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A STUDY IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF  
ORIGENISM AND ANTI-ORIGENISM

by

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CONSORTI VITAE STVDIORVM AVCTORI  
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## PREFACE

M. DENIS, the brilliant French scholar who in 1884 gave to the world an elaborate study of the philosophy of Origen<sup>1</sup>, dealt at considerable length with the great writers of the fourth and succeeding centuries who took a prominent part in the criticism or defence of the peculiar teaching of the famous scholar of Alexandria. But he was disappointingly brief in his treatment of the Alexandrian teachers who came between Origen and Athanasius. Yet they have an interest of their own. The half-century which they occupy includes the first high-water mark and the first ebb of the tide of Origenism. Its claim upon our attention has been obscured by the supreme importance of the great Arian controversy which absorbed the next generation. Dionysius, the scholar, the pastor, the converter of heretics, the healer of schism, has at length received

<sup>1</sup> J. Denis, *Philosophie d'Origène* (Paris, 1884).

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the recognition due to a great bishop of Alexandria whose manifold services to the Church of his day far outweigh the theological indiscretion which incurred the criticism of his namesake of Rome<sup>1</sup>. But the minor Alexandrians who followed him in school and diocese remain yet unrepresented in English theological literature. It is the aim of this dissertation to do something towards the filling of this gap. Our knowledge of the three writers here selected for study,—Theognostus, Pierius, and Peter the Martyr,—depends partly upon the comments of Photius, the scholar-patriarch of Constantinople in the ninth century, but mainly upon fragments of their writings long accessible in the pages of Routh's *Reliquiae Sacrae* and Pitra's *Analecta Sacra* and Migne's *Patrologia*, and recently enriched by the discoveries and discussions of De Boor, Diekamp and Harnack. The present dissertation is an attempt to estimate the teaching of these three Alexandrians with special reference to their adherence or their opposition to the teaching of their great predecessor Origen.

M. Denis remarks that while Origen's exegesis passed in a chastened form into the work of the great fathers of the fourth century, his philosophy ran a far less favoured course. Their task was to define certain

<sup>1</sup> Feltoe, *Dionysius of Alexandria* (Camb. Patristic Texts, 1904).



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doctrines forced to the point of definition by the needs of their day. The splendid but dangerous task which Origen had set himself was to push the frontier of Christian speculation to the furthest legitimate point, while yet keeping in such close touch with his base of operations, the tradition of the Church's faith, that some of the ground which he traversed might become a permanent acquisition to Christian theology. But his philosophy, to quote M. Denis, "was on too many points antagonistic to tradition, too free and too venturesome ever to become a theology." It might have disappeared as a system to survive as a spirit under different doctrinal forms. "But it can be affirmed without fear of contradiction that Origen had no successor even in the bosom of the school of Alexandria. The teaching of Heraclas is unknown. Dionysius seems to have done little but repeat Origen's teaching, doubtless in a weakened and reduced form; nothing is known of that of Pierius; that of Theognostus would be more important to know, if it is true, as Athanasius says, that he did not content himself with explaining dogma but like Origen raised and discussed a number of questions by way of exercise (*ὡς γυμνάζων*). From his time it seems that the school stood on the defensive. If that is only probable of

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Peter the Martyr, it is certain of Didymus, who explained, softened, mitigated, i.e. effaced in large part, the doctrines of the *De Principiis*, especially those on the dogma of the Trinity, on which he was completely orthodox, if we may believe Jerome. As for the last master who is mentioned, Rhodon, his name is all that is known<sup>1</sup>." It will be seen in the course of this dissertation that M. Denis underestimated the extent of our knowledge of Theognostus and Pierius; that what was known of their work then and what has since been recovered goes far to prove that in ability they were not unworthy successors, and in teaching were close disciples of Origen; and that in Peter the Martyr, during his episcopate, if not already during his tenure of the catechist's chair, the Church of Alexandria found a theologian who was not an Origenist on his defence but a vigorous opponent of all that was peculiarly Origenistic.

<sup>1</sup> Denis, *op. cit.* pp. 416, 417.

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