

a livery servant brought in sherry and light refreshments between the prayers and the sermon. Some of the finest sculptures of previous ages were defaced by a coating of whitewash. The style of architecture in vogue was a hideous similitude of "Roman theatres and Grecian fanes." The high decker pulpit was coming into general use. The hour glass was still one of the articles of church furniture. The parish clerk was a universal institution, and responding and singing in the Church were at a very low ebb. Chanting was almost unknown save in the cathedrals. Organs and musical instruments were matters of dispute. Catechizing, in the afternoons, was all but obsolete. Confirmation was much oftener omitted than performed. High Churchmen used the bidding prayer before the sermon and low Churchmen prayed extempore. Irreverence was the order of the day. Lost goods were published in Church. Vestries sat with their hats on, smoking and drinking, to elect churchwardens. Even William III. kept on his hat during the sermon. The congregation looked about, whispered, talked, laughed, flirted, reclined for sleep, and hurried out of church, after the sermon, without waiting for the benediction. Some went so far as to play cards on the Communion table, and, in a church in Canterbury, the people stood on the holy table to see Queen Mary. We cannot be too thankful that in our day a better taste and greater reverence universally prevail.

As we contrast the blessings and the dangers of our own day with those of the period we have just considered, our first feeling is one of devout thankfulness to God that He has placed on the throne of our kingdom a monarch who commands, and what is much better, who deserves, not only undivided loyalty, but also unfeigned love. By a reign of almost unexampled duration, and of quite unexampled prosperity, progress, wisdom, purity and devotion to the public good, Queen Victoria has given, under God, almost unbroken peace and contentment, not to the United Kingdom alone, but to the whole Empire. This has left the Church free to devote all her thought and energy to the unexampled work that lies before her.

And it is somewhat remarkable that the Church's foes and work are precisely the same now as they were then. The Deists, it is true, have disappeared, but they have been succeeded by a race of men no less dangerous and powerful. Under the name of materialists, rationalists, infidels or agnostics, they are undermining the very foundations of the Church and of the Holy Scriptures. May God raise up among us such men as Butler and Warburton to meet and remove this danger. The glaring immorality of the past age has disappeared, but it has been replaced by a gradual loosening of all the bonds of society, morality and religion. Thanks be to

God that He is daily giving us men, and women too, to cope with the gigantic evils that everywhere surround us. And the work of Missions, that only began to dawn upon that age, has assumed such vast proportions in ours that we are tempted to look upon it as the one paramount mission of the Church, and to look forward to the speedy downfall of heathenism, and to the conversion, nominal at least, of the whole world to Christianity. Here also God has been very bountiful to our Church. He has given her opportunities and resources and men such as she never had before. If He grant her a still greater measure of self-denial, devotion and enterprise, there need be no limit to our expectations.

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA.

III.—THE SECOND MESSAGE.

"Unto the angel of the Church in Smyrna write."—Rev. ii. 8

FORTY miles from Ephesus lay the city of Smyrna. Of the two cities Smyrna was the larger and more extensive. Here, as well, had sprung up a little band of Christians who formed a Church, appointed their chief pastor or bishop ("angel," as he is called here), and struggled on as a witness for God in the midst of a wicked, heathen city. When speaking of the message that was sent to Ephesus, we had some points in connection with the history of the Church there, which invested it with special interest. We could speak of it in connection with Paul and John and Timothy, and with events recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, and mentioned in St. Paul's Epistles. But we have nothing of this kind in connection with the sister Church of Smyrna. She has no New Testament history upon which we may seize as points of interest regarding her; but for all that, the message itself unfolds sufficient material to afford an interesting and profitable study.

The message, like that to the Church of Ephesus, came from Christ; but it is well to observe how He styles Himself, "These things saith the First and the Last, who was dead and is alive." The thought was that of His own divinity. He wanted the people of Smyrna to know that he was not simply a despised Nazarene, who had been put to death with every mark of shame and disgrace; but that He was the one who was strong in the life which had been given back to Him. He *was* dead. Of that He would have no doubt to be felt by anyone. The breath struggled from Him, and the grave closed over Him. He went to the regions of the dead, or as the Creed has it, He descended into Hell (Hades); He went and preached to the spirits in prison. But the life all came back again. It came back again never more to leave Him. And