

A PERSONAL VIEW FROM MY WEST COUNTRY COTTAGE

BY JENNY MULSTROH

The End of August.

> Another bright summer day. A low murmur of voices gathers in the lane outside, as the church bells start a lively peal. A wedding! The murmur grows in volume as time goes on and the bells quicken. Children's voices, excited, adults admonishing them, laughter and anticipation. The usual knot of village ladies gather around the church gate to get a peek at the bride, and I see two small blond curly haired boys being towed past the cottage, crisp in white shirts and breeches, perhaps the pages?

> A joyous end to the month, and a summer of sunshine and blue skies.

> The Field opposite has mostly slumbered the time away with fewer dramas than last year, but not entirely without. The early summer was a buttercup time, with golden meadows gilding the countryside. The field was no exception. The buttercups danced in the gentle breezes and almost hid the guinea fowl, now fat and fully grown, as they continued their comical quest for any tasty tit-bits. Then suddenly, where there had been 4, now were only 3, and they stopped coming although we could hear their monotonous chuntering daily from the farmyard. Visions of roast guinea fowl were quickly displaced when we were told the male had been run over on the upper road, and his little harem was inconsolable, keeping up a constant chorus of mourning!

> Life and death have still been played out as we watched. A sick cow was put in the field, apart from the herd, and the vet called. (The bells have stopped ringing. Footsteps of latecomers start hurrying the last few yards. I can hear the onlookers discussing with the farmer's oldest son the fact that there are two weddings today. And now the congregation are safely inside and the lane deserted, the boys are starting their tractors up to get back to work!)

> Ah, the vet. A young Robert Redford look-a-like. Blond hair flopping into his concentrated eyes as he bent over the motionless cow. Poor creature. What wasn't thrust into the aperture under her lifted tail was thrust down her throat the other end. In an odd way I identified with her!

> Two days later it was all repeated, and then, one morning, a closed van was driven into the field; the back door was lowered, revealing the body of a calf, limbs twisted in death, on the floor within and in a short time it was joined by the inert cow, which had died overnight, and which was hauled unceremoniously away as soon as possible.

> The church bells have started again; the deed is done. Cheering and applause and laughter erupt from the churchyard and now the chattering voices get louder. Then the roar of an engine and, voila, the bride and groom in a shiny open sunshine yellow sports car, proceed noisily and happily the short distance to the village hall, where no doubt a repast awaits them all. Fragments of conversation float over our hedge where we bask with our books unseen in our garden, enjoying vicariously the whole event.

> The bells are reaching a frenzied crescendo and then Saturday peace descends once more.

> The white doves settle back on to the roof of the dairy that is their home, the cloud of recently hatched butterflies stretch their beautiful wings in the warmth and the house martins, that to our great pleasure rebuilt the nest under our thatch that they had abandoned some years ago, swoop

and spiral with their two just fledged youngsters to scoop the insects from the sky.

> And from death in the field comes life to the field.

> The pregnant cows, when they are near their time, are put there to wait. A short time ago as the waning moon cast a bright light over one of my nocturnal bathroom visits, a glance out of the window showed three or four black and white shapes, wraith-like in a ground mist that muted the field and the valley below, seemingly rooted like ancient trees into the earth.

> And as the morning sun dispersed the mist and explored the nooks and crannies of the field, it revealed a small shape at the feet of a now standing cow, which was nuzzling and caressing the black and white miniature duplicate of it self. A new life, to underline yet again the continuity of the world.

> So the weeks have roller-coasted towards autumn. We have survived -again- to look forward to the ups and downs of our lives, and to be thankful for them. Rolf survived his heart attack, my biopsy showed nothing too alarming, and a butterfly just landed on my leg, wings quivering in a cavalcade of colour. Magic!

> Look after yourselves and each other! Make every day count!