

## Thy kingdom come

**H**IS REIGN HAD BEGUN. Ever since his arrival the king had looked down on this land. And what he had seen was good.

For a start, the river wound aimlessly across the Cotswold landscape. Its colour was never that of royalty, but rather a thin brown, hemmed with rushes and its flow outlined by trailing weeds that swayed occasionally in the cross-currents or when disturbed by wildlife. The banks were rough, often steep, as the water cut insidiously into the landscape.

Through the villages flowed the river, little more than a swollen stream, but destined to supply the imperious Thames. Humped stone bridges or simple planked affairs crossed the water, a source of endless fascination to child and grown-up alike as they peered down into the murk. The king followed its course with warm eyes.

He loved the woods. His grandfather had told him countless tales about the mighty Wychwood Forest which stretched for seamless miles across the rolling lands north of Witney. Now, only pockets remained, but pockets with an enduring attraction. Early summer was their radiance when leaves were young and richly green and when woodland floors were sprayed with bluebells, wood anemones and bugles.

The king watched and wondered. From his stance, the thick tangle of branches was both his frustration and his salvation. Still, he watched and his eyes glittered.

The variety of life widened those sharp eyes of his.

Back on the river, pairs of swans seemed as watchful as him while their mottled brown cygnets billed among the reeds or dipped long necks into the depths. He loved the coots, so improbably fussy, yet with the bearing of nature's harbingers, always alert, never at rest.

On land, he watched the creatures through appreciative eyes. The smallest creatures could not escape those eyes but the larger ones fascinated him, particularly when the sun sank and the fields turned grey beneath a darkening sky. It was then that the rabbits grazed on open hillsides or at the very margin of the busy roads, seemingly unaware of his presence. Foxes cantered through ripening fields, with ears pricked, and badgers lumbered robustly through the undergrowth, their clumsiness belying their power.

The sheep seemed so aimless though he would make an excellent shepherd in many ways. Again, the king smiled. It was very good.

Even the man-made villages seemed in harmony with this landscape. Their creamy stone walls and grey-brown roofs blended in with the lately cut fields, fields burnished by sun and exploited by man. Beside each house he saw nature tamed but glorified in countless gardens.

Summer was drawing to a close with the buddleias fading and the pure white of the Japanese anemones, plus the pinks of the dahlias, now fringing the tightly manicured, and slightly browning lawns.

The king's pleasure didn't end with the close of summer. His kingdom shone throughout the year.

He loved the myriad shades of brown and yellow as summer turned to autumn in the woods above Tangle Hall and he loved the dry whisper and rattle of dead leaves as they scudded across the ground in winter's gathering winds. Blenheim woods were a particular joy with their colours and sounds of the ending of the year.

But perhaps most glorious of all, even before the fresh growth of spring tinged the land, were those chill January mornings when a bitter early sun sent long shadows and searing light across the frost-covered fields, a magical combination of warmth, brightness and penetrating cold – cold flesh and warm heart. No wonder the king's eyes narrowed in appreciation.

This was the landscape which inspired the king who returned its attraction with his approval. He was at home. And many people loved him. They had waited for him for so long. Often they searched for him and his appearance brought both excitement and joy together with a longing to see him again and to know more of his ways.

Satisfaction was shared, pleasure was mutual.

Adored by his subjects, he watched and he waited, gathering his strength and anticipating his future.

Yet he had enemies. There were those who didn't understand him, those who were suspicious of both his presence and his motives. They saw his beauty, sensed his might, and suspicion turned to fear.

The king understood. He understood the people's fickleness which swayed under pressure and which swung between the extremes of adulation and hatred. Polarisation, he knew, was the resort of the thoughtless. Their moods concerned him, nibbling away at his contentment. How could the spite of a few destroy the peace of the many?

But so it was that late one August evening when doors had closed and the light was fast leaking from the sky, a shot rang out.

Without warning, the king's life was over. Never again would he soar over his land. When tomorrow's sun rose, the kingdom would gleam but the king was dead.

What price a kingdom without its King?

Bob Forster.

### **Wife-beating Update.**

Further to the note in the last issue about a suitable size of stick for wife-beating (Rule of Thumb), the following extract was seen in a national newspaper, and may help those so inclined.

#### **Book on how to beat wife.**

A HANDBOOK published by a state-funded religious foundation which prescribes wife-beating and polygamy has unleashed a wave of public anger in Turkey. The Muslim's Handbook advises its readers "not to strike the woman's face" but to hit her "gently" elsewhere "as a warning". It also says a man can take a second wife if his current spouse is ill and he cannot afford a maid.

Thought you might like to know!