



Legend of the Poppy

In ancient Cathay, long before Marco Polo first saw its wonders and before Confucius lived to spread his philosophy of gentleness and understanding, there grew a flower from which was distilled a potent drug. It was white in colour and it was known as the flower of forgetfulness.

Timeless centuries passed, Dynasties rose and fell. Babylon flowered and crumbled into dust. The Pharaohs lived their brief span and passed on. Europe emerged from her savagery and fair cities spread across her smiling landscape.

Then out of the land of the white poppy came Genghis Kahn. His ravaging hordes, as they swept tumultuously Westwards, brought terror in their train and wherever they passed, there men died. But something besides death they brought – it was a strange and awesome symbol. In the wake of the Great Kahn's bloodthirsty warriors, wherever blood was spilled, the seeds of the flower of forgetfulness budded full flower. Now however, a strange transformation had taken place. The white flower of forgetfulness had turned blood red; and in the centre of the flower was outlined a cross, as though nature herself was crying in protest at the wanton slaughter.

Flowers Sprang Up

Through the centuries, an even stranger event occurred. Emperors and Kings marched their armies across suffering Europe in bloody conflict, and everywhere, on battlefields which before had been bare wastes, there sprang up the poppy, its symbol carpeting the graves of men who had died.

It was Lord Macauley who first drew attention to this strange symbolism and it was he who suggested that the poppy should henceforth be known as the flower of sacrifice and remembrance.

In 1920

After World War One, the British Legion was formed to foster the interests of ex-Servicemen, and the late Field-Marshal Earl Haig, the first Grand President, sought for a symbol that would honour the dead and help the living. What more natural than that of the poppy, with its strange symbolism, should be chosen?

Ever since then, the red poppy has flaunted its brilliance. Every November, in the Embassies of all the great capitals of the world, or merchant ships upon the seven seas, in tiny outposts on veld and in jungle, the poppy makes its appearance to remind us of those who died, and also those who survived, but with health impaired.

You Pay Tribute

That is the story behind Poppy Day; and that is why, when every year you buy a poppy, you are paying tribute to those who have died and you are helping those who are left behind. You are making the flower of forgetfulness a symbol of remembrance.