

Reviews.

"THE MYTH OF THE PENT CUCKOO," by the Rev. J. E. FIELD,
M.A. London, Elliott Stock.

It is refreshing to get a book which is neither wholly topographical nor biographical. Now Mr. Field's "Myth of the Pent Cuckoo" opens up a new train of ideas. It is easily and pleasantly written, shewing the writer is well up in his subject, and the myth is logically worked out from facts and fiction.

We have all heard of the wise men of Gotham. Mr. Field gives us the story in full, and very amusing it is. How these clever people built a wall to imprison the cuckoo in this country, so that it should always be summer, and then, having built their wall, found it was not tall enough, so that the cuckoo was able after all to fly away to warmer climes. Then after the bird had escaped the clever folk of Gotham, in their belated wisdom, reasoned that if only the wall had been one row of stones higher the bird would not have been able to make its escape, so it would have remained in England, to ensure a perpetual summer. The writer has cleverly traced the Gotham tales, and has shown that the collection of tales are not peculiar to Gotham in Nottinghamshire, but are also known in Sussex, at the other Gotham near Pevensey, hence Mr. Field says "that it has been suggested that the tales of the chap-book may have belonged to the Sussex Gotham in their origin, and may have been adapted to suit the Gotham near Nottingham." From what the author tells us, we learn that the "myth" is a reminiscence of the feud between the conquering Saxon and the vanquished Britain—a feud that even now time has not been able to heal, as those who know Wales realize.

Unfortunately space does not allow us to take the readers of this journal through much of Mr. Field's interesting work, so we will turn to those chapters which deal with our own neighbourhood. In the seventh chapter, entitled the "Country of the Cuckoo Pens," a very detailed and most interesting account is given of the numerous "Cuckoo Pens" which abound on the Chilton Hills. On turning to chapter eleven a very full account is given of the two Berkshire "Cuckoo Pens," the one at Castle Hill in Wittenham parish, the other at Frilford. This work tells a great deal of the folk lore of both Berkshire and Oxfordshire. Of the former county very little of the folk lore has been published, so on this account the volume is a welcome addition to that subject. "The Myth of the Pent Cuckoo" is well illustrated, with four pictures of "Cuckoo Pens," which show such places to be clusters of trees on high "downland." Also there is a copious index which adds to the value of the book. This short notice may fitly be concluded by an appeal to those who take an interest in old-time traditions to obtain the book, and not only read it but study it, for though dealing with rather a "mythical" subject it is written in a very pleasant style.

