

Tuesday August 2nd

Weeding Kale

Quite a change today. I was delighted when the morning's orders were being given out to hear Mary²⁰ being given the dairy to clean and "Anne to weed." I enquired "where?" and was told "On the left, past the Cowman's Cottages past the fields of purple flowering potatoes to the Kale. You will see tall white weeds and corn and a feathery bush. Pull all those out." I said yes very glibly but set off feeling very dubious as to whether or not I should know what to take out and what to leave in. However, there was no doubt at all when I reached the end of the potato fields (so pretty with a mauve and yellow-centred flower and sweetly scented), for there, beyond me, stretched about 8 acres of tall white hemlock, mixed with corn and a tall feathery weed which apparently is very prevalent this year. At the far end a good stretch had already been weeded, leaving the kale, almost a foot high, clean and green and flourishing, unchoked and luxuriating in the sunlight. There was a sharp, clear-cut line and I judged that one worked a row at a time. This was a job I knew I should enjoy. It was still early morning, with a nip in the air and a brightness in the sky which foretold a hot, sunny day later. I set to work with a will, pulling out great roots of hemlock in one hand and oats in the other. On and on I went, frequently looking back at the long row of kale I had freed to the light. It was most rewarding, and most satisfying and the only difficulty was that I got an ache in the small of my back with bending hour after hour. Joyce and Dorothy came later and told me that we cut this kale in the winter (3 cartfuls of it a day) for the cows. This made the job for me more interesting than ever and we three "John Bull's Daughters"²¹ took a row each and worked till dinner time. Then we went home, laden with milkwort for the rabbits.

After supper, I went to the park and stoked up corn till 9.30pm - a wonderful evening of golden light and long shadows stretching away from the stooks and the silence of evening when birds are hushed and no-one is about. I loved it.



A still from a Pathé newsreel of gypsies in the New Forest. Gypsies feature often in the Diary; an appealing, individualistic presence. Anne appreciates them and enjoys describing their independent character. At one point she calls them “a colourful gang” but she doesn’t particularly romanticise them, as did some artists of the time. CREDIT: British Pathé Ltd.

Wednesday August 3rd

Weeding again, this time with the gypsies. I liked to watch them in their odd picturesque clothes. From time to time, they would gather in a bunch for a smoke and the assortment of colours is wonderful. Such fine, good looking women they are. And old Mrs Whitcher, a mother of 12, who has a baby of a few months and a glowing skin, fine, clear-cut, delicate features and eyes two points of china blue. We chattered of this and that as we worked and I wondered how people with such a normal and civilised outlook can live in such an uncivilised way - like animals really, in a handful of filthy tents and yet they look wholesome and clean in themselves.

Milking after dinner, we all got very skittish and sang songs and spirits ran high. It is such fun, the vitality of these young things, so spontaneous and completely irresistible!²²



The old gypsy described admiringly by Anne. Whitcher was a fairly common gypsy surname.

CREDIT: Photograph by Stan Orchard