

Harvest

Norah Anderson

Harvest is the time of year when we look around, and can see all the fruits of the earth displayed before us.* We know that in His bounty the good Lord has given them to us. We have not earned them, but, as we are told in the Communion service, 'His nature is always to have mercy'. And so it is. All that is required of us is 'Our humble, thankful heart'.

We of the farming community are especially conscious of these gifts. They lie all around us. I think back to earlier harvests. Admittedly, there may not be quite the 'hands on' approach of earlier times. Small family farms are fewer. Much of the land is owned by consortiums of London businessmen who understand more of the commerce of the city, than they do of the the cultivation of the land.

No matter. The crops grow, as they have done from time immemorial. The fields, stripped of grain, stretch out in the sunlight. It seems always to have been hot. This couldn't have been so, but that is the way memory works. I well remember those harvests of yesteryear. Men and women flocked to the gathering – sweat streaming. Today we are told of the dangers of sunlight. No television gave warning to these workers, but instinctively they knew. The men wore open necked cotton shirts and the women loose fitting dresses. They were wise in their generation!

They worked with a will, they gathered and stooked. The fields were cleared, the sun shone and the baby rabbits ran out from the corn. As the poet said 'God's in his heaven, All right with the world.'

Soon the clank of cans of hot tea was heard. The harvesters flung themselves on the parched ground and drank the tea. Time for a gossip. There had been births and deaths and marriages these last few weeks and it was time to catch up with the news.

Then, as the light began to fail, they made for home; for supper and then for bed. There must have been content now in their hearts, as they thought of work well done.



The fields now cleared, it was time for Harvest Festival, that joyous service in church.

To the village church they went; these sons of the soil had a true sense of occasion. The men wore dark suits, mostly only brought out for weddings and funerals. The women wore their prettiest dresses, with hair brushed until it shone, and well powdered cheeks.

They settled on the hard oak pews, as their fore-fathers had done before them. The vicar, himself a country man, told of that glorious harvest year to come '*the valleys stand so thick with corn that even they are singing*'. The congregation could empathise with this – had they not just seen it happen?

But they were tired; weeks of hard work were now behind them. Some dozed a little.....

But the sound of the organ tuning up roused them. As the opening chords of the well-loved hymn '*Come ye thankful people, come*' swelled they rose to their feet and they sang. How they sang! Bass and treble – the sound seemed to soar to the very rafters!

The music stopped and the church was quiet. The only sound was a bumble bee, buzzing lazily in the now hushed nave. The harvesters fall to their knees and murmur '*With glad and grateful hearts, Lord God we thank Thee. Amen.*'

*Editor's note: I had the pleasure of a chat with Norah when she visited the Festival with her niece to enjoy all the marvellous displays. She was most impressed!