

**ORIGEN THE TEACHER: BEING THE
ADDRESS OF GREGORY THE
WONDER-WORKER TO ORIGEN,
TOGETHER WITH ORIGEN'S
LETTER TO GREGORY**

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Origen the Teacher: Being the Address of Gregory the Wonder-Worker to Origen, Together with Origen's Letter to Gregory by William Metcalfe

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WILLIAM METCALFE

**ORIGEN THE TEACHER: BEING THE
ADDRESS OF GREGORY THE
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TOGETHER WITH
ORIGEN'S LETTER TO GREGORY**

Gregorius Thaumaturgus, Saint, Bp. of Neo-
" Early Church Classics. ca. 250-310

ORIGEN THE TEACHER

BEING THE ADDRESS OF GREGORY THE WONDER-
WORKER TO ORIGEN, TOGETHER WITH ORIGEN'S
LETTER TO GREGORY

TRANSLATED WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY
WILLIAM METCALFE, B.D.

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PREFACE

THE name of Origen is inseparably connected with the Catechetical School of Alexandria, over which he presided for almost thirty years (A.D. 203–231). Yet the most graphic sketch of Origen the teacher has for background not Alexandria, but Cæsarea. The Farewell Address which Gregory the Wonder-worker composed, and in all probability also delivered, on the occasion of his leaving Origen's circle there, and Origen's letter of acknowledgment, are not only precious remnants of the once abundant materials for the personal history of Origen, but also important documents in the history of Christian learning. Until the publication of Koetschau's handy edition,¹ they were not easily accessible, being buried in somewhat scarce and expensive collected editions (a remark which applies equally to the existing translations).² The text, too, was none of the best, and even when editors have done their utmost, Gregory's style is

¹ Des Gregorios Thaumaturgos Dankrede an Origenes, als Anhang der Brief des Origenes an Gregorios Th., herausgegeben von Dr. phil. Paul Koetschau. Leipzig, 1894 (Krüger's *Quellenschriften, Heft 9*).

² There is an English translation of the Address by the late Principal Salmond in Vol. xx. of Clark's Ante-Nicene Library, and of the Letter in the supplementary volume to the same series by Prof. Allan Menzies, p. 295.

such a quagmire, a thicket, a labyrinth, to borrow his own comparisons, that he is by no means easy to follow. For my own part, when I first encountered the Address, I was driven to write down the translation as the only way of making sense of the text. Any one who knows Lommatzsch's text will understand what I mean.¹ I afterwards came across Koetschau's edition, and it occurred to me that a new translation from his texts might be acceptable to the increasing number of those who take an interest in such studies, but who have not the time or patience to wrestle with Gregory's original.

The Letter to Gregory is an interesting example of Origen's habits of thought, and equally with the Address, forms perhaps the best introduction to the study of Origen's writings.

¹ *Origenis Opera*, xxv., p 339.

ORIGEN THE TEACHER

INTRODUCTION

I

S. GREGORY the Wonder-worker, whose original name was Theodorus, was of a heathen family belonging to Pontus. He and his brother Athenodorus were drawn by a series of events which he details below (c. v.) into the circle which had newly gathered round Origen at Cæsarea, and eventually returned home to become the founders of the Church of their native land.¹ Having been ordained the first bishop of Pontus, Gregory applied himself to the evangelisation of the province with such devotion that, as has been said, when he began he found only seventeen Christians; when death ended his life-work there remained only seventeen heathen. The date of his birth is nowhere stated, but it may be calculated as not later than 212 A.D. (cf. Koetschau, p. xv.). According to Suidas, he died in the reign of Aurelian (270-275).

The legends which speedily gathered round the first bishop of Pontus, and procured for him the title

¹ Eusebius, *H. E.* vi. 30. 'Ὡς ἐστὶ νέους ἀμφω ἐπισκοπῆς τῶν κατὰ Πόντον ἐκκλησιῶν ἀξιωθῆναι.

of Thaumaturgos or Wonder-worker, together with some rather confused scraps of biography, were collected by S. Gregory of Nyssa, from oral tradition, especially that of his grandmother Macrina, and were woven into a life designed more for edification than for historical study. The history of Gregory need not, however, concern us here, except so far as it is connected with the great Christian teacher, who inspired him with the desire for sacred knowledge, and influenced him so profoundly in the choice of a profession.

Origen is remarkable among the Christian philosophers of Alexandria in that he was not a convert from heathenism but the child of a Christian home. Born about 185 A.D., a son of the soil, as his name indicates,¹ he evinced great ability even as a child. His father Leonides instructed him in Scripture and in secular subjects, and sent him at an early age to the Catechetical School, of which more hereafter. His school and college days ended abruptly. In the persecution under Severus (A.D. 202), his father was martyred, and the school was broken up by the flight of Clement and other chief men in the Church. The young Origen gathered a number of pupils about him, and eventually the Bishop Demetrius formally appointed him head of the school, a post which he was to hold for close

¹ Origenes used to be regarded as an uncommon name, until the recent discoveries in Egypt showed that Origenes, Orion, and Or, all derived from the name of the Egyptian god Horus, were common among the country folk of Egypt. See for example the *Oxyrynchus Papyri*.

on thirty years. Only eighteen years old when instituted, he found time amid the work of teaching to continue his own studies. The requirements of controversy with Jews and heathen led him to pay special attention to Hebrew and philosophy. His Hebrew studies, remarkable for the period, produced the *Hexapla*, a great edition of the Old Testament with the Hebrew text and various Greek translations arranged in parallel columns.¹ His philosophical knowledge found expression in his writings; for, not content with the labours of lecturing and collating MSS., he composed numerous books. These were all written to the order of his patron Ambrose, who had at one time been attracted by Gnosticism, but was won over to orthodoxy by Origen. Ambrose made use of his wealth to give the poor but independent scholar the only aid he was likely to accept. He supplied him with quarters and a staff of shorthand writers and copyists. Ambrose not only provided the means; he also prescribed the subjects. For example, the tract *On Prayer* was written to clear up certain doubts which had been exercising Ambrose. The *Commentary on S. John* was composed with special reference to an earlier commentary by the Gnostic Heracleon, which Ambrose had no doubt studied in his Valentinian days. Origen's last great work, *Against Celsus*, originated

¹ The best and most recent account of the *Hexapla* and its constituent parts is in Swete's *Introduction to the O.T. in Greek*.

in the same way, Ambrose having sent him a copy of Celsus' attack on Christianity.

This industrious but peaceful life, spent between class-room and study, with occasional visits abroad, was terminated rudely. Trouble had been brewing between Origen and his superior, Bishop Demetrius. As Gregory says below, we have not the necessary knowledge to explain it and would gladly pass over it. It seems, however, to have turned on Origen's fitness for ordination, and came to a crisis when, in the course of a journey to Greece, Origen was ordained priest at Cæsarea of Palestine by the bishops there, among whom were his own warm friends Theoctistus of that city and Alexander of Jerusalem. An act so opposed to all Demetrius' intentions could not fail to excite his anger, especially as his authority over his own flock had been infringed. The reception which Origen met with on his return compelled him to retire from Alexandria. Soon after, early in 231, a synod deposed Origen from his headship of the Catechetical School and banished him from Alexandria. He made his way to his friends at Cæsarea, and after some delay resumed his usual pursuits. He found a further field for his activities. Demetrius had never allowed him to preach or expound in public, on the ground that he was a layman, and had even remonstrated with Theoctistus and Alexander when they had allowed him to preach in Palestine. Now he was installed as a regular preacher in Cæsarea. We