

## Autumn

‘Coldly, sadly descends the autumn evening. The Field strewn with its dark yellow drifts of winter leaves, and the elms, fade into dimness apace, Silent...’

Matthew Arnold captures to perfection the melancholy sadness which poets and writers seem to associate with this time of year. The summer is over, the evenings draw in, the landscape begins to take on a starker, bleaker mantle.

Perhaps that matches our mood at the moment as we come to terms with the terrible events of last month and look anxiously to an unknown and uncertain future, There are indeed many now for whom autumn will always be a sad time of year.

### **Choir – Autumn Leaves – Joseph Kosma, arr. Andrew Carter**

But autumn can also be a magically beautiful time; it can remind us of the wonders of the created world, a world of nature which dies only to renew itself, a world rich in goodness and full of promise.

From this diary of the gentle, passionate Francis Kilvert, Curate of Clyro in Radnorshire, comes this description of an autumn day in 1875.

*I went out upon the Common before breakfast. The morning was singularly lovely even for a fine autumn morning. A tender delicate blue mist spread its veil over the trees and distant hills, and the lilacs and the thick grass were drenched with a silvery white web of dew. Through the mist the quiet green sunshine came softly stealing over the fresh morning meadows. The air moved sweet and warm over the common. Two wood pigeons were pouring out their hearts and their tale of love from elm to elm. The bright coloured herd of cows and the silver-fleeced sheep fed quietly at distant parts of the great level pasture. There came a sharp swift hurtling of wings overhead and a large hawk rushed through the air going south. The Chippenham church clock struck eight with a sweet musical sound and two sweet bells immediately began chiming for matins. Two boys came from the village laughing merrily.*

*This afternoon I walked over to Kington St Michael by Langley Burrell Church. It was a day of exceeding and almost unmatched beauty, one of those perfectly lovely afternoons that we seldom get but in September or October. A warm delicious calm and sweet peace brooded breathless over the mellow sunny autumn afternoon and the happy stillness was broken only by the voices of children blackberry gathering in an adjoining meadow and the sweet solitary singing of a robin.*

*As I drew near Kington the sun was veiled by a great cloud, dark in the middle and white-edged, from behind which darted on*

*different sides broad streaming rays, some dark blue, some light blue and some shining and brilliant white.*

*Near the entrance to the village I fell in with a team of red oxen, harnessed, come home from plough with chains rattling and the old ploughman riding the fore ox, reminding me vividly of the time when I used to ride the oxen home from plough at Lanhill*

*In spite of the warm afternoon sunshine the solitary cottages, low-lying on the brook, looked cold and damp, but the apples hung bright on the trees in the cottage gardens and a Virginia creeper burned like fire in crimson upon the wall, crimson among the green.*

*When I returned home at night the good Vicar accompanied me as far as the Plough Inn. The moon was at the full. The night was sweet and quiet. Overhead was the vast fleecy sky in which the moon was riding silently and the stillness was broken only by the occasional pattering of an acorn or a chestnut through the leaves to the ground.*

Kilvert could capture the beauty of an early autumn day on the Herefordshire border so that as we listen we can almost see the mist, feel the stillness, and smell the fallen leaves.

Listen to this setting of Psalm 65, which speaks powerfully of the creation which god made-

*Thou visitest the earth and waterest it  
Thou greatly enrichest it  
The river of god is full of water  
Thou crownest the year with thy bounty...  
The pastures of the wilderness drip,  
The hill gird themselves with joy...*

### **Choir – Thou visitest the earth – Greene**

And now perhaps the most famous evocation of autumn – John Keats' Ode to Autumn, which describes three aspects of autumn in each of the three stanzas: first, it's weather, fruits, and flowers: second, it's personification as a languid young man with long hair spending time in silent contemplation: third, the song and sounds of autumn, as the birds wheel overhead in the sky and the year begins to turn.

### *Keats' Ode*

*Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;  
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,*

*And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
Until they think warm days will never cease;  
For Summer has o'erbrimm'd their clammy cells.*

*Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?  
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find  
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,  
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;  
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,  
Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook  
Spare the next swath and all its twinèd flowers:  
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep  
Steady thy laden head across a brook;  
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,  
Thou watchest the last oozings, hours by hours.*

*Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—  
While barrèd clouds bloom the soft-dying day  
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;  
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
Among the river-sallows, borne aloft  
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;  
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;  
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft  
The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft;  
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.*

### **Organ Solo – Autumn – Peter Oxley**

And a contrasting autumn poem by the late Sir John Betjeman, Autumn 1964;

*Red apples hang like globes of light  
Against this pale November haze,  
And now, although the mist is white,  
In half-an-hour a day of days  
Will climb into its golden height  
and Sunday bells will ring its praise*

*The sparkling flint, the darkling yew,  
The red brick, less intensely red  
Than hawthorn berries bright with dew  
Or leaves of creeper still unshed,  
The watery sky washed clean and new,  
Are all rejoicing with the dead.*

*The yellowing elm shows yet some green,  
The mellowing bells exultant sound:  
Never have light and colour been  
So prodigally thrown around;  
And in the bells the promise tells  
Of greater light where Love is found.*

For Betjeman the light and colour of autumn early on a Sunday morning give a glimpse of divine glory, echoed in the church bells, which summon us to remembrance of a greater light and a divine love.

‘Thou O lord wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee.’

### **Choir – Thou, O God, art praised in Sion – Malcolm Boyle**

We have moved from the sadness of this season, made more so by the events of recent weeks, to a deeper understanding and affirmation of the beauty of the created world, which reflects the love and majesty of the Creator, and which calls us to offer back our praise; to acknowledge that in spite of the worst man can do to God’s world – still ‘There lives the deepest freshness deep down things.’

Gerard Manley Hopkins

God’s Grandeur

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.  
And for all this nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And through the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings.*

### **Choir – September Song**