

SYMBOLS OF CHRIST IN THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN.

THE last of the Evangelists, writing many years after the others, applies himself more to setting forth the doctrine taught by Christ, than describing the mere facts of His life on earth. Thus he omits all detail connected with our Lord's birth and early years, announcing merely the fact, that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." In this Gospel only is the doctrine of Christ's Divine nature set forth positively and dogmatically, giving the clue to the intention of the whole book: "that ye might believe on the Name of the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might so have life through Him."

St. John was evidently of a more contemplative turn of mind than the other Evangelists, and where they are content to record Christ's parables and miracles with little comment, his closer and more affectionate intercourse with their Divine Author seems to have given him a deeper insight into spiritual things. "None," says Origen, "can rightly read St. John, who has not lain with him on Jesus' breast." In order to adapt the mysteries of God in some measure to man's finite comprehension, it is necessary to make use of "earthly things with heavenly meanings;" and in these representations, called "symbols," the Gospel of St. John abounds more than any other; that of "the Word," is used by this writer alone.

We shall take the symbols in detail, as they occur in the course of the Gospel; noticing, that some are used by our Lord of Himself, others by the Evangelist only, and others by both.

The book opens with a symbolical expression, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." That something more than the mere commandment or law of God is here meant, is evident not only from the employment of the personal pronoun in the 3rd verse, "All things were made by Him," but from the 14th, "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." There

was but one, Being to whom these words could apply—the only-begotten Son of God, who became man for our sakes. (Luke i. 35.)

The description of Wisdom in the 8th chapter of Proverbs is very similar to the opening passage of St. John, and has probably the same meaning. Our Lord never applies the expression "Word of God" to Himself, though we may trace a paraphrase of it in His address to the Pharisees: "Him whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world." The Jews were constantly taught in their synagogues that the "Word of God" was the same as God, and that by the Word all things were made. Only that which they knew not was, that this Word was made flesh, and that the Word made flesh was Jesus Christ. He is called the "Word," because God hath spoken to us by Him (Heb. i. 1), and has directed us to hear Him (Matt. xvii. 5). As a man makes known his thoughts and intentions by his word or speech, so is Christ the Interpreter of God's will towards us.

Closely connected with this symbol is another—that of light. By comparing verses 3 and 10, the one assigning the office of Creator of the world to the Word, the other to the Light, we see that both symbols indicate the same Divine Being. Our Lord also frequently styles Himself the "Light of the World" (John viii. 12; ix. 5; xi. 35). In the material world, the creation of light was the first step towards bringing order out of chaos; so, at the time when the Sun of Righteousness arose upon the spiritual world, "darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people;" the Gentiles were sunk in cruelty and licentiousness under the name of religion, and the Jews had superseded the pure law of their God by countless human traditions. Then the true Light appeared—first of all as the Star out of Jacob, offering His rays to His own chosen people. But as the most brilliant light is of no use to a blind man, or to one who wilfully shuts his eyes,