

OUTSIDE THE GATE SONNET FOR THE MADONNA OF THE CHERRIES

DEAR Lady of the Cherries, cool, serene,
Untroubled by our follies, strife and fears,
Clad in soft reds and blues and mantle green,
Your memory has been with me all these years.

Long years of battle, bitterness and waste,
Dry years of sun and dust and Eastern skies,
Hard years of ceaseless struggle, endless haste,
Fighting against greed for power and hate and lies.

Your red-gold hair, your slowly smiling face
For pride in your dear son, your King of Kings,
Fruits of the kindly earth, and truth and grace,
Colour and light, and all warm lovely things —

For all that loveliness, that warmth, that light,
Blessed Madonna, I go back to fight.

Northwick Park, April 29th, 1943

Note

At the end of my garden of other men's flowers, outside the gate, I have put this little wayside dandelion of my own. It has no business here, even outside the garden, but the owner of the lady for whom it was written is anxious for it to be included. She is a beautiful lady, designed though not actually painted by Leonardo da Vinci, and I have loved her ever since I saw her.

The sonnet was written when I visited her last April after nearly four years of war. I was not allowed, after all, to go back and fight as a soldier against the powers of darkness, as I had hoped and intended. But the Lady of the Cherries smiles not for soldier or for Viceroy, only for her small son playing with the bunch of cherries. A blessing to you, my Lady, and to all beautiful things that help us to forget the dreariness of war.

A. P. W.

A NOTE ON 'THE MADONNA OF THE CHERRIES' BY THE OWNER, CAPTAIN SPENCER-CHURCHILL, M.C.

When the great Flemish Masters visited Italy in the sixteenth century to see what they could learn from the exponents of another splendid branch of art in two dimensions, the Milanese artists showed them a picture, or a cartoon, by Leonardo of this Madonna, and suggested that they should copy, or try to improve on it — doubtless also wishing to see if they too had anything to learn from their Northern colleagues, or rivals. There are twelve such versions of this picture by Flemish artists; and we do not think that this one is inferior in quality to any of them.

The apple often appears in pictures of the Madonna as she is supposed to have undone the harm caused by Eve's persuasion of Adam to eat it.



Madonna Of The Cherries - Joost van Cleves

Joost van Cleves also shows the 'Legend of the Madonna' which tells how, when Herod heard that a family with a baby had fled to Egypt, he sent a posse of soldiers after them to kill the baby. The husbandmen are begging for their lives, and when asked if they had seen such a family pass by, they replied 'Not since we were sowing this corn', and the corn shown in the picture had miraculously grown and ripened in the night.

Among other tributes published on my father's death was a poem by an 'ordinary soldier'. Let me here give him our family thanks.

The message of this anthology is that poetry can inspire the lives of us all, and so the fit farewell for the end of the journey when 'the mists of Time no longer confound' is this "ordinary soldier's" salute.

A.J.W.

They say the mirage is the mind's illusion
The dust to the sun's heat, thirst to the parched eye returning:
Well might the mind in Scholarly profusion
Her gifts for a soldier store and reveal, his footsteps turning
Backward again and backward. This is the end
Foretold and dreamed—'colour and light and all warm lovely things'.
The last, Earth's last horizon eyes transcend
The mirage. Homeward, warrior poet the evening brings —