of them; but the Hebrews used them, for the wisdom of God was with them, for religious purposes. Holy Scripture knows, however, that it was an evil thing to descend from the land of the children of Israel into Egypt; and in this a great truth is wrapped up. For some it is of evil that they should dwell with the Egyptians, that is to say, with the learning of the world, after they have been enrolled in the law of God and in the Israelite worship of Him. Ader the Edomite, [4451] as long as he was in the land of Israel and did not taste the bread of the Egyptians, made no idols; but when he fled from the wise Solomon and went down into Egypt, as one who had fled from the wisdom of God he became connected with Pharaoh, marrying the sister of his wife, and begetting a son who was brought up among the sons of Pharaoh. Therefore, though he did go back to the land of Israel, he came back to it to bring division into the people of God, and to cause them to say to the golden calf, "These are thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." I have learned by experience and can tell you that there are few who have taken of the useful things of Egypt and come out of it, and have then prepared what is required for the service of God; but Ader the Edomite on the other hand has many a brother. I mean those who, founding on some piece of Greek learning, have brought forth heretical ideas, and have as it were made golden calves in Bethel, which is, being interpreted, the house of God. This appears to me to be intended to convey that such persons set up their own images in the Scriptures in which the Word of God dwells, and which therefore are tropically called Bethel. The other image is said in the word to have been set up in Dan. Now the borders of Dan are at the extremities and are contiguous to the country of the heathens, as is plainly recorded in the Book of Jesus, son of Nave. Some of these images, then, are close to the borders of the heathen, which the brothers, as we showed, of Ader have devised.

3. Personal Appeal. Do you then, sir, my son, study first of all the divine Scriptures. Study them I say. For we require to study the divine writings deeply, lest we should speak of them faster than we think; and while you study these divine works with a believing and God-pleasing intention, knock at that which is closed in them, and it shall be opened to thee by the porter, of whom Jesus says, [4452] "To him the porter openeth." While you attend to this divine reading seek aright and with unwavering faith in God the hidden sense which is present in most passages of the divine Scriptures. And do not be content with knocking and seeking, for what is most necessary for understanding divine things is prayer, and in urging us to this the Saviour says not only, [4453] "Knock, and it shall be opened to you," and "Seek, and ye shall find," but also "Ask, and it shall be given you." So much I have ventured on account of my fatherly love to you. Whether I have ventured well or not, God knows, and His Christ, and he who has part of the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. May you partake in these; may you have an always increasing share of them, so that you may be able to say not only, "We are partakers of Christ," [4454] but also "We are partakers of God."

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