

and, as is related by St. Augustine, very frequently a great number of the devout would assemble before it to give thanks for the triumphal birthday of the Saint and Martyr, 'receiving' (these are his words) 'on that spot the Blood of Jesus Christ, in honour of the birthday of Cyprian, with great joy and delight, who himself, with such glowing love, shed his blood for the name of Jesus.'

At the time when St. Cyprian suffered martyrdom St. Cornelius governed the See of St. Peter. It was a time when the Church of Christ needed a strong hand to guide her through the storms which broke over her on all sides. Fearful wars and pestilence were followed by the still more fearful persecution raised against the Christians under the Emperor Valerian; and that which increased to its highest pitch the grief of the Holy Father was the confusion caused by the wickedness and obstinacy of the heretics within the fold of Jesus Christ. During the persecution forty-six priests were put to death. Whilst they lay in chains every kind of means was made use of by the faithful to visit them in their captivity, in order that the Holy Sacrifice might be celebrated in their prisons, and that they might receive in their hour of dread the support of the Blessed Eucharist. Now here there was no altar, and, in the absence of a table, the bread and wine were consecrated upon the open hands of the deacon.

This same persecution reached as far as the land of Egypt. Already under the Emperor Decius had the blood of Martyrs flowed, and many fell away from fear of the executioner. Now these lapsed ones were, after long and severe penance, received again into the company of the faithful. Amongst others, an old man, Serapion by name, after leading a most blameless life, had been induced to offer incense to the false gods. He had bitterly repented his fall, but in vain had he entreated for absolution and reconciliation. At length he fell ill, and was for three days without speech. On the fourth day, recovering the use of his senses for a moment, he cried to his young grandchild, his daughter's son, 'How long, my son, how long! Haste thee, I entreat, and bring me a priest, that my sin may be forgiven.' The child ran; but the priest was himself ill, and could not go. 'As,'