

St. John Chrysostom: john homilies acts

St. John Chrysostom: John Homilies Acts Preface to Part II. of the Oxford Edition. The manifestly imperfect condition in which these Homilies ha come to us may partly be accounted for by the circumstances of the times in which they were preached. It was Easter weeks of the third year of his residence at Constantinople as Archbishop, that St. Chrysostom began th of Sermons; and during all the remaining part of that year (a. d. 400), the Capital of the East was kept in consta trouble and alarm by the revolt of Gainas and the Goths. Moreover, scarcely had the preaching commenced, w complaints from the Churches of Asia Minor were brought (May, 400) before the Metropolitan See, which busin many months painfully occupied the Archbishops thoughts, and eventually demanded his presence at Ephesu Chrysostoms Sermons were originally prepared in writing: certainly these were not: and as certainly the text, d by no skilful hand from notes taken during the preaching, can never have been revised by the Preacher himself a serious disadvantage: for these Homilies, if only from the novelty of the subject, stood especially in need of revision. The Acts of the Apostles, though read in the churches in the season between Easter and Pentecost, w preached upon; and we find St. Chrysostom complaining in the opening of these Homilies, as also on an earlie at Antioch, that this xportion of the Scriptures was not so much read as it ought to be, nay, that there were ma whom this Book was not even known. (p. 1 and note I). Hence it is not surprising, if the Preacher was not alwa understood; and, in fact, the attentive reader will not unfrequently see reason to suspect, that the scribe (or reporter,) from whose notes the text was formed, did not rightly apprehend the sense of what he heard. Nor h transcriber (or redactor) remedied the defects, whatever they may have been, of the original report. On the co in other ways, of which we shall have to speak presently, he has often perplexed the sense, and sometimes en misrepresented the Preachers meaning. The earliest mention of our Homilies is by Cassiodorus (a. d. 514), wh that with the assistance of friends he caused the fifty-five Homilies on the Acts, by St. John, Bishop of Constantinople, to be translated into Latin, Opp. t. ii. p. 544. This version unfortunately is lost.¹¹ From the sam Cassiodorus there is extant a short work on the Acts under the title *Complexiones Actuum Apostolorum*; but th a brief syllabus of the history, and contains nothing in which we could trace a reference to St. Chrysostoms Exposition. In the Canons of the Fifth and Sixth General Councils, St. Chrysostoms view of the Seven Deacon Acts is cited at length from Hom. xiv. (p. 91). John of Damascus, *de Fid. Orthod.* iii. 15, (a. d. 730), cites as from second of these Homilies a passage which appears in the first, being the comment on i. 9. Photius has an entr *Bibliotheca* relating to them, but by some

mistake the number is given as fifty. Of the Catena on the Acts, comp certain Andreas Presbyter of unknown age and country, but not later than the tenth century (for there is a man that age), a large proportion is taken from St. Chrysostom: and the Commentaries of cumenius (990) and The (1077) are in many places formed from the Catena: as also are the Scholia in mss. of the Acts. To these may be Florilegium or Eclogæ, a compilation the date of which is unknown, but certainly not later than the first half of the eleventh century. The Author of this work seems to have resorted to our Homilies once only (Hom. xix. p139): he, as all the rest who have been mentioned, used the text which in the notes we call the old text, and from which present Translation is made. For there is another and a widely different text, by which alone, unfortunately, the Homilies have been known in modern times, except by the few who have had access to Manuscripts. In the Na at Paris there is (No. 729) a manuscript (in our notes marked E, in Par. Ben. 2, D), which the Parisian Editor de thus: Quorum (of six mss. on the Acts) antiquissimus, olim Colb. nunc Reg. 729, sæc. X., nitide et accurate scriptus desinit in hom. quinquagesima. (This is a mistake; it reaches to the end of the 55th.) Of the other mss. he assigns B. C (No. 725, 6, 7), to the twelfth, fourteenth and thirteenth centuries respectively. These, and a copy in the Lib of New College (N), contain the old text. Two others D, F, (728, and 73 suppl.) exhibit a text compiled from old new, and with alterations peculiar to itself. Of these six Parisian mss. a full collation was made for the Library of the Fathers: of N we have at present but a partial collation. The ms. E. came into the hands of Erasmus, and from him his Latin version, down to the end of Hom. liii. and therefore for some reason which is not explained he goes to the other text, of which he has nowhere taken notice in the preceding Homilies. Of this work he says in an Epist. to the Bishop of Durham: Ex Chrysostomo in Acta veterum homilias tres; cujus operæ me pernituit, cum nihil Chrysostomi. Tuo tamen hortatu recepi codicem in manus; sed nihil unquam legi indoctius. Ebrius ac stertens meliora. Habet frigidum sensiculos nec eos satis commodè potest explicare. In his Preface, however, he considers and abates the severity of this censure, and contents himself with hinting at a doubt whether the work be St. Chrysostom quod stylus concisus quiddam et abruptum habeat, id quod a phrasi Chrysostomi videtur alienum: si docti tam opus Chrysostomo dignum, libenter hoc ego quicquid est suspensionis ponam. Of the Greek text, the editio princeps of Commelin, professes to be formed from manuscripts Biblioth. Palatinæ Bavaræ, Augustanæ, Pistorianæ, of present we are unable to give any account. Perhaps Commelin's leading ms. was of a composite order: such a text; for it occasionally deserts E, to which, as a general rule, it closely adheres. This was inconsistent, for the circumstances of the two texts are such, that one or other ought to be followed throughout. There can be no way for alternating between the two: for they are not different reports of the same matter, such that between them one hopes to approximate to the truth: the one is a refashionment of the other, and where it differs, it does so, not because the framer had a

more correct report of the Sermons, but because he wished to improve upon the materials which were before him in the other text. Commelin's text, in substance, is retained in all the subsequent editions. Savile, from the New College ms. has corrected words and phrases here and there, but in the main his text is still that of the princeps. (He describes it as composed from the New College ms., another belonging to J.A. de Thou (Thuanon ita pridem excuso in Germania.) The edition of Morel (which commonly goes under the name of Fronton Du Roule, but without Savile's emendations: and the Benedictines (here not Montfaucon), though they profess collated the Parisian mss., have reprinted with but slight improvements, and with not a few disimprovements, of Morel. In the Parisian reprint of the Benedictine Chrysostom (Par. Ben. 2), the Editor has occasionally, but not constantly, resorted to the manuscripts, rarely gives the preference to the text of A.B. C., and constantly assumes inferiority of those copies, in contents and authenticity as well as in antiquity, to the manuscript (E), which furnished the Latin version of Erasmus, and in substance, as we have explained, the printed text of the original. The Editors collated the manuscript copies of these Homilies a labor from which they, or those whom they employ to have shrunk, they would probably have reversed their estimate of the relative value of the two recensions. The superiority of the other text in point of sense and coherence, notwithstanding its frequent abruptness and uncorrectness is too evident to be called in question. Had they also collated the Catena, Cumenius, Theophylact, and the Scholia they would have found the external testimony to be coincident with the internal evidence to the higher antiquity as greater authenticity of the text which (for the most part unknown) they rejected. It would have been seen that besides being, with all its faults, incomparably better, was the older of the two; and that the other could claim no higher antiquity than that of the manuscript (said to be of the tenth century) in which it appears: that it is the work of some scribe, who, offended by the manifest abruptness and ruggedness of the earlier text, set himself to smooth the difficulties, and to make it read more easily. For this is clearly the true state of the case. With this view, the scribe sometimes alters words and phrases, sometimes transposes: often omits, where he finds something that he does not understand, oftener still amplifies, or rather dilutes: and interpolates matter which sometimes is demonstrably bad with little disguise from the Catena (see p. 113, note 1; 279, note 3; 280, note 2); or which, when it is his own, is little worth. In short, he has thought more of sound than of sense, and if he could make a passage run smoothly, has given himself little concern whether St. Chrysostom was likely to have so thought, or so expressed himself. Notes appended to our Translation will abundantly substantiate this censure. To have noted all the variations, either of the printed text, or of E alone, would have been a task as unprofitable as it was wearisome: perhaps as it is, we have given more than enough to vindicate the claims of the older text. If any one desires larger materials for comparison of Erasmus' Latin version, which, except in the two last Homilies, keeps close to E, will show that the text which we represent in our Translation is, with all

its imperfections, incomparably the better of the two. Even if it were otherwise and were the alterations not, as they mostly are, disfigurements, but, considered in themselves, decided improvements, still our duty was plain: the text which came thus accredited by all the testimony known to be true were not at liberty to reject in favor of an alien recension, unknown to the Ancients, and, as far as our evidence unhears of before the tenth century. Therefore, in forming the text for this Translation we have entirely dismissed except where it has preserved readings which came strictly under the description of various readings. But when confining ourselves to that old text, we were not to leave unnoticed its more patent defects and errors. We could but perceive, that we had before us an unrevised report of St. Chrysostom's Sermons, which, especially in the Expositions, was frequently imperfect, sometimes, indeed, little more than a set of rough notes thrown together apparently, little or no attempt at arrangement. So far as this imperfection was caused by the reporters' negligence in capacity, there was no remedy: and leaving the matter as we found it, or, at most, inserting in the text the mark of a lacuna, we have only ventured, in the notes, to surmise what may have been the general purport of St. Chrysostom's remarks. In other places, where the defects of our sources seemed to be rather chargeable upon the redactor, sought to apply a remedy, sometimes, but rarely, by conjectural emendation; very often by inserting portions of text or other connecting matter in [], and also by transposing parts which had fallen out of their true order. For it seems that the original transcript from the reporters' notes was defective in these two regards. (1) The reporter frequently omitted to note in his tablets the other some other text of Scripture, or would indicate it in the shortest possible way by a word or two at the beginning and ending of the passage, intending to insert it after his leisure. It appears, however, that in many places this was either not done at all, or done in the wrong place where the text seemed incurably defective or perplexed, we have often been able to restore coherency by the expedient of inserting texts which were omitted, or else, by removing the texts altogether, and redistributing them among the comments. Almost any page of the Translation, especially in the Recapitulations, will illustrate this. (2) It often happens, that the order of the comments both in the first and in the second exposition (or recapitulation) does not follow the order of the texts. Of course the Preacher might be supposed to have sometimes returned steps, but it was scarcely conceivable that St. Chrysostom should have delivered an Exposition perplexed, as we found it, by disjointed remarks thrown together without the slightest method. It was necessary therefore to consider whether it might not be possible to deduce something like connected exposition, by assuming that the reporters had been transcribed from his tablets in a wrong order. Where it could be seen that one sentence or portion was a comment on such a verse, another on some other verse, and so on, some clue to the true order was given us by the sequence of the texts themselves. Even so, the difficulties which beset this part of our task were greater than be readily estimated by any one who has not tried it.

Sometimes the complication resisted all attempts at disentanglement. We are far from supposing that we have done all that might have been done in this way: but that the labor which has been bestowed has not been altogether wasted, and that the restoration will carry with it own evidence. And as in these attempts we have indicated by letters the order in which the trajected parts lie in manuscripts, the reader in every case has the means of forming his own judgment.

In the first seventeen Homilies have only now and then resorted to this method: not because it was less needed there, but because we had no clearly perceived what was the state of the case, and what was practicable in this way. The eighteenth furnishes a remarkable instance, pp. 116, 120. Let any one read it in the order denoted by the letters, i. e. the six parts marked consecutively, then the seven parts marked (b), inserting in the third of the latter (see p. 116, note 3), the comment on v. 25, from page 117, (And they when they had testified, etc., to when the Samaritans believed,) and the whole the entire recapitulation or second exposition of the history of the Samaritans and Simon Magus as it appears in the MSS. which he will plainly perceive could not have proceeded in that form from St. Chrysostom. The same matter we have arranged it, will be found to form a continuous exposition, not indeed perfect, for the dislocated state in which it had fallen seems to have led to further corruptions on the part of the scribes: but at any rate coherent, with the parts fitting into each other. Moreover, if the fourteen parts, as here arranged, be numbered 1. 2. 3. etc. will be seen that the order in which they lie in the MSS. is 1. 3. 5. 8. 10. 12. 2. 4. 6. 14. 7. 9. 11. 13., whence it seems that the derangement proceeded by some kind of method. The like was often found to be the case in similar instances. In p. 229, the trajection is 1. 3. 5. 7. 9. 11. 13. 2. 4. 6. 8. 10. 12: i. e., the transcriber missed the alternate portions, and brought them all together at the end. In p. 229 (before the series just noticed), and 260, 3. 2. 1., and in 170, 4. 3. 2. 1., i. e. three, and four, parts read in reverse order. In a great number of instances the transposition is only of two parts, 2. 1: sometimes repeated as in 235, 2. 1., 1: 2. 1: 234, 2. 1: 1: 2. 1: 2. 1: 196, 2. 1: 1: 2. 1: 1: 2. 1: 1: 2. 1. A form of frequent occurrence is 2. 4., 1. 3., as in 188, 220, 225, 247; and combined with others as in 213, 2. 4. 1. 3. 2. 1: in 275, 2. 1: 1: 2. 4. 1. 3. and 183, 2. 1: 1: 2. 4. 1. 3: 2. 1. There is the like regularity in the scheme 2. 1. 4. 3., p. 125; and 3. 1. 4. 2. p. 216, 301. In the last Homily, which is extremely confused, the trajection seems to yield this very regular scheme, 2. 4. 6. 1. 3. 5: 1: 5. 3. 1. 6. 4. 2. In other instances where the trajection is less regular, or does not seem to follow a rule, as in 151, 4. 1. 3. 2: 152, 2. 4. 1: 242, 4. 6. 1. 3. 5. 7. 2. 8: 250, 2. 1. 4. 8. 5. 3. 6. 9. 7. and in 298, 316, 321 (on which three see the notes), the transcriber may have gone wrong on other grounds, and not, as in the generality of instances, from the order in which the reporter had set the matter on his tablets. The trajections we have attempted to remedy mostly in the expository parts. In the *Ethica* it often appeared to us, that the coherency might be greatly improved by transposition, but the evidence of the true order was more precarious here, than where the sequence of the text furnished a clue; in these

parts, therefore, we have rarely ventured upon applying this remedy. In these ways it is hoped that something has been done towards presenting these Homilies in a form nearer to that in which they delivered, than the form in which they are exhibited in the unadulterated manuscripts, much more in the printed editions. The task was arduous, and we are far from supposing that our labor has always been successful; but we have not spared pains and diligence. The Translation was a work only less difficult than the reconstruction text. Here again much indulgence is needed on the score of the difficulty of producing a version, which, while it represented the original with its roughnesses and defects, should not be altogether unreadable. We have attempted however, to give faithfully, though not always literally, the sense, or what seemed to be the sense, of our materials. As a commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, this Work stands alone among the writings of the first ten centuries. Expositions of St. Clement of Alexandria (in the Hypotyposes), of Origen, of Diodorus of Tarsus, and St. Chrysostom, Theodoret of Mopsuestia, as well as of Ammonius and others whose materials are used in the Catena, have perished. Those who are acquainted with the characteristic qualities of St. Chrysostom's exegesis, will perceive also the same excellencies which mark his other expository works, especially the clear and full exposition of the historical sense, and the exact appreciation of the rhetorical momenta in the discourses of St. Peter, St. Stephen, James and St. Paul, as recorded in the Acts. Of the *Ethica* it is perhaps not too much to affirm, that not the most finished work of St. Chrysostom will be found to furnish more of instruction and interesting matter (apart from the expression) than will be found in these Homilies, on the religious and moral subjects of which they treat: for example, On the delay of Baptism, On spiritual indolence and excuses derived from the cessation of Miraculous Grace, On the nature and uses of Miracles, On Prayer, On the Study of the Scriptures, On Alms, On Anger and Gentleness, On Swearing, and many others. Nor does any work exhibit a livelier portrait of the character and life of the Preacher and Bishop, and of the manners of the times in which his lot was cast.