

ARTICLE IV.

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM.

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THERE were ten men whom God gave to the church in the fourth century, men as great, perhaps, as any one century can boast of. These were Athanasius, Hilary of Poitiers, Gregory Nazianzen, his brother Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Ephraem Syrus, Ambrose, Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine. These men have left an ineffaceable impress upon the life and theology of the church. Of these ten no one deserves a higher estimation than he whose life and genius we are now to consider.

John, afterwards called Chrysostom, the Golden Mouth, was born in Antioch, Syria, in 347. As in the case of Frederick W. Robertson, whom he resembled in many respects, his father was a military officer of rank, who died when he was an infant, leaving him to the care of his mother Anthusa, a woman of more than ordinary character and talent. She devoted herself to the training of her son, and it is chiefly to her influence that he was kept from contamination by the vices of one of the wickedest cities of the world, and was at last given to the church as a shining ornament. She was to him what Monica was to Augustine, and Nonna to Gregory Nazianzen. It was with reference to her that Libanius, John's pagan teacher, when told that he was the son of a widow who at the age of forty had lost her husband twenty years, exclaimed with mingled jealousy and admiration, "Heavens! what wonderful women these Christians have!" Anthusa gave her son the benefit of the best intellectual culture of the age in the school of Libanius, the most distinguished

rhetorician and literary representative of heathenism at the close of the fourth century. Anthusa was not careful whether it was a pagan or a Christian school, deeming rightly that the careful home training in Christian principles would be a safeguard in any moral or intellectual temptations to which he might be exposed. Libanius esteemed him his best pupil, and desired him to become his successor as professor of rhetoric.

Chrysostom began his public life as a lawyer, and he promised to obtain eminence in that calling.

"The profession of law," says W. R. Stephens, "was at that time the great avenue to civil distinction. The amount of litigation was enormous. One hundred and fifty advocates were required at the court of the praetorian prefect in the East alone. The display of talents in the law courts frequently obtained for a man the government of a province, whence the road was open to those higher dignities of vice-prefect, prefect, patrician, and consul, which were honored by the title 'illustrious.'"¹

But the upright character of the young lawyer revolted from a profession which revealed to his gaze so much fraud, artifice, and wickedness. His standard of truth was so much higher than that of the world around him that he was continually offended by the chicanery and double-dealing in which his calling abounded. "Like many another in that degraded age, his soul revolted from the glaring contrast presented by the ordinary life of the world around him to that standard of holiness which was held up in the gospel."

Chrysostom left the practice of the law because he

worldly passions, and without experiencing such violent storms and struggles in his more gentle soul, he was enabled to develop himself with a quiet and gradual progress under many favorable influences." ¹ Chrysostom passed through no convulsion of spirit, which by some has been thought to be necessary to conversion, but his baptism marked a higher consecration to which his whole past life had been leading him.

His first impulse was to embrace the monastic life, which, since Anthony of Egypt had set the example, and such men as Athanasius, Basil, the Gregories, Ambrose, and Augustine had given it their praise, was now carrying away many of the most earnest youths of the church. It was looked upon as a mode of life which renounced the perishing vanities of the world, and by taking up the cross in self-denial and crucifixion of the flesh, obtained unbroken communion with God. Anthusa, however, defeated this design for a season. She took him by the hand, led him to her room, and by the bed where she had given him birth she remonstrated with him, in tears and tender entreaties, not to forsake her. This scene is described with great dramatic vividness by Chrysostom himself in his work "On the Priesthood." ²

While at home he carried on a severe self-discipline by study and religious austerities. With some fellow-students of a congenial spirit he formed a voluntary fraternity for spiritual culture. They did not dwell in a separate building, nor were established as a monastic community; but, like Wesley and his young friends at Oxford, they lived by rule, and practised monastic severities. Their studies and general conduct were submitted to Diodorus and Carterius, presidents of the monasteries in the vicinity of Antioch. Diodorus was a man of liberal and discriminating mind, ahead of his age in the grasp of many of the princi-

¹ History of the Christian Religion and Church (Torrey's Translation), Vol. ii. p. 754.

² De Sacerdotio, i. 3-6.

ples of biblical interpretation, and it is to the long training under him that Chrysostom owes his emancipation from the allegorical method of interpretation, and his life-long adherence to the simple, grammatical, and historical method.

The eyes of the church were now set upon John and his friends, and upon the banishment of Meletius in 370, he was sought for the office of bishop. This he avoided by stratagem, and thrust it upon his unwilling friend, Basil, whom he considered worthier, but who bitterly complained of the deception. Chrysostom justified himself on the principle of good management (*οἰκονομία*), and brought forward the legitimate use of stratagem in army tactics, in medicine, and in St. Paul's circumcision of Timothy and observance of the ceremonial law in Jerusalem (Acts xxi. 26).¹ Many of the ancient Fathers did not rise above the conceptions of their times in their oriental laxity in matters of veracity. If the intention was a holy one, deception was allowable. But in the midst of so much ecclesiastical ambition and unworthy means of self-promotion, it is refreshing to look back upon self-abnegation so sincere, generosity so noble, and humility so deep as that shown by the action of John at this time.

It was this occurrence which gave rise to one of the earliest and best of Chrysostom's works, "On the Priesthood" (*περὶ ἱερωσύνης, De Sacerdotio, libri vi*). With acuteness, skill, sympathy, and largeness of view, he traverses the whole field of the sacred office, describes its duties, difficulties, honors, and burdens, and gives the qualifications of the preacher. The lapse of fifteen hundred years has not lessened the interest, freshness, and appropriateness of this earnest and comprehensive survey of the ministry.

To avoid election to a position of which he felt himself so unworthy, and to escape the seductions and tumults of city life, Chrysostom fled to the monasteries south of Antioch, where he spent six years in meditation, prayer, and

¹ See the *De Sacerdotio*, i. 6-8.

study, under the guidance of the learned Diodorus, afterward Bishop of Tarsus (d. 394), and in companionship with such young men as Theodore of Mopsuestia, the celebrated father of Antiochian theology. "Monasticism was to him," says Dr. Schaff, "as it has been to many, a profitable school of experience and self-government, because he had embraced this mode of life from the purest motives, and brought into it intellect enough to make the seclusion available for moral and spiritual growth."¹ John thus describes the life of his brethren on the mountain solitudes near Antioch. Before the rising of the sun, they rise hale and sober, sing as with one mouth hymns to the praise of God, then bow the knees in prayer under the direction of the abbot, read the Holy Scripture, and go to their labors; pray again at nine, twelve, and three o'clock; after a good day's work enjoy a simple meal of bread and salt, perhaps with oil and sometimes with pulse; sing a thanksgiving hymn, and lay themselves on their pallets of straw without care, grief, or murmur. When one dies they say, "He is perfected; and they all pray God for a like end, that they also may come to the eternal Sabbath-rest and to the bosom of God."² Perhaps the chief reason why Chrysostom was drawn to the monastic life was his appreciation of the great disparity between the Christian life in the society around him and the holy and unselfish precepts of Christ and the apostles. The life of the church was to a large extent superficial and hollow; but here was a body of men altogether devoted to Christ, and who were earnestly trying to fill out his ideal. We say they were mistaken in thus taking refuge from the world, and we say rightly. Yet with a man of Chrysostom's sincerity, to

¹ *History of the Christian Church* (revised ed., New York, 1884), Vol. iii, p. 935.

² See the eloquent description of the daily life of the monks in *Homilies on Matthew*, lxxviii., lxxix., lxxxii., and on *1 Tim.*, Hom. xiv. Cf. Schaff's *Ni-*

see a nobler way of living was at once to embrace it. At any rate, those six years were of incalculable benefit in his after ministry. That knowledge of Sacred Scripture, that right method of interpretation, that high conception of the Christian life, that austere regimen which he ever carried into every detail of life, that self-knowledge and power of insight into conduct and motive,—the foundation of all these was laid in those long years of preparation.

In the fast age in which we live, when young men rush into the professions with such haste, it is well to remember that many of those who have done great service to the church did not commence their work till after many years of faithful waiting. Gregory of Nyssa did not commence his ecclesiastical career until the age of forty, his namesake Gregory of Nazianzen, not until the age of forty-two. Basil the Great was ordained priest at the age of thirty-three, and Augustine did all his work for God after he had passed thirty-seven. Calvin spent his life in study and travel until he was twenty-seven, and then was pressed into the pastorate much against his will. Arminius was ordained minister at twenty-eight, and Wesley, though he commenced his sacred duties at twenty-five, had reached the mature age of thirty-five before he experienced that wonderful uplifting of spirit at Aldersgate Street, and was baptized from above for the mission to which he was called. A mistake is committed when young men are hurried into the ministry before they are prepared by years of meditation, prayer, study, and self-discipline to undertake its sacred functions. The marvellous power exercised by voice and pen by Chrysostom in all his after life can be explained only as we understand that for many years under the best teachers of his time he had been slowly maturing his faculties, until, with ripened knowledge of himself, of the world, and of the human heart, and with profound acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures, and abreast of the learning of the age, he was or-

dained presbyter in 386, in the fortieth year of his age.

The five years preceding were spent in the office of deacon. The duties of the diaconate were to announce certain parts of the service, reprove any improper behavior during worship, bring cases of poverty and sickness before the notice of the bishops, distribute alms, and report moral offences.¹ These duties brought Chrysostom into constant intercourse with the Christian population of Antioch, especially with the poorer classes. These years gave him that sympathy with the poor, and knowledge of the manners of the people, their vices as well as their virtues, which appear on every page of his sermons. He thus obtained that practical acquaintance with life which is as important as meditation and study in the training of a great preacher.²

Chrysostom spent eleven years as presbyter and preacher in his native city. These were the most satisfactory and fruitful years of his life. With entire devotion he put himself into the work of uplifting the moral life of the city, and with unfaltering courage he proclaimed the gospel of God, rebuking sin wherever he found it, and laboring to bring all men in thought and life to a true conception of Christianity. His greatest oratorical efforts were his famous twenty-one sermons "On the Statues," preached in 387, when the city was lying under an interdict on account of insults offered by a mob to the statues of the emperor and empress. Professor Charles J. Little is correct when he says that these sermons "mark the highest point ever reached by a preacher dealing with contemporary life."³

The installation of Chrysostom as archbishop of Con-

itably bring him into collision with the dominant forces, both in court and society and in the church, in that proud and voluptuous capital. His ascetic training and his vigorous notions of Christian consistency unfitted him to mingle with urbanity in the corrupt society into which he was introduced, and were a poor promise that the hollow religion of the imperial court, the unfaithfulness and immorality of the clergy, and the avarice and worldliness of the wealthy, would go without his unsparing denunciations. "Peculiarly dangerous was this field," says Neander, "for a man of his freedom of speech, so used to chastise every form of ungodliness without respect of persons,—a man who in his impatient indignation at wickedness, and zeal for oppressed innocence, could not stop to measure his words by the rules of prudence."¹

Gibbon has given an admirable summary of the causes which finally led to the overthrow of the bishop John.² Suffice it to say, that his reformatory zeal, his plainness of speech, his ascetic life, which was a constant rebuke to the indolence and luxury of clergy and laity, his unsocial spirit, and the vigor with which he proceeded against the bishops guilty of simony and licentiousness, made all parties, except a faithful minority, determined to get rid of this fearless preacher and administrator. That he was himself altogether blameless, it is too much to assert. When he reproached the affectation of wealthy widows to conceal by the ornaments of dress their age and ugliness, and when he boldly declared that but very few of the bishops would be saved,³ it is evident that he should have expected a storm about his ears. But his mistakes were on

The conspiracies against him were managed by Theophilus, Archbishop of Alexandria, who procured a packed council, that of the oak, at Chalcedon, A. D. 403, which deposed him from his see on false and frivolous charges.

We cannot enter into the sad story of Chrysostom's exile. Full details of it are left in his own interesting letters, which breathe the spirit of forgiveness and love, and of a mind strong to endure. His heart was filled not with complaints at his own lot, but with anxiety for the safety of his friends and the prosperity of God's work. John Henry Newman has brought out with keen sympathy this part of Chrysostom's life, and by copious extracts from his correspondence, has let us into his inner feelings during those tragic years, and has paid a strong, beautiful, and touching tribute to this, his favorite saint.¹

He lived three years in banishment, years for the most part of intense suffering, and died near Comana in Pontus, 407, while being hurried to a wilder and more distant scene of exile at Pityus on the Euxine. His last words were, "Glory be to God for all things."

Three hundred and fifty years before, the feet of another saint were bruised for Christ's sake over the highlands of Asia Minor. Fourteen hundred years after, on the exact spot where Chrysostom yielded up his soul to God, one of the noblest and most heroic characters of modern times, sick, jaded, and hurried on, lay down to die. "Two Christian sufferers, in widely different ages of the church," says Dean Howson, "occur to the memory as we look on the map of Galatia. We could hardly mention any two men more thoroughly imbued with the spirit of St. Paul than John Chrysostom and Henry Martyn. And when we read how these two saints suffered in their last hours from fatigue, pain, rudeness, and cruelty, among the mountains of Asia Minor which surround the place where they rest—we can well enter into the mean-

¹ *Historical Sketches* (6th ed., London, 1885), Vol. ii. pp. 212-302.

ing of St. Paul's expressions of gratitude to those who received them kindly in the hour of his weakness."¹

The character of our saint was one of singular purity, elevation, and strength. Not without imperfect elements, it was at the same time so bathed in the spirit of Christian devotion, that the reputation of Chrysostom, placed as he was in the most difficult and trying places, and exposed to harsh and brutal criticism and opposition, has come down to us bright and spotless. This Gibbon acknowledges.² He doubtless committed errors of judgment, and was misunderstood by those not intimately acquainted with him. Those nearest him acknowledge the greatness and holiness of the man, and he bound his friends to him with hooks of steel. He was stern and severe to vice, especially when flaunting itself in the church of God, but he was always gentle and charitable to the penitent, kind to the poor, benevolent to the last degree, and tender toward the suffering and sins of men. "A bright, cheerful, gentle soul," says Newman, "a sensitive heart, a temperament open to emotion and impulse, and all this elevated, refined, transformed by the touch of heaven, winning followers, riveting affections, by his sweetness, frankness, and neglect of self."³

He had a brave and true heart, ever sanguine, which beat high with the love of God, which was ever true to friends, and ever forgiving to enemies. In his jealousy for Christ he was sometimes austere, but never did a truer saint walk this footstool.

Chrysostom has his greatest reputation as a preacher. His discourses were largely exegetical. He aimed to explain the entire Bible to the people, following it book by

¹ Conybeare and Howson, *Life and Epistles of St. Paul*. (New York: Scribner.) Vol. i. pp. 274-275. "It is remarkable that Chrysostom and Martyn are buried in the same place. They both died on a journey, at Tocat or Comana in Pontus." See also Newman, *Hist. Sketch*, Vol. ii. p. 298. Bush, *Life and Times of Chrysostom* (London, 1885), p. 285.

² Smith's ed., p. 475.

³ Newman, *l. c.*, Vol. ii. p. 234. See also p. 273.

book and text by text ; and it is said that he actually did this in the course of his ministry. His early education had set him upon the right track, and he remained faithful to logical and grammatical principles. He derived the spirit from the letter, and by a "rich inward experience he lived into the understanding of Holy Scripture." He made the Scriptures the basis of all his argument and exhortation, and elevated the gospel above philosophy and theology. He preached the morals of Christianity, made religion to deal with all the affairs of society, and all the details of life. In fact, in his homilies the whole social and religious life of his time is depicted. He was a fearless rebuker of sin in high places as well as in low, and spoke out with Pauline earnestness even at his own peril. Against the gigantic corruptions of the waning empire he contended with earnestness unsurpassed. Every doctrine of Christianity and every aspect of life and manners came before him for treatment from his standpoint as a Christian preacher and moralist. He sometimes stormed against popular vices as with lightning and thunder, at other times he was quiet and tender and moved his audience to tears. He was frequently interrupted by applause, though always rebuking such demonstrations. He could soar into the empyrean of God's awful and incommunicable attributes, and he could descend into the pettiest details of every-day life. His preaching was his life—he lived it, he made it his master-passion. He was the Demosthenes of the pulpit, with more of Demosthenes' vehemence and range. At times he could carry everything before him by his eloquence ; his listeners would become like drunken men, and would surround his pulpit with gaping mouths and outstretched necks. When he was banished, they lamented with unavailing cries, "Better that the sun should cease to shine than that our Chrysostom's mouth should be stopped." Professor James M. Hoppin, who has given the best analysis of his pulpit power in the English language, thinks that, of all the preachers since the apostolic

day, Chrysostom is the best model for imitation, the one to be most carefully studied.¹ His illustrations are still fresh and startling. He composed his sermons with care, preparing himself by study and prayer. He spoke extemporaneously, and, it must be confessed, is not always free from the faults of that style of address, diffuseness and desultoriness. As an orator he was gifted with an ardent vitality, a bold and incisive intellect, a pungent wit, a graphic power of the imagination, a fiery temper, resource and genius,—and these are the notes of the orator wherever found. In his conception of the office of the preacher, he had the earnestness of St. Paul, with whom he had many points in common. “It is the firm resolve of my soul,” he said, “as long I breathe, and as long as it pleaseth God to continue me in this present life, to perform this service whether I am listened to or not, to do that which the Lord hath commanded me.”

Such was his humility and seriousness of soul, that popularity Chrysostom detested, and often preferred the quiet meeting of a few Christian people who would listen quietly to his words and apply them to their lives.

So far as we have a right to classify men by the terminology of a later age, Chrysostom belonged to the Arminian type of theologians rather than to the Calvinistic. He emphasized the freedom of the human will, its self-determining power, and its rule in all the domain of action. All men inherit a tendency to evil, but it is only a tendency, and can be overcome by the force of will. The grace of God is always at our disposal. His doctrine of original sin is remarkably free. The Adamic connection prevails only so far as the physical nature is concerned. Man inherits a vitiated sensuousness, which develops into sin by his voluntary action. Sin has a purely individual origin. As to predestination, he held that all men without exception are called through Christ to salvation; predestina-

¹ See his admirable and eloquent treatment of this preacher in his *Homiletics* (New York, 1883), pp. 90–102.

tion means no more than God's original design of bringing all men to salvation. His redemptive plan embraces all, but constrains none. The accomplishment of God's purpose is limited to the freedom of choice which he has himself bestowed on man. God's election is persuasive, not compulsory.¹

As to regeneration, Chrysostom's theory is firmly synergistic. If man on his side works toward holiness, God's grace will come to his succor and strengthen him. It is necessary, he says, for us to choose goodness, and when we have chosen it, then God introduces goodness from himself. . . . It is our function to choose beforehand and to will, but it is God's function to finish and to bring to completion. We can thus see how far Chrysostom was from his great contemporary, Augustine, in his views of sin and salvation, and how he laid himself open to the quotations of the Pelagians. Augustine, however, praised John much, and vindicated him from any imputation of leaning toward Pelagianism. Methodism in its doctrine of sin is more Augustinian than Chrysostom would now be considered.

He held firmly to the Nicene symbol as to the divinity of Christ; and his doctrines of God, of the Holy Spirit, and of the atonement are those generally held by the church. He laid great emphasis on the love of God, and some of his most eloquent passages are in praise of the divine mercy.

He believed that baptism is a solemn initiation into the Christian covenant, an ordinance symbolical of sin and of moral renovation.

Concerning his doctrine of the Lord's Supper there has been much dispute. There are passages which may be interpreted both according to the Roman Catholic and the Protestant theory of the sacrament. He constantly speaks of the sacrament as a sacrifice, and there are ex-

¹ 1 Cor., Hom. ii. [8, 9] (New York ed.), Vol. xii. p. 8; Matt., Hom. i. 1, Vol. x. p. 364; Rom., Hom. xvi. 20-24, Vol. xi. pp. 467-469.

pressions which might well satisfy any Roman Catholic. At other times he speaks of it as a memorial and a feast. He taught the real presence of Christ, and that we partake of his body and blood. The controversy on this subject, however, had not then arisen, and it is unfair to press him for or against dogmas which were not then chiselled.¹

He approved of invocation to the saints, prayers for the dead, and honors to the relics of martyrs and other holy men. But, as Dr. Pusey has well observed, "through volumes of St. Augustine and St. Chrysostom, there is no mention of any reliance except on Christ alone."²

There is in his writings no trace of priestly confession as an ordinance of the church. He knows nothing of purgatory, and nothing of Mariolatry. He paid great deference to the metropolitan at Rome, and the bishop of that city was his friend and admirer. It is, however, certain that he acknowledged nothing of papal supremacy, in the sense in which the words were understood by later generations. Many of the peculiar doctrines of the Roman Church stand condemned by the mouth of one whom she has justly honored as a saint and as a great doctor of the church of Christ.

Finally, as to his doctrine of Scripture. He was here in accord with the general teaching of his school. He said, generally, that the prophets spake by the Holy Ghost, that they were the mouth-pieces of God, and that the words of the apostles were not theirs but the Spirit's. In this, however, he spoke rhetorically. He freely allowed discrepancies in the Scripture narratives, and contradictions on minor matters.³ He held that this lack of agree-

much better if man would listen to the voice of the Spirit speaking to his own soul. But since he will not so listen, God has graciously given him the more imperfect revelation of the letter.' "In Chrysostom," says Neander, "we recognize an interpreter of Scripture who had been formed in the Antiochian school, where we find him admitting without scruple the existence of many discrepancies in the Gospel narratives, as to unimportant matters relating to times and places, and in particular forms of expression. This agreement in essentials, with diversity in things not essential, he regards as a proof of the credibility of the narratives. He holds that the only thing important is agreement in the essential matter, in that which serves to the end of salvation, whereupon Christianity reposes. Under this head he places the incarnation of God; the miracles of Christ; his resurrection and ascension; the fact that he gave precepts serving to salvation; the fact that the New Testament stands not in contradiction with the Old."¹

In these days of ecclesiastical machinery, of petty ambitions, of superficial piety, and low ministerial ideals, it would be well for us to go back to the study of the life, writings, and spirit of St. John Chrysostom to see if we might not become baptized with some of his courage, purity, and devotion. This man was a martyr to the cause of Christian holiness, fidelity, and charity. He was relentlessly persecuted by men of his own calling, by men who could not appreciate his holiness, and his liberality to the

¹ Homily on Matthew, l., at beginning; Post-Nicene Fathers (New York), Vol. x. p. 1.

² Neander, *l. c.*, Vol. ii. p. 390. The enterprise of the Christian Literature Co., 35 Bond street, New York, has now made available to the American reader all the more important works of Chrysostom. See Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, edited by Dr. Schaff, first series, Vols. ix.-xiv., 8vo., 1888-90. These works ought to be read again and again by the preacher, and they are invaluable to the historical and theological student. Thomas Aquinas declared he would rather possess the homilies on Matthew than be master of all Paris.

followers of Origen. Against these persecutors, however, he said nothing. In God was his trust, and in the darkest hour God's presence and smile was his light and joy.

“ Preacher and Saint, whose name is eloquence,
Well called they ‘ Golden ’ thine impassioned tongue
On which Truth sat, and glowing manly sense,
And words that stand the fire—in wisdom strong.
And strong in charity.”