

**ST. CHRYSOSTOM'S
PICTURE OF THE
RELIGION OF HIS AGE**

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St. Chrysostom's Picture of the Religion of His Age by Anonymous

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Part II.

CHAPTER I.

THE WORD OF GOD.

Versions of Holy Scripture.—History of the Septuagint.—
Books of the New Testament.—Method of Interpretation.
—Diffusion of the Scriptures.—Preaching the Word.

If the reader were to be furnished with no further information than is contained in the Author's work on the social aspect of the age in which St. Chrysostom lived,¹ he might conclude, not only that religion was exceedingly corrupted, but also that Christianity had almost ceased to exist in the regions where St. Chrysostom discharged the duties of his ministry. Yet he would thus

¹ *St. Chrysostom's Picture of His Age*, published by S.P.C.K.

fall into error. The people of those countries were remarkable for the intensity both of their vices and their virtues. This partly arose from that fervour of disposition, which is so general amongst the inhabitants of the East; partly from those troubles in which the falling empire was involved, and which offered so many facilities to the lawless for the commission of crime, or opened a pathway of fame to the violent and unscrupulous; but which at the same time taught the pious to raise their hopes above a world which was so miserable, and convinced them that the energy of holiness was necessary if they would stem the tide of crime and corruption. They were arriving in the East at that state which Gregory the Great more than two centuries later described so beautifully as existing in the West, "Behold! now the world is withered in itself, and yet it flourishes in our hearts. Everywhere there is death, and mourning, and destruction; we are smitten on all sides, the bitter cup is handed to us from every quarter, and yet with the blindness of earthly desires we love even the bitterness of the world, we pursue the fleeting world, we hold fast to the sinking world, and since we cannot keep it from sinking, we sink ourselves with it, wishing to retain it as it sinks. Once the world enchanted us by its

amusements; now it is so full of suffering, that of itself it points us to God. The downfall of these earthly things shows how worthless they were, even when they appeared to stand firm. Therefore think upon this, in order to direct your hearts to the love of the Eternal, so that, despising earthly glory, you may attain through our Lord Jesus Christ to that glory which you already profess in faith." ²

In reviewing the picture which St. Chrysostom draws of external and internal religion, I call to mind that he himself was "mighty in the Scriptures," and that he regarded them as the fountain-head from which all should draw the water of life. I therefore begin by examining the accounts which we have of them, the authority which was attached to them, and the reverence with which they were regarded.

Our Archbishop was a contemporary of St. Jerome, but of course the East had not at that time derived any advantage from the studies of that great Biblical translator. There the Old Testament was represented by three versions of the Septuagint, except, perhaps, in Osdroene and Mesopotamia where Syriac was the vulgar tongue, and they possessed a Syriac translation from the Hebrew. Constantinople and all the

² Neander's *Memoriale of Christian Life*, part iii. chap. 4.