

Country Matters in Prose And Woodcuts

New Volumes by Clare Leighton and H. E. Bates Which Will Delight the Country Lover

COUNTRY MATTERS. Written and Engraved by Clare Leighton. 160 pp. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$3.

DOWN THE RIVER. By H. E. Bates. With Eighty-one Wood Engravings by Agnes Miller Parker. 151 pp. New York: Henry Holt & Co. \$3.

By J. DONALD ADAMS

HERE are two books of distinction for the country lover. True, it is of the English countryside that they are written, and of which their woodcuts have been made, but they are not books of parochial interest: what they have to offer, both in text and pictures, is escape from the city and the problems created by cities; they are books that offer tranquility and peace, and the contemplation of things that are honest and homely and beautiful.

Clare Leighton's "Four Hedges," published two years ago, was one of the most warmly welcomed books of that Christmas season. Its admirers will not be disappointed in "Country Matters." Here again are more than seventy specimens of her craftsmanship; one of the finest of contemporary wood engravers, she has done as much as any one to restore that medium to popular esteem. "Four Hedges" served also to introduce her as a writer of sincerity and skill. In that book she did not stray beyond the bounds of her garden in the Chiltern hills; "Country Matters" goes out into the village and the countryside.

The plain and forthright title of her book covers a deeply rooted love for the land and the men who work upon it. She is as much interested in the human aspects of the country scene as she is in the face of the land and in its trees and flowers and creatures. She delights in man in his natural relationship to the physical world about him, and her art is never so strong as when it deals with men performing the age-old tasks of manual labor. Such a print as "The Chair Bodgers," depicting men working in the woods at a primitive country craft, shows her at her best. The finest work in the woodcut she has achieved, I think, was in a series of lumber camp subjects, not yet available, unfortunately, between book covers. But the engravings she has made for "Country Matters" bear the distinguishing stamp of her work:

its grace and its power, its notable sense of composition, with so resourceful and yet so unstrained a use of repetition and contrast in shape and line. They are qualities well exemplified in the illustrations reproduced on this page.

"Country Matters" opens with a chapter on tramps, and then goes on to other persisting features of the English countryside and village, vignettes that are enlivened by a warmly human interest in the figures they introduce. There are glimpses of the country fair, the flower show, the village cricket match; the harvest festival, the horse show, the plowing match. There is a chapter on the village pub which



From a Wood Engraving by Clare Leighton for "Country Matters."

is excellent in its evocation of atmosphere, another on bell-ringing. These and other aspects of rural England are presented with a sharp sense of the contrasts and changes which time is effecting, and Miss Leighton manages to be both graphic and philosophic in writing about them. She has caught in her book, to take a phrase from her Preface, "the strong sane humour of the earth, without which there is no health." "Country Matters" is one

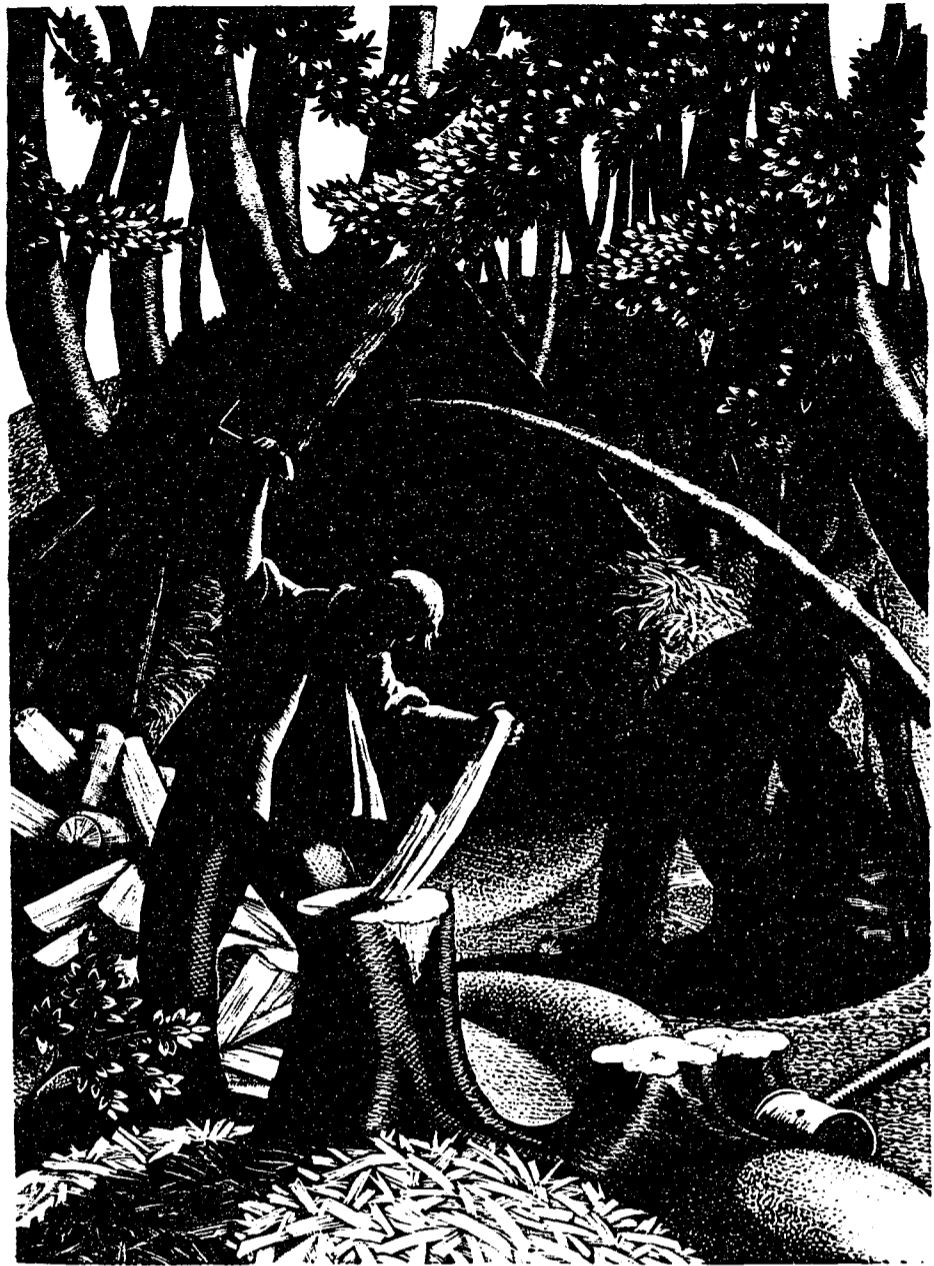
of the most pleasing and physically one of the most beautiful books of the year.

"Four Hedges" no doubt supplied the pattern for "Through the Woods," that delightful book about the English woodland which H. E. Bates published last year, illustrated from wood engravings by Agnes Miller Parker. They have followed it now with a companion volume, "Down the River." Mr. Bates, who was already well established as a short-story writer and novelist, is proving himself an able writer on nature as well. This, too, is a book of leisurely charm, in which Mr. Bates has used his intimate acquaintance with the Ouse and the Nene as the core of some very

pleasant writing about the nature of English rivers and the life, human and wild, associated with them. It is a book full of boyhood memories and mature

observation, written with honest feeling and descriptive skill. Agnes Miller Parker is an accomplished wood engraver, particularly successful in her treat-

ment of wild-life subjects, and the eighty-one woodcuts which she contributes to "Down the River" are excellent specimens of her work.



Chair Bodgers.

From a Wood Engraving by Clare Leighton for "Country Matters."

Masefield Sings of "The Country Scene"

THE COUNTRY SCENE. Poems by John Masefield. Pictures by Edward Seago. 94 pp. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$18.50.

THIS book, of large quarto size, is the combined work of an outstanding artist and an outstanding poet. Edward Seago's paintings of the English rural scene hang in many a private gallery of note, and it is some twosome of these paintings, excellently reproduced in color, which form the backbone of the book. For each picture John Masefield has written a poem.

Masefield has deep and abiding affection for the country, not merely hillside, field and wood, but also for those who people the land. In the past he has frequently been at his poetic best in pastoral themes. Naturally, in a book of this character, with the subject more or less imposed, some of the poems fall short. An artist

works in dimensional space; poetry knows no dimensions. If Mr. Masefield's work in "The Country Scene" is, therefore, found to be a trifle uneven, the exigencies of the task should be borne in mind. And a majority of the subjects struck instant fire from the imagination of the poet.

Pastoral poetry has furnished in England perhaps longer than in any other country. It began with Chaucer and has continued through the centuries. The attitude of the individual poet to the rural scene has, of course, varied with the mood of the era, but sharp description intensified by warm feeling has always formed the dominating characteristic, and we find in these poems by Mr. Masefield no exception. Also there is something highly instructive in this unusual interweaving of picture and poem. Ordinarily with illustrated books it is the artist who strives to catch the mood of the author. Here there is a degree of cooperation seldom attained. The painting visualizes the poem; the poem teases mind and imagination beyond the confines of the picture.

"The Bellringers," perhaps the most engaging poem in the book with the exception of "Tiddlers," in which Masefield

has caught the very quintessence of the child's imagination, takes the reader flying off into realms beyond even speculative thought. The picture is of two hoary ancients and a very frightened boy peeling the chimes in a cobwebbed belfry. Mr. Masefield wonders where they go when they lock the door behind them.

*Go home, you say! I think the moonlight sees
Those birds of sound that they have magicked near,
Bear them between their wings over the trees
Through all the starways of the moon's career.
Up, up, above the sparkless chimney cocks,
Over the wildwood and away, away
To where strange palace doors undo their locks.
And waiting queens have secret things to say.*

The variety of "The Country Scene" will make the city dwellers long to rush forth to the land. Hunter and hounds, gypsies, dancers on the green, cattle-fair, "point-to-point" and the road to Epsom, the fowler's hut in the marsh, gulls at plowing and the plowing match—these are but a few of the themes jointly engaging poet and painter. Each picture has a full page allotted to it, each poem also. The type is hand set. PERCY HUTCHISON.



From a Wood Engraving by Agnes Miller Parker for "Down the River."