

13th May 2021

Roses

“The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.”

Bible, Isaiah 35:1

Roses of Picardy is a song written by Frederick Weatherly with music by Haydn Wood. Published in London in 1916 at the height of the First World War, it became one of the most popular songs of its day. The melody came to Haydn as he was going home one night on a London bus. He jumped off and wrote the tune on the back of an old envelope under the light of a streetlamp. Weatherly wrote the song – along with *Danny Boy* – for the soprano, Elise Griffin, who became a leading performer with the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company. In his 1926 memoirs, Weatherly hinted that the lyrics concerned a love affair of one of his close friends.

Picardy, a historic French province, covered the areas of the Somme and Aisne. Given the location of some of the bloodiest of battlefields, the symbolism of roses blossoming in such an awful place caught the public imagination, for it spoke to them of hope and the prospect of peace. The song quickly became popular, with soldiers singing as they enlisted for the Front in France and Flanders. Following the War, singing *Roses of Picardy* also helped soldiers suffering from shellshock recover their speech.

*Roses are shining in Picardy, in the hush of the silver dew,
Roses are flowering in Picardy, but there's never a rose like you!
And the roses will die with the summertime, and our roads may be far apart,
But there's one rose that dies not in Picardy! 'tis the rose that I keep in my heart!*

Roses were often planted in our hospice garden in memory of a loved one. The local crematorium has a Memorial Rose Garden for the same purpose. My wife has a rose named *Handel* at the front of our house as a symbol of thanks for the beauty of music. And which of us isn't looking forward to summer displays of roses in our gardens and parks?

Might we see roses shining in *our* Picardy today – as we offer hope and the prospect of peace to those around us, beauty and love to replace horror and pain? There are many deserts waiting to rejoice, many places, even now, expecting to “blossom as the rose”.

A prayer for today

Lord, wherever there is a desert, make from me a rose that blooms. Amen

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