

THE PROMISE

*My soul went into the wilderness to cry
Where none could see her tears, to groan and moan
Like a wing-shot Eagle, dying in despair,
Eyes dim with stabs of pain and growing haze,
Blotting the fiery vision of all the things
He loved and sought in life. Despair is dumb.
She now feels like a straw flailed by the wind
Sees no more His light, but a thousand shapes
Of vicious snakes, temptations of all sorts,
The world turned to a handful of grey ashes
Surrendering to the Enemy without hope.
In such a miserable state of fallen pride,
The wing-hurt Eagle shuts his weary eyes
To die alone and see no more the world
He loved to soar above on steel-borne wings,
Till, suddenly, a wind from the Paralytic Lake
Stirred the stagnant waters in the Pool
Of High Despair. An Angel from God's court
Drew with a sword of fire a cleansing Flame
Shaped like a mighty cross with the hanging body
Of Jesus asking God forgive his enemies.
My soul, beholding the shrunken face of Jesus
Austere, unsmiling and profoundly sad,
Burst into tears: 'Let me not perish!'
She sobbed, 'Spare those I love the pain and shame
of degradation. God, forgive once more –
Another chance for another trial of strength.
Right now I make this promise in all solemnity:
Never to let the Foul Snake drag me down,
To stand eternal sentinel by Your Cross.
I call your Mother witness to this pledge.
So help me, Mary, keep it all my life;
Refuge of sinners, hold me to my promise
Now and forever in life and after death.
Your hands will mend my broken wings and raise
my drooping spirit from dark despair.*

*Custodian Angel, invisible friend,
 Be you no less my witness to this pledge
 And you, St. Joseph, whose holy name I bear:*

* * *

*My soul is sad, but she no longer cries
 Nor moans nor groans, a prey to vile despair.
 She knows, that is her Faith, that loving God
 will heal the wounds and mend the broken wings
 And rouse the drooping spirit for a new flight,
 the one true final flight into His Arms.
 Behold the Hound of Heaven at the door;
 Remove the rusted bolts, let Him come in
 To take sovereign possession of my will,
 And make of me a Kingdom of True Love.*

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J. AQUILINA

SOUL'S ANGUISH

*'Tis frightening to feel emptied heart and mind
 Of God, to be an animal, alone
 With tortured conscience gnawed at like a bone,
 The world a mocker, cynical and unkind.
 If God is in me, why am I so blind
 That I see not His face but writhe and groan
 Like one whose chest is crushed by heavy stone,
 Hating himself, and sick in heart and mind?*

*Yet how I yearned unheard for God to fill
 The shattered spaces in my emptied soul
 With all the loving presence of the Cross!
 Do not desert me, Jesus; Come back to kill
 The filthy Snake, the Robber Snake, that stole
 My Youth and Manhood – Avenge the loss!*

*And yet 'tis strange, and very strange indeed
 I always loved God in my foolish way;
 Stopped to chat with Him during the busy day
 And during sleepless nights; prayed for His lead,
 Telling Him how I wanted to be freed
 From Satan's heavy chains of Sin which weigh
 On my free will filling me with dismay:
 Sin in God's Garden is the killing weed.*

*Come, Jesus, save me from the grave again;
 Enter into my body with your glory.
 I am unworthy, but Your Word can heal
 The many wounds that kill me with dull pain.
 The moment has now come; repeat the story
 of Lazarus! Yes Lord, remove Death's seal.*

*O God, how can so many live and die
 Without You and Your Son, doubt your Divinity,
 Reducing the absolute and Infinity
 To a pseudo-metaphysical verbal lie?
 I need You in my mind; I need You nigh
 And far, through Time and through Eternity;
 I need You for a Meaning and Serenity;
 I need You down on earth and when I fly¹;*

*I need You here, everywhere, at home, in town;
 I need You undivided, Perfect Whole:
 I need the Holy Ghost to shape my mind.
 I need You most when Satan drags me down,
 Extinguishing Your lamp to hide the Goal,
 Then torture me with cruelty most refined.*

J. AQUILINA

¹Written on the 10th July 1966, while flying back home from London.

RESURRECTION

*I am going into the garden; come with me,
 Come! Let us bear witness to the miracle
 Of Resurrection. It is Spring again,
 The time when the dead leave their graves,
 Put off their crumbled, earth-soiled shrouds
 To put on instead their finery again.
 The cherry plum that was a criss-cross skeleton
 Of bare wood is now a frosted dream;
 Its many branches studded with gems of Alpine white
 That are new blossoms piercing through hard wood
 Followed by tiny leaves like emerald notches.
 The orange and the peach trees, all fruit trees
 Are waking from their Winter's frozen sleep.
 This is the Resurrection of all the dead.
 Some live, some die but all the dead awake.
 The crocuses lie blasted by the wind,
 But the grape hyacinths in alternate rows
 Stand by them like blue turrets, amethysts,
 Blowing their bugles loud for Eastertide.
 The hard-baked crust of trodden soil is knifed
 By the tall and pointed blades of straight gladioli
 Red tulips that are chalices for the sun.
 The anemones and montbretias join the choir
 Of sweet ranunculi and fragrant hyacinths
 Listen! Can you not hear? The shrouds are bursting.
 The gaping soil is like a bleeding womb:
 The hour of nature's childbirth, long travail.
 Let us pick up a handful of green soil
 And listen closely for the movement there.
 A clod of soil carries a universe of life.
 Let's offer it to God for a thanksgiving;
 For out of it His bounty re-creates
 Motion and Colour, Fragrance and gentle Poise.
 This soil, red soil like human blood, is flesh,
 A mother's yearning womb, the bursting foetus
 Of lives unborn breaking their ligaments.
 This is the day of Resurrection; we are moving*

*In God's laboratory, the chemistry of soil,
 Resurrection day for trees, for grass and flesh,
 For irises, daffodils and cherry plums
 And fragrant orange trees, the flesh and bones
 Of all the dead; for Lazarus, Donna Laura
 And her lover Petrarch and his Canzoniere,
 Donna Beatrice and the Vita Nova
 Of her worshipper Dante Alighieri.
 All flesh, all grass returns to dust,
 But all dust returns to life.
 As we say Amen to Life,
 And say Amen to Death
 Through the succession of Season and Years
 We say Amen also to the Resurrection
 Of all dead Grass and Flesh.*

16th March, 1967.

J. AQUILINA

