

Book Notices.

The Lives of the Fathers: Sketches of Church History in Biography. By FREDERIC W. FARRAR, D.D., F.R.S. 2 vols., 8vo. Pp. xxiv.-582; vi.-556. London and New York: Macmillan & Co.; and Methodist Book Rooms, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax. Price \$5.

The story of the early centuries of the Christian era will ever continue to be the most important and most interesting chapter in the history of the race. It was a grand transition period. Old things were passing away, and all things were becoming new. Paganism, like a rotten tree, was hollow at the heart and tottering to its fall. The world, weary with waiting for the healer of its woes, hailed with joy the Divine Teacher who brought life and immortality to light. The new and world-agitating ideas of Christianity were everywhere renovating society. The old faiths were fading out of the firmament of human thought. The old gods were reeling on their thrones. It was the heroic period of the Christian Church. She was girding herself, like a noble athlete, for the conquest of mankind. She was engaged in deadly struggle with paganism for the possession of the race. On the side of the latter were all the resources of the empire—the victorious legions, the treasures of the East and West, the prestige of power and splendour, a vast hierarchy, an ancient and venerated national religion, and, most potent ally of all, the corruptions and lusts of the evil heart of man. To these Christianity opposed the omnipotence of its divine principles—its fervent love, its sublime virtue, its heroic self-sacrifice—and they proved victorious. In this conflict both evil and good were brought into strongest relief and most striking contrast. Persecution was kindled to intensest rage against the new faith; but Christianity nerved

itself to suffer with a quietness of spirit all that the wrath of man was able to inflict. Nay, the hour of its sorest trial was that also of its noblest triumph. A moral Hercules even in its infancy, around its cradle were strewn the strangled serpents of heathen superstitions, vain philosophies, and pernicious heresies.

Ever since the revival of learning, this period has been the subject of exhaustive study by successive generations of critical scholars. It has been the battle-ground fought over, inch by inch, by orthodox and sceptical polemics. Its contemporary literature has been the armoury which has furnished weapons both for the attack and the defence of the truth. The names of Fabricius, Mosheim, Echart, Bingham, Cave, King, Jortin, Milner, Milman, Neander, Gieseler, Schaff, Killen, Lea, Merivale, Gibbon, Strauss, Baur, Renan, and Lecky, do not exhaust the list of those who have gleaned rich harvests in these oft-reaped fields. Our author will not suffer by comparison with even the chiefest of these great lights of literature; and for perspicuity and elegance of style, skill in grouping, warmth of colouring, and picturesqueness of detail, he is scarcely equalled by any of them. He has proved that, treated by the hand of a master, the interest of the subject is not exhausted. The more accurate processes of inquiry employed by modern criticism have dissipated many errors and developed many new truths. The recent discovery of long-lost writings of the period, and the study of its monumental evidences in the Catacombs and elsewhere, assist us to rehabilitate the past, and to comprehend its spirit better than modern writers have hitherto been able.

Archdeacon Farrar possesses in the highest degree the qualities requisite for the noble task he has undertaken. He unites, in unusual wedlock, a