

account of his superior powers of reasoning, and his indefatigable application in the pursuit of knowledge. At the age of seventeen he was sent to Alexandria to prosecute his studies. He began Philosophy there under the direction of Ammon—the greatest christian philosopher of that period—and chose as his companion St. Alexander, who subsequently became bishop of Alexandria. He made vast proficiency in whatever he undertook, and shortly rivalled all those with whom he contended. He became a deep as well as an accomplished scholar. Not only was he acquainted with dialectics, geometry, astronomy, music, and rhetoric, but he also knew the Scriptures, even by rote, and had so extensive a knowledge of Hebrew—a rare study to persons of his age—that his fame in this particular department extended even to Greece, and was echoed by the voices of thousands who shone at Athens.

In the beginning of the reign of Severus his father was martyred. Whilst St. Leonidas was yet in prison the youthful hero already began to elicit sparks of that burning fire for the faith which his virtuous parent had enkindled in his bosom. On hearing the sad tidings that Leonidas awaited his trial, Origen could scarcely be restrained in his wild impetuosity to become a martyr, but rushed madly forward amidst the enemies of the Gospel, and by every opportunity in his power courted the means by which he might satiate this noble and ardent passion. Finding himself unheeded in his exposures, in order to crown his efforts, he finally attempted to seek the prison in which his father was detained and thus become a participator in the glories of martyrdom. In this he was disappointed. His mother thwarted him in his rash enterprise, and in order to succeed the better in her wishes, she concealed from him his clothes, and remonstrated with him on the impropriety of so hazardous an undertaking. He obeyed, though reluctantly, and then as he could do no more, dictated to his father a letter in which with all the spirit and wisdom of a saint and a sage encouraged him to meet the impending shock, and to hail with delight the end of such a glorious event.

The fatal day soon came and went, and left himself, and his mother, and his brothers, of whom he had six, abandoned to the coldest penury, with their hopes blasted, their goods confiscated, and their home and hearts lonely wrecks where sat in silent sullenness, deepest sorrow and despair. To amend, however, their fallen fortunes, Origen undertook to give instruction to several young men, in grammar and rhetoric, and thus meet by a sufficiency ample enough, the low exigencies to which he was reduced. He was not long engaged in this capacity before his powers to instruct were observed by the professors at Alexandria, and Origen was immediately raised to the chair of "Instructor in the Christian Doctrine." He was at this period only eighteen years of age—a fact, which, beyond all doubts, proves the great superiority of his attainments, when on none, except the most erudite, was such an appointment conferred. He was followed by numbers eager to initiate themselves in the pale of Christianity, and especially by those who previously had the benefit of his valuable tuition. Seeing now the great increase made in the applicants, Origen conceived the necessity of foregoing all thoughts of profane learning, and of applying himself entirely to that which more immediately appertained to his avocation. He accordingly disposed of all his books, of which he possessed an immense assortment, and gave himself most assiduously to the acquirement of ecclesiastical lore. In his new profession his rigid observance of things extended perhaps to an extreme. He saw how little effective was the philosophy of theory unattended by practice, and in order, therefore, that he would leave no obstacle to the advancement of those under his charge, he began to fulfil the precepts of holy writ even to the letter. His love of poverty was so great, that, rather than a master of Catechumens' he appeared more like the most unfortunate of mendicants, and frequently exposed himself to the fact of being requested by his disciples to accept of some portion of their substance for the more respectable support of his position. He persevered, notwithstanding, in the refusal of all such donations, and even added to his privations the frequent laceration of the body. The greater part of the night he spent in prayer and meditation—he used a certain kind of herb for the better sustainment of his memory—slept upon the cold floor without the slightest covering—had but a single coat—abstained from the use of wine and flesh meat—travelled about continually without a sandal to his foot—and seemed as