

COUNTRY SCENES AND PEOPLE

THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY

THE COUNTRY YEAR. By ERIC PARKER. Seeley, Service. 10s. 6d.

DOWN THE RIVER. By H. E. BATES. Illustrated by AGNES MILLER PARKER. Gollancz. 10s. 6d.

COUNTRY MATTERS. By CLARE LEIGHTON. Gollancz. 10s. 6d.

Mr. Eric Parker's book is an attractive collection of short notes or essays grouped under the headings of the twelve months, with a page or two devoted to each note. The book is in many ways typical of the interests of the English country gentleman, interested in gardening, sport and nature study. It is all seen from a comfortable leisured angle, but

comes to feel a genuine affection, who took his three hens out for a little walk every day and was so devoted to pigs that he had almost come to look like one himself. There is the maiden lady trying to live up to a warped ideal of gentility and succeeding only in producing squalor and decay. And Rook, the master fisherman who could see where other men were blind, and fished where others merely angled. There is an excellent chapter on the lace-making industry of Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire, which is, according to the author, rapidly dying out owing to the world's indifference. The history of pillow lace and the description of its tools with their curious inscriptions, and of the old ladies who practise the art, is full of interest. There are lovely descriptions of the wild flowers and birds and insects that live by the Ouse and the Nene—the two rivers with which the book is concerned, and there is also a heartfelt indictment of the cruelty of otter hunting.

Miss Agnes Miller Parker's eighty-three woodcuts show a remarkably high standard throughout and make the book a worthy successor to "Through the Woods." They are full of vigour and life, and the treatment of texture is never at fault. They are admirably related to the text, well chosen and well placed—points of some importance in a book of this type, in which almost every page is decorated. The appearance and arrangement of the whole book is very pleasing.

Miss Clare Leighton's new book portrays village life in the Chilterns, where there are still ploughing matches and witches and blacksmiths (who make real horseshoes and have not yet found it necessary to turn to fire screens and wrought-iron gates). She tells of the travelling fair, the annual flower show and the harvest festival, each subject being introduced in the form of a short story freely illustrated with her charming woodcuts. We become familiar with all the villagers, the farm hands and their wives and the school children. We see the men playing cricket on the green and hear their friendly banter and their well-worn jokes as they sit in the village taproom in the evening.

Miss Leighton's drawings and stories all seem to emphasize the essential harmony of the village community with the land it springs from.

The movements and shape of the people and their animals are fused together; and this idea seems to dominate the design of the woodcuts. The little cottage seems to grow out of the hill, and the ploughman and the prize shire horse are treated as a single unit. In the illustrations the point is emphasized by outline and grouping, and in the text she enlarges it by bringing colour and time into the same theme—the colours of the tramp's clothing and of the working labourers are those of the countryside—of plough and stubble and lane. "If he is wearing a blatant pink muffler, it seems, against the harmony of its background, to be a bright flower in



From "Down the River"

shows a genuine knowledge of country matters and keen observation of those country things in which the author is interested. He tells how one day in December he watched a water shrew hunting under the ice of a frozen pool—one of those trivial yet rare experiences that give a nature lover a thrill of pleasure. In another note headed "Sights that are missed" he comments on the fact that it is the game-keeper, woodman or gardener—men whose whole life is spent in the open, who most often have these sudden and unexpected glimpses of wild animals living their lives in unsuspecting ease.

There is curiously little about farming in Mr. Parker's book. There is a note on "Farming Forefathers" but very little realization of present-day agriculture. January evokes thoughts connected with soil and flood water and mentions briefly the delay caused to the ploughing by wet weather, but it is the appearance of the country, the behaviour of birds in frost and a comparison of the Swiss climate with our own which form the main theme of winter. In early spring the pairing of the game birds is noted with satisfaction, the salmon fishing begins, the returning migrants are seen. There are Point-to-Point races to go to. In summer we are taken to Lord's to watch cricket, and to a local hound puppy show. In August the Scotch moors, and later the English seaside, are visited and then we return to village cricket and partridge shooting, cub-hunting and picking blackberries. There are photographs of country scenes illustrating the book—some from *The Times's* well-known collection and some from "Sport and General" and other sources.

"Down the River" is a companion volume to "Through the Woods" (by the same author and illustrator as last year). Mr. Bates also writes of country things, but from a completely different angle. He hates all blood sports except fishing, and the fish he has in mind are not salmon and trout but roach or gudgeon, tench, eels or chub. The only shooting he refers to is serious shooting to keep the rooks off young crops. The gun his grandfather used for this purpose was an ancient muzzle loader, loaded by a lengthy process with all the discarded rubbish in the tool shed. And, as it was difficult to approach the rooks with a gun and as there was considerable doubt as to which end of the gun would discharge first, the gun was tied on to some railings and fired by means of a long string from a safe distance.

The lively descriptions of country people are a very charming feature of the book. There is the old man for whom the reader



From "Country Matters"

the hedgerow." The speed of their movements coincides with those of the animals they tend and with the slow tempo of farming operations. Some of the chapters deal with special country trades or arts such as bell ringing, tree felling and "chair bodging." The first chapter of the book, which is perhaps the most charming, is about tramps—not the "soft" kind who tramp from one workhouse to the next, but the "true" tramp who carries his cooking pots and a few other essentials round with him, and lives and sleeps in the open.

Mr. Llewelyn Powys has collected the reflections of a lifetime in his volume of "Somerset Essays," expected next week from the Bodley Head. The book is illustrated with photographs by Mr. Wyndham Goodden.