II

SMYRNA

8. “And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write : These  
things saith the First and the Last, who became dead, and returned  
to life.”  
  
THE first attribute of Christ *imports His Deity*—  
He is “the First and the Last.”  
 But this Mighty One, who once descended to death,  
has now risen out of it, and is beyond man’s power for  
ever. What believer then need fear death? The  
Saviour has passed through its fortress. He is Almighty,  
and will make a way for His people’s rescue. Beyond  
death lies their reward.  
  
 9. “I know thy tribulation and poverty.”  
  
 The ordinary reading, which inserts “thy works,” is  
rejected by the critical editions. *Internal evidence is  
against it also*. Jesus is speaking throughout of suffering,  
and not of action. In times of persecution, the Church  
can do but little.  
 Jesus was aware of the “*trouble*” of the saints. He  
knew it by experience, having Himself passed through  
the same. Both Jew and Pagan joined to persecute  
the saints. This word is, in the Apocalypse, only used  
of the churches; and it hence serves to *identify the  
Great Multitude* of chap. vii. 14 *with the saved of the  
churches*.  
 The angel was poor, and most probably the Church