

did not know. The name was a common one. Keim has counted about twenty who bore it. When Origen received the book, he was nearly sixty years of age. It came into his hands, therefore, about the year 245. But this book had been in existence for many years. Origen, therefore, can only guess at the author. He presumes him to be an Epicurean who lived in the time of Hadrian. Origen's palpable error in calling the author of the "True Discourse" an Epicurean has been followed by many of the church historians; and even Froude, who had the material at hand for knowing better, repeats the erroneous assumption. This Celsus is not an Epicurean, but a decided Platonist. As he is the first heathen author who mentions the sacred books of the Christians, and as some of his references bear directly upon the authorship of the four Gospels, it is important for New Testament critics to fix his exact date; but for the more general purpose of this article, which is rather to exhibit the mind and method of Celsus, such precision is not necessary. The difference is a matter of forty years. Various German critics, taking Origen's guess that he lived under Hadrian, put him about 137. Keim and others, through various political indications in his works, place him during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. The indications favor the latest date, 178 A.D.

Here, then, we have a criticism of Christianity written by a cultured Greek mind in the third quarter of the second century. It fell into the hands of Origen about sixty-five years after it was written. Its author had passed away, but the work had not lost its vitality. Origen was disinclined to reply to it, falling back on the example of Jesus, who, when falsely accused, opened not his mouth. But the earnest request of Ambrose, with the intimation that some believers might have their faith shaken by its argument, induced him to undertake the task. We may be grateful to Ambrose for his request and grateful to Origen for acceding to it, since this work of Celsus is known to us only through the elaborate reply which Origen constructed to demolish it. The great service he has rendered to Christian literature lies, not in the fact that he destroyed the argument of Celsus, but in the fact that he has so well preserved it. Origen took up the work of Celsus piece by piece, paragraph by paragraph, and enveloped each extract in a tissue of refutation. Instead of having the full living, breathing argument of Celsus, or even the articulated skeleton, we must seek the disjointed bones in the eight books in which Origen sought to give them Christian burial. We undoubtedly owe it to the fact that the work of Celsus was so thoroughly incorporated in Origen's reply, that it has been preserved to us at all. If there had been any means of detaching it, it would probably have shared the cremation which overtook the works of Porphyry at a later date. Fortunately, it was not possible to burn Celsus without burning Origen with him.

Origen was a fair-minded and generous critic, who would not wilfully garble or pervert. He has not shunned to exhibit the argument of his opponent in all its force. He sometimes paraphrases, sometimes skips

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