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WOOD ENGRAVING BY CLARE LEIGHTON FOR "FOUR HEDGES"

An English Garden

Four Hedges, by Clare Leighton
London: Gollancz, 10s 6d. New
York: Macmillan, \$2.50

THE ENGLISH, blessed by a unique climate, are so much a race of gardeners that the present spate of gardening books is not astonishing. It is only astonishing that it did not happen long ago. Botanical treatises are always with us, but the work of pure love, inspired by flowers for their own sake, has not been common since Elizabethan days. Good gardeners that are also good writers are rare birds. True, we have had Miss Jekyll and Farrer and the too autocratic Robinson, but they seem like horticultural plates of ham and beef, necessities, substantial. So that I turn with great relief to Miss Clare Leighton's book, which has nothing new to tell us, but which is simply a delicate meal of English earth and flowers and birds, in 12 courses, choice as the seasons, the whole garnished with some first-class wood engravings by Miss Leighton herself.

The garden is on the Chilterns, on the chalk ridge overlooking Oxfordshire. It needs courage to garden there: the soil

being a kind of gray ash, a spit deep, over a foundation of chalk concrete. This not being enough, Miss Leighton began with another disadvantage. Her four hedges bounded not one of those sweet and mellow gardens which artists are fond of depicting in color on calendars, but a bare patch of grassland, aridly virgin. Courageously, she planned it, dug it, planted it and in due course reaped a reward which is now also ours. This book records her difficulties, hopes and joys, modestly describes her plans and flowers, expresses her just pride in the things she has done. It teaches nothing—except patience. It offers no philosophy, pretends to no kind of authority. All of which is good.

But, as though it were not good enough, Miss Leighton has decorated it with 88 of her own illustrations. As an artist more generally concerned with the human figure, Miss Leighton has always seemed to me to suffer from a kind of wooden refinement. In her flower illustrations, this drops completely away. Her engravings here have unexpected delight, a new delicacy. Also they are authentic and superbly appropriate. For, just as her prose pretends to teach us nothing, so her illustrations pretend to show us nothing we have not seen. The objects she depicts are commonplace, hedgeside things, child's flowers: there is no showing off of rarities, no dazzling array of rare lilies. Cowslips, snails, birds' eggs, roses, wild arums, pods of peas, gawky nestlings, all the things which visit and grow in—and even devastate—a country garden are depicted with a beautiful authenticity. They appear in a proportion of roughly one to two pages; so that one may read a bit and gaze and read a bit, just as in a garden one works a bit and stares and works a bit.

In short, prose and pictures are perfectly married. And the union will give pleasure to all who care in the least degree for flowers and the English countryside, and who are tired of sugarness in books about them.

H E BATES