

ENGLISH FOLK-HEROES. By Christina Hole. (Batsford; 10s. 6d.)

This short but excellent book presents a scholarly review of several of the great figures of English folk-lore, seen in relation to the parallel figures and legends of other lands. It also includes studies of purely historical figures, such as St Thomas of Canterbury and King Henry VI, who have not survived the Reformation in the minds of their countrymen. The authoress remarks the curious fact that the two strongest figures of legend, King Arthur and Robin Hood, are historically the most obscure, so obscure, in fact, that it can be argued that they have no factual origins at all, though this is unlikely. On the other hand great personalities such as King Alfred have made but little impression on the imagination of the people as a whole. Another fact that she brings out is how many of the old customs and legends still flourished little more than a century ago and what wealth of cultural influences have withered in this land since the Industrial Revolution. P.U.F.

CHRISTIANITY IN SOUTHERN FENLAND. By R. F. McNeile. (Bowes and Bowes; 12s. 6d.)

The appearance of this little book is welcome as an indication of that reawakening of interest in our Christian past to which the Bishop of Ely refers in his foreword. Mr McNeile applies to the history of Christianity in England the method of regional study which is, at the moment, so widely popular, and the possibilities which, in this particular field, have already been demonstrated in monographs such as Father Robb's on medieval Farnham. The method is not without its pitfalls, and Mr McNeile is not wholly successful in avoiding them. If, as the foreword claims, he contrives to fit the story of Christianity in Southern Fenland into the framework of the *Ecclesia Anglicana*, he conveys no clear impression of that greater Western unity of which, during the Middle Ages, the Church in England was an integral part. It is strange, in a book of which more than half the contents are concerned with pre-Reformation times, to find no mention in the index of Rome, or even of those individual popes who are casually referred to in the text. Perhaps, however, this defect may be ascribed to Mr McNeile's preference for the narrative as opposed to the expository style, and to his assumption of a certain familiarity on the part of his readers with the general outlines of Church history. He carries his story only as far as the Restoration of 1660; by which time, in his view, the revolutionary and schismatic outbreaks which had begun with Wycliffe were drawing to a close, and a measure of stability, if not of unity, had been achieved. He writes throughout with detachment and impartiality; although the Catholic reader will feel that his description of the interior of a medieval church omits the heart of the matter, and will be unable to accept without reserve his interpretation of the religious history of the last century of his period.

For the medievalist the least satisfying sections of the book are perhaps those dealing with monasticism—a subject on which Mr McNeile is not only disappointingly jejune but at times positively inaccurate.

H. M. CHEW

A WILTSHIRE HOME: A Study of Little Durnford. By Dorothy Devenish. (Batsford; 12s. 6d.)

This is a type of book which, when well done and authentic, is not only extremely pleasant to read but valuable as a record of an English way of life that has almost ceased to exist. That thing so oddly named 'Progress' has destroyed it. Factory farming and the monoculture which produces 'dust-bowls' are rapidly taking the place of the old integrated rural life where the squire and the ploughman realised their dependence on each other. There were abuses and tyrannies, but nothing to equal the inhuman tyranny of the machine.

Miss Devenish's study of life in Little Durnford in her childhood gives a rich and balanced picture, filled with loving detail, of what such a country life could be under good conditions. There is no squalor or poverty here, but a real feudal friendliness, very incredible to the Communist mind. It is simply family life on a large scale, in which a cow-man, cook, butler, and dairymaid had as certain a place as the squire and his lady. It produced people who were individuals, not cut to a pattern, though they were stamped by their occupation, and proud of it. In this book we hear of the Keeper who announced the birth of twin boys to his employer by saying 'Two new under-keepers have arrived'.

In the old days Wiltshire shared with Sussex the child-like custom which buried the shepherd with a lock of sheep's wool on his breast, so that St Peter would know why his attendance at church had been irregular. This is a custom which must go back to days before the Reformation.

ESTHER MEYNELL

RICH AND POOR IN CHRISTIAN TRADITION. By Walter Shewring. (Burns Oates; 10s. 6d.)

The slick exegesis which enlarges the needle's eye to admit an undersized and not-too-tightly squeezed camel is without foundation in authentic Christian teaching. The Gospels, Tradition, Theology and Papal Documents, all emphasise the obstacle to salvation which riches present: to overcome it requires a grace so extraordinary and so rare as to be comparable to this apparently futile and still technically impossible operation. Mr Shewring presents the traditional teaching in a graceful and distinguished translation, preceded by a brief but full introduction, itself firmly based on yet wider reading and long reflection.

It is true that the mere possession of riches, the resources of the earth which were meant to be at the disposal of man, is not sinful. But in the presence of riches it is so difficult to be detached, and