

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.