

Review.

Darkness and Dawn ; or, Scenes in the Days of Nero. By F. W. FARRAR.
Two Volumes. London : Longmans, Green and Co.

HERE Archdeacon Farrar is at home. The picture he gives us of the reign of Nero is painted in colours the most vivid and lifelike, bringing before us as we read the darkness of paganism and the first bright rays of the Christian truth piercing the mists. Such a conflict offers an opportunity for much effective contrast, which has not been lost, but rather accentuated by many a device of description and effort of imagination. The book will be found to be not altogether a novel, not even an ordinary historical tale, and yet it is equally far removed from a series of descriptions with no connecting interest. It is rather a sequence of scenes, showing the same persons, and unfolding a drama ; or an exhibition of magic-lantern slides explained by a continuous narrative. While it is strictly what it professes to be—the history of a reign—there is enough of human interest involved to make us feel the story, as well as read it.

Of course, in some respects, Dr. Farrar's task was an easy one. The darkness of decadent paganism was so dark ; underneath the superficial glitter and orderliness was fermenting such a chaos of human lust and despair, that even a timid attempt to draw the beams of Gospel light as they stole softly over the disordered scene, would not fail to impress. The awful nature of the slave system—a system which was so engrained in the fabric of those times that even St. Paul did not ask his friend Philemon to *free* the runaway slave ; the dreadful fiction of a Divine Caesar, who was constantly being assassinated to make room for another brief-lived god ; the hardihood in immorality, and despair of better things—these and other thoughts will at once rise in the mind as we think of the early empire. The most careless cannot fail to see a pre-ordained fitness in the selection by the Almighty of this period as the time for the propagation of the new truth, just as a feeble light is most easily seen in the darkest room. For it brought to the people, amongst other gifts, the one of which at the immediate time most want was felt, and that was hope. All that was best and purest in the early empire was pessimistic. Even Horace had to play the plaintive, for his melancholy, gentle as it was, is probably assumed, and not a real part of his nature, but only adopted to suit the prevailing tone. All that was optimistic was self-indulgent ; to be cheerful in one's personal life was to be callous as regarded other people's sufferings. Thrasea and the other stoics looked upon life as a mistake, as an unwelcome present, which it did not chafe them to abandon, while Petronius and his fellow *viveurs* enjoyed life as a thing of which no account would have to be given hereafter. Dr. Farrar's task, then, was to show how Christianity breathed into this morbid atmosphere a pure exhilaration for the first life of man,

with a sure and certain hope of a second. He has performed it admirably.

Many characters are crowded into his brilliant canvas. Nero, of course, is the central figure, but we suppose that the place of hero would be rightly shared by Onesimus, the runaway slave, and Titus, the future conqueror of Jerusalem. The slave, says the author, must be regarded as an imaginary person, except in name. He is made to run away from Colossæ, where Philemon lived, and come to Rome to see life. Here, although he is a Christian, he sinks very low and sins deeply. The climax of his degradation is reached when he becomes a gladiator. Later he meets with St. Paul, who reconverts him, and of course, sends him back to Philemon. His kind master frees him, allowing him to return to Rome, where he waits upon St. Paul's last days, and is the only Christian to attend him at his martyrdom. He is represented as a young Phrygian, beautiful, brave, but weak and wayward, though in the end he nobly redeems his transgressions. Acte, Nero's first and faithful love, is made his cousin.

We see Titus growing up as the companion of Britannicus, and represented as a manly and virtuous lad, good-tempered and vigorous, qualities which were partly due to his plebeian birth. His humble home-life, too, is shown, with his honest soldier-father Vespasian, who afterwards ruled Rome, and his savage brother Domitian, his own successor in the empire. Titus grows up to a brave and honest Roman, acquainted with, but despising, Christianity on account of what he fancied its superstition. He is sitting next to Britannicus when the young prince is poisoned. That ill-fated prince is represented as a shy, but noble boy, resenting his ousting by Nero, but aware of the futility of resisting it. Archdeacon Farrar takes a somewhat bold step in making him a Christian, though the scene where the young Claudius is taken to a secret meeting, hears the *Glossolalia*, and is himself affected by the Spirit, is one of the most powerful in the whole story. Octavia, too, his hapless sister, sacrificed to Poppæa, is made a Christian; so, of course, is the beautiful Acte.

The forms of Agrippina, Seneca, Burrus, Lucan, Pudens, Claudia, Poppæa, Gallio, and many others, are full of interest. As for Nero, we see him under every light—as the comparatively innocent boy; the young tiger learning his strength; the matricide; the unchecked tyrant; the craven, dreading death. We see him chafing under Seneca's philosophic restraint; rioting with Petronius, Otho, Tigellinus and the rest; flinging princely gifts to the pantomimists, Paris and Aliturus; poisoning with consummate coolness his adoptive brother, Britannicus, at a feast at which the *élite* of Rome were present; contending in the arena; touring through Greece, and winning his prizes in blood; gloating over burning Rome and burning Christians; and finally whimpering, "Only to think that such an artist must perish!" as his fate finds him. His strange character is displayed with a master hand—the music-hall tyrant, as he would be called nowadays: "He was but thirty-one when he died; and he had crowded all that colossal criminality, all that mean rascality, all that insane degradation, extravagance and lust, into a reign of fourteen years!" (vol. ii., p. 324).

But no doubt the main interest circles round the glimpses of the beginnings of the Gospel. The secret meetings, the pass-words, the simple worship, the talking with tongues—all are drawn reverently and with skill. The figures of the three Apostles who are introduced are drawn with honourable delicacy and respect, and so far from offending, are a help towards realizing their personality. We give the descriptions of their appearances.

St. John "was dressed, as was not unusual at Rome, in Eastern costume. He was a man a little past the prime of life. The hair which escaped from under his turban was already sprinkled with gray. His dark eyes seemed to be lighted from within by a spiritual fire; his figure was commanding, his attitude full of dignity. His face was a perfect oval, and the features were of the finest type of Eastern manhood. When once you had gazed upon him it seemed impossible to take the eyes from a countenance so perfect in its light and spiritual beauty—a countenance in which a fiery vehemence was exquisitely tempered by a pathetic tenderness. His whole appearance was magnetic. It seemed to flash into all around him its own nobleness, and to kindle there that flame of love to God and man which burnt on the altar of his own heart" (vol. i., p. 231).

As to St. Paul: "Julius pointed to a prisoner chained to the foremost soldier. He was a man with the aquiline nose and features of his race; somewhat bent, somewhat short of stature; evidently, from his gestures, a man of nervous and emotional temperament. His hair had grown gray in long years of hardship. Many a care of peril and anxiety had driven its ploughshare across his brow. His cheeks were sunken, and the eyes, though bright, were disfigured by ophthalmia. He was evidently short-sighted; but, as he turned his fixed and earnest look now on one, now on another of his companions, the expression of his deeply-marked face was so translucent with some Divine light within, that those who once saw him felt compelled to look long on a countenance of no ordinary type of nobleness" (vol. ii., p. 96).

Of St. Peter we are told: "His gray hair added to the venerable aspect of his advancing years; but his eye was undimmed, his cheek still ruddy with the long years of the winds of Galilee, and holy courage shone in his weather-beaten features. There was a certain fire and force in all he said which gave it an impressiveness beyond that which was contained in the words themselves. Plain and practical as was 'the pilot of the Galilean lake,' there hung about him a reflection of something which elevated him above himself—as though the sunlight of Gennesareth still played around him, and the glory of Hermon shone upon his face. Everywhere among the good he commanded the deep reverence which his simplicity did not seek; and everywhere among the evil, he inspired the awe which his humble manliness might seem to deprecate" (vol. ii., p. 210).

Peter and Paul are martyred at Rome. John escapes the cauldron of oil, and, owing to superstitious terror on Nero's part, is banished to Patmos.

Without revealing any more of the tale, we think we have said enough to show that it is one of no ordinary interest. Here and there a careful observer may detect slight slips in matters of fact. Here and there the speech bewrayeth the Archdeacon. Figures are occasionally lugged in, merely, as far as one can see, for the sake of introducing them. But the tone is so true, the imagination is so vivid, the aim is so high, that this is a noble book.]

Short Notices.

Africa Rediviva. The occupation of Africa by Christian Missionaries of Europe and North America. By R. N. CUSK, LL.D., author of *Modern Languages of Africa, Bible Translations, and Notes on Missionary Subjects.* Pp. 117. Elliot Stock.

THIS book demands a longer notice than at present we are able to afford it. Full of statements and suggestions, on which no doubt the well-informed will make, in due course, worthy comment, it merits careful reading. The eminent writer, second to none in zeal for Missions, uses considerable freedom in his criticisms. It is well. The Missionary cause will lose nothing by it. In his Introduction, he says: "My book is compiled in a Catholic spirit of sincere love to all earnest Christian work, but the criticism on method employed is none the less severe, because in my opinion it is required: there are several radical errors which must be eradicated."

The volume contains four Mission-Maps compiled under the author's instructions, by Messrs. Stanford.

We quote a few specimen sentences, from the concluding remarks, on Woman's Work:

To send a young European or American married woman into the Equatorial regions with the possibility of maternity without the surroundings of decent civilized life is a downright wickedness. Do we read of any such folly in the great Missions of the early centuries? . . . I heard this year (1891) on a missionary platform a colonial Bishop, who ought to have known better, say that the exhibition of a white baby to the simple African or Indian people was *favourable to conversion.* This seems to my mind sheer folly.

The Critical Review of Theological and Philosophical Literature. Edited by Professor SALMOND, D.D. Pp. 460. T. and T. Clark.

With the first volume of the "Critical Review" as a whole, we are not able to say we are thoroughly satisfied. Many of the papers of course are helpful, and nearly all reach a high literary level.

The Days of Queen Mary. Annals of her reign, containing particulars of the restoration of Romanism and the sufferings of the martyrs during that period. Religious Tract Society.

This is a new edition of a carefully-written book.

The Story of the Life of Mackay of Uganda, told for boys. By his Sister. With portrait and twelve illustrations. Hodder and Stoughton.

Full of interest. Handsomely got up as a gift-book.