

weave the four Gospels into a single and connected narrative, the same desperate difficulties of course present themselves which are encountered by the author of a Diatessaron, and they are totally fatal to anything like free and flowing narration. Nobody can possibly have anything new in the way of facts to tell us about Christ. To fancies of course there is no limit. Renan's pretended life is the merest fancy, and a fancy which in essential respects most likely bears no relation to the facts whatever, though by its literary fascination it has now probably taken complete possession of the imaginations of a multitude of people, many of whom in France and other Roman Catholic countries have never read the Gospels.

Mr. Fairbairn's book is remarkable as a concession to the tendencies of the age on the subject of miracles. He does not attempt to separate the natural from the supernatural part of the narrative, and indeed admits that the separation is impossible. But he confesses that the miracles, which to the generations before science were the great evidences of Christianity, are in a scientific age its stumbling block, and the object of his book apparently is to present the founder of Christianity to our spiritual acceptance and allegiance on other grounds than the evidence of miracles. By taking this line, he at all events brings out with special clearness, and in strong relief, what we may call the testimony of history to the divine origin of Christianity. For any other character however extraordinary, and for the effects produced by any other character, however immense, history can account. Given an account of individual genius and force, which, though unusual, is within the bounds of experience, history can perfectly well account for Mahomet. We can trace all his ideas and the elements of his character to their sources, Arabian, Christian, or Jewish, and we can show that he set agencies in motion sufficient to overthrow the decrepit Roman Empire, and give birth to the Mahometan powers. The same thing may be done in the case of any other man who has produced great changes and exercised a permanent influence, such as the leaders of the Reformation, or the founders of science. But the character of Christ, and the effects which His life and sayings have produced, are to scientific history still a mystery, if not a miracle. We can see that Galilee, Jewish in religion, yet inhabited by a mixed population, free from the exclusive pride of race, was suited to give birth to a religion of humanity. We can see that the simplicity of peasants would preserve them from the taint of Pharisaic legalism and open their hearts to such teaching as that of Christ. Still, there are natural limits to the vision and the power of the son of a Galilean mechanic, totally ignorant of history, and almost ignorant of humanity outside his own Capernaum. We have to account for the foresight of Christ as well as for His insight, for His having been able to found a moral civilisation which has endured for eighteen centuries, and to retain His own ascendancy over it to this hour. This is a problem which historical science has not solved, and, which, therefore it is open to us, if we choose, to hold that historical science by itself is incapable of solving.

#### SAUNTERINGS.

THERE are certain days and certain books, we think, about which it is impossible to say any new thing. All the harmonies in their colour-schemes have been exhausted long ago. We are familiar with every line and detail of the pictures that are conjured out of the memories of the one, or lie between the pages of the other. All the chords in the gamut of their associations have been struck again and again, and, from its simplest melody to its most intricate variation, we know the music well.

Such a day is the day after to-morrow, such a book is Charles Dickens' "Christmas Carol." We cannot expect or be expected—thank heaven!—to talk or think originally about Christmas, or Dickens. In talking or thinking otherwise we may take comfort in the reflection that the masters have nothing, mediæval or modern, to compare with the simple old pictures that hang in everybody's private art-gallery, their backgrounds "scumbled" with happy memories, or "washed in" perhaps with tears—that in a worldful of divine clangour there is no note so sweet as that which finds gentle and prolonged repetition in our hearts. We saunter to-day in a path beaten by the feet of countless multitudes, yet the wild thorn by the wayside may be as sweet for us as for them. In gathering it we only illustrate the fact that the dew and the sunlight repeat themselves endlessly, and why not we?

The history and tradition of Christmas came into this man's life as it has come into all of ours, to solemnise and sweeten it, and lift it up to higher altitudes of hoping and believing and doing. But he found in it such sustenance for a nature prone to take root and grow in all that was best and truest among men, that in a short quarter of a century we see clinging to Christmas, gray and monumental among the days, lichen-covered with a thousand thoughts of other men, the vital essence of Charles

Dickens' broad humanity—clinging and loving best the queer crannies and out of the way corners, like the "ivy green" he rhymes about. And so it comes to pass that he, kindly shade, keeps every Christmas with us now, though he must enter his genial invisible protest at our colonial dearth of yule logs and holly, and the growth of the sentiment that would prohibit the true adaptability of the nutmeg and the higher uses of the lemon, as he sits, a benignant impalpability, on one of our creaking modern "platform rockers," in the ruddy flicker of our Scranton coal-fed hearths, and looks vainly and a little disconsolately about him for the steaming and appetising bowl which is not an invariable accessory to the colonial Christmas Eve. There is no doubt about the Presence; we feel it everywhere in the soft, warm light of the room, see it in the gentle, unaccountable stirring of the curtain-folds, hear it in the quiet cinder-droppings from the grate. It gyrates pleasantly with the shadows about the bookcase in the corner where you go for your leather-backed Piccadilly edition, or looks approvingly over your shoulder as you cut the strings of a fanciful little package that contains rough edges, broad and uneven margins, vellum-like pages, and all the luxurious whimsicality of a holiday book, together with photographs of John Leech's drawings, and a preface which, in so far as you are aware, has not previously been printed as such. The preface indeed carries conviction with it, and you look over your shoulder with some little apprehension as you fancy your guest introducing himself *viva voce*, thus:

"I have endeavoured, in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it."

In good sooth, sir, you have succeeded; but why anybody, of never so nervous a temperament, should desire to 'lay' your beneficent spirit, so long as it keeps within the dematerialised limits of ghostship, it is not easy to say.

It is probably the twentieth time that you have experienced the distinct sensation attendant upon being informed that "Marley was dead: to begin with," and followed the incontrovertible logic that discarded the obviously excellent simile of the coffin-nail in favour of the time-honoured and commonly accepted door-nail by way of showing how exceedingly dead Marley was. Christmas Eve would not be Christmas Eve without this post-mortem reminiscence of Marley. We do not find it at all out of accord with the prevailing festivity; in fact, we are curiously certain that Marley could have contributed nothing merrier to the sum total of Christmas cheer than the fact of his funeral. We have looked in upon Marley's obsequies so often as to begin to feel a positive nepotistical interest in them, which does not flag, oddly enough, when we learn that Scrooge is "his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee." We feel that, nevertheless, Marley has made individual bequests to all of us, with several figures in them, if one stopped to compute them after the manner of the world's notation. As to Scrooge himself, age cannot wither him, nor custom stale his infinite variety. Scrooge, King of Skinflints! Behold his withered lineaments:

"Oh! but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait, made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

"External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him, no wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often 'came down' handsomely, and Scrooge never did."

The keenest, finest, most merciless caricature of miserliness known to literature! and yet not repellent and not cruel—redeemed from that by the subtle play all through it of a sunny nature, with which even Scrooge might claim the kinship of a common humanity.

Then Bob Cratchit, and the nephew, and the two philanthropic old gentlemen, and the place to pause and contemplate the red ruin in the grate, while the clock on the mantel regularly and rhythmically punctuates the silence, and reflect upon the infinite differentiation of the spirit that said "Humbug!" to sentiment and "Good afternoon" to philanthropy.