OLD WOODS AND PASTURES THROUGH THE YEAR

A COTSWOLD YEAR. By C. HENRY WARREN. Geoffrey Bles. 7s. 6d.
THE COUNTRYMAN'S YEAR. By DAVID GRAYSON. Hodder and Stoughton. 5s.
THROUGH THE WOODS. By H. E. BATES. Gollancz. 10s. 6d.

Here are three books which will appeal to all those who love a quiet country life and know the pleasure of walking in fields and woods and talking to country people. All three emphasize the change of seasons and give the experiences of a full year—more or less in diary form.

Mr. Henry Warren, from his cottage in the Cotswolds, looking across the Severn Valley at the Malvern Hills and the Black Mountains beyond, tells of the life of the village, and of his visits to neighbouring parts of the Cotswold Hills. The cottage belonged formerly to an old woman whose husband never allowed her to leave it; so to her the Black Mountains were nothing but a weather signal —if she could see them clearly it was going to rain. But Mr. Henry Warren visits them, and also many nearer places of interest, such as Chastleton House, Fairford Church and the site of a Roman villa at Chedworth. He laments the fact that the people have so little sense of local history that in many cases they do not even know of the existence of Roman remains in their villages; also that the natural sense of architectural fitness, which must have existed for centuries for the Cotswold villages to be what they are, is lost. But the haymaking, the apple harvest, cider making, thatching and the art of the wheelwright and shepherd still go on, and are noted with pleasure. Mr. Warren delights in the slow tempo of genuine country life, or rather in the fact that it is still slow. As a contrast to the life of the genuine villager, he goes to visit a settlement somewhere " high up in the Cotswolds," inhabited by ardent disciples of Tolstoy. Originally there were only five colonists, now the population numbers eighty and the place has become as unsightly a collection of odd bungalows and villas as could be seen in any suburb.

Summer in "A Cotswold Year"

Mr. David Grayson originally intended to call his book "The Quiet Way," but decided finally that "The Countryman's Year" was more exactly descriptive. His life in New England is, one feels, far nearer the Tolstoy ideal than the rather self-conscious experiment of the earnest Cotswold settlers. He cultivates his garden, keeps bees, markets his produce and reads extensively. He writes because "by writing I enjoy life twice: and that is necessary since life is so short." The book gives expression to his charming philosophy of content. His happiness is derived from two sources of activity—the intellectual and the physical, which merge in his love of nature and country things. "The happiest men I know have their feet—or at least one foot in the soil." The other foot in this case is on the bookshelves, well stocked with the works of Marcus Aurelius, Montaigne and Emerson. He has no patience with Hamlet "who has not yet decided whether it is better to be or not to be." On his way to the mill to have his flour ground he converses first with a farmer and then with a university professor, and rejoices in the resources of a neighbourhood that in one afternoon can unfold the lore of Jersey cows and the Einstein theory. If on the way home he is troubled by thoughts of bad times, slumps or international politics, he is able by contemplation of the meadows, the woods and the birds to calm and reassure himself.

The book is in the form of notes from the author's diary; it gives the impression at times of being rather disjointed, and one comes across a string of isolated and, at first sight, unrelated thoughts reminding one of the Book of Proverbs. But they are good proverbs and spring from an underlying unity of theme. And if the author's natural history is sometimes at fault—as when he takes off his hat to *Viburnum opulus*, believing it to be the Wayfaring tree (which is really *V. lantana*)—well, Solomon himself can scarcely have been infallible. The black and white drawings on the title page of each month represent country scenes typical of the season. They are pleasantly in keeping with the atmosphere of the book.

"Through the Woods" brings us back to England, and gives some very fine descriptions of woodland with wood engravings of flowers, trees and animals to illustrate them. The author knows his woodland well; both plant and animal life are lovingly described, and he has listened to bird song with a truly critical ear, observing not only the quality of the nightingale's notes, but the quality of the silence between each phrase, and the variety of the phrases. He takes us all through the year, and with him we see the woods in their various aspects as the season changes, hear the bird chorus swell and die down again and note the wild flowers come and go. The buds and catkins of February and March inspire him to write passages which are perhaps the best part of the book, and make one long to look more closely again for oneself. "The best woods," says the author, "are small, a few acres in extent—not much more than copses." The charm that he is describing does not belong to forests. It is "the small intimate English wood with its variation of trees, its many flowers and bird-voices, its feeling of being only a part but never the whole of a countryside. It never dominates, never assumes the dark dictatorship of forests." The charm of our small woods is, however, due in large part to the fact that they are not regarded as economic concerns. Where forestry work is scientifically carried out and the trees planted in close formation, the birds and animals and wild flowers disappear for lack of light and air.

Humanity plays little part in this book. There is the wicked "Uncle Silas," and "my aunt," who kept the little thatched pub in Bedfordshire. The gamekeeper appears often, but he is the evil spirit of the woods—the Villain of the Piece. In this matter the author feels much as W. H. Hudson did, but with far more bitterness. His hatred extends also to the hunt—grooms, huntsmen and field, and his sympathy is all with the fox and the poacher. The question as to whether, if hunting and shooting were to be discontinued, the English woods could survive in their present lovely and uneconomic condition is not discussed.

A two-volume edition is published by Cape of Doughty's TRAVELS IN ARABIA DESERTA (3gns.). Described as "new and definitive," this edition contains T. E. Lawrence's introduction, and is uniform in appearance with the posthumous published edition of "Seven Pillars." Like the "Seven Pillars," these volumes are remarkable for the generous size not only of the page but of the type. They make no pretensions to "fine printing": they are indeed primarily practical. But no greater care could have been given to their outwardly simple design, and few books of recent years have been as easy to read or such a pleasure to handle. The effect is an object-lesson in commercial publishing.