

SPRING

A Country Curate writes about Easter; from the diary of the Rev'd Frances Kilvert, Curate of Clyro on the Welsh borders during the latter part of the 19th century:-

I rose early and went out into the fresh, brilliant morning, between six and seven o'clock. The sun had already risen some time, but the grass was still white with the hoar frost. I walked across the common in the bright sunny quiet empty morning, listening to the rising of the lark as he went up in an ecstasy of sing into the blue unclouded sky and gave in his Easter morning hymn at Heaven's Gate. Then came the echo and answer of earth as the Easter bells rang our their joy peals from the church towers all round. It was very sweet and lovely, the bright silent sunny morning, and the lark rising and singing alone in the blue and then suddenly the morning air all alive with music of sweet bells ringing for the joy of the resurrection. 'The Lord is risen' smiled the sun, 'The Lord is risen' sang the lark. And the church bells in their joyous pealing answered from tower to tower, 'He is risen indeed'.

Kilvert's lyrical description of an Easter Sunday morning reminds us that it is no accident that Easter is celebrated in the Springtime. According to the historian, the Venerable Bede, the name Easter comes from the Anglo-Saxon 'Eostre', a Spring goddess. Almost certainly the Christian festival of Easter supplanted an old pagan festival, because the celebration of new life through the Resurrection echoed the new life breaking out in nature at this time of year.

CHOIR: Now the green blade riseth trad arr Lindley

After the long dark months of winter there is a deep longing for light and life, both in nature and the human heart, celebrated in this poem by Christina Rossetti:-

READING: The First Spring Day Christina Rossetti

I wonder if the sap is stirring yet,
If wintry birds are dreaming of a mate,
If frozen snowdrops feel as yet the sun
And crocus fires are kindling one by one:
Sing, robin, sing;

I wonder if the springtide of this year
Will bring another Spring both lost and dear;
If heart and spirit will find out their Spring,
Or if the world alone will bud and sing;
Sing, hope, to me;
Sweet notes, my hope, soft notes for memory.
The sap will surely quicken soon or late,
The tardiest bird will twitter to a mate;
So Spring must dawn again with warmth and bloom,
Or in this world, or in the world to come:
Sing, voice of Spring,
Till I too blossom and rejoice and sing.

CHOIR: Rise up my love Willan

“Sing voice of Spring, till I too blossom and rejoice and sing.” The same sense of longing is captured by Robert Browning, writing from self-imposed exile in Italy, in his poem ‘Home thoughts from Abroad’. Here is the first and best-known stanza:-

READING: Home thoughts from Abroad Browning

Oh to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brush-wood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England – now!

PIANO SOLO: Spring Song Mendelssohn

It's possible to overlook the change of the seasons in cities – it just gets colder, it gets warmer, it rains. In the country, however, you can't ignore springtime; it's all around. One day the fields are empty, the next they're lush with new green shoots. There's an old country saying: ‘It's not spring until you can plant your foot upon twelve daisies.’ The earth itself changes colour and so, as their water content dries out, do the stones in walls and buildings. The smells are different too, sweet and fresh. Birds are in fine voice as their courtship begins. Spring is a feast for the senses; things are changing at last.

CHOIR: Loveliest Of Trees Deane

And one of the most obvious signs of Spring is the sight of daffodils opening their yellow heads and dancing in the breeze. Here's a poem about daffodils, called “The Poem I'd like to write” by Clive Sansom:-

READING: The Poem I'd like to write Sansom

I'd like to write a poem about daffodils.
I'd like to say
How beautiful they look on a March day,
Their green stems rising
Into those large, incredibly surprising
Trumpets of pure gold;
And how, after frost and cold,
They bring
Such colour and such warmth to everything,
They shake us into Spring.

I'd like to write it, but I Know
That Wordsworth wrote it long ago.

And now that poem that Wordsworth wrote long ago:-

READING

Daffodils

Wordsworth

I wander'd lonely as a cloud
That floats in high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils,
Beside a lake, beneath the trees
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretch'd in never ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance
tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced, but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:-
A Poet could not but be gay
In such a jocund company!
I gazed - and gazed – but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought.

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills
And dances with the daffodils.

We began in a church at Easter, and we end in one. Here is a description of a visit to a country church just after a spring wedding, and it perfectly blends together the mixture of new life, new love, new hope that weaves Easter and Spring together into a season of change and growth and new possibilities.

READING

The magic apple tree

Susan Hill

We went inside the church and the air still seethed quietly with the wedding that was just over, it was warm with all the breaths of the people and sweet with flowers and scent. We stood very still by the altar, looking at a great vase of white and yellow narcissi and apple blossom and I felt the imprint of this marriage service somehow sinking gently down and down on to us and being imprinted on to the fabric of the church itself, into the stone of the walls and the brass of the rails and the stained glass of the windows, being absorbed, every hymn and anthem and voluntary, every blessing and vow, every petitionary prayer, every praise in the morning and thanksgiving at evening, every bidding of welcome to a child and of farewell to a dead soul.

The church was empty apart from my daughter and me, and yet it was not empty at all. She felt it, too. She wandered

quietly about, touching this and that, talking a little to herself.

We closed the great door carefully, let down the latch, in case a bird would get in and be trapped.

Outside, there were white and pink paper petals in the ground, and spring sunshine.

CHOIR:

Younger than springtime

Rogers/Hammerstein