POEMS

By J. Aquilina

THE VISIT

To our University Chaplain, Fr. M. Jaccarini, S.J.

The Lord knocked on the door of the Beggar,
And the Beggar rolled out the red carpet
For the Lord to step on, and prepared Him a supper
Cooked on the fire of crackling wood
And a sheaf of dry thorns gathered from the street;
And the Lord and the Beggar sat at the same table
Till very late in the night
When the stars came out one by one
As if by turn to watch the encounter.
Then, blessing the bread and the wine,
Which they both ate and drank together,
The Lord said: 'I must now return to my castle
To report to my Father.'
And the Beggar knelt down and said:
'Lord, Lord, your will be done.
I know you have other business elsewhere,
Other visits to make,'
And as the Lord went out blessing his home,
The beggar rolled back the red carpet
For the next visit
By mutual agreement,
The stars twinkled in the sky,
Over the beggar's house,
Keeping a steady watch throughout the night.

15.iv.72

HE AND SHE

A man and a woman of more or less the same age
Sitting on a bench in a public garden
Side by side like two lovers holding each other's hand
In intimate conversation
Compared their temperaments and hobbies.
She: My hobby is to collect figurines, antiques and dresses.
You, my good friend, what do you do
With your free time when you are alone?
Do you collect bunches of flowers or rake up grime?

He: My hobby has always been
To collect a number of strains and stresses
That fit no less tightly in my mental cupboard
Than your fashionable dresses in your wardrobe.

She: When I am dead and gone away
(Will my lovers mark the day?)
Write me an epitaph and say this of me:
'A well-dressed lady she was who hurt nobody's feelings
And offended no laws.
She just wanted to be a thing of beauty
And, as Keats would say: "A joy forever"
(If not too subtle, yet feminine and clever).

He: If you survive me, as I think you will,
Write me this epitaph:
'Here lies buried a good-natured fool
Whose hobby it was
To collect catalogues of worries and stresses
Duly numbered under separate headings
For easy reference in self-torture.
He might have lived a few more useful years
If, instead of collecting worries and stresses,
He filled his mental cupboard
With figurines, antiques and dresses.

13.ix.72 - Lugano

ON LEAVING LUGANO

Good bye, Lugano! What a sad farewell
To your green mountains huddled on the lake
That breathe the Life Force of tall trees and take
From their green foliage the urge and spell
Which animate your soil. Would I could tell
By what strange, hidden strength you could awake
A resonance of youth in me and shake
My mind out of its torpor like a bell!

Good bye, Lugano! After the dash and roar
Of scowling winds that troubled Parma's sky
Keeping the sun a prisoner behind bars
In Italy of all places, could I deny
Your sun my homage on Mount Salvador?
Next stop, Milan. Lost pleasures leave their scars.

13.ix.72
POEMS

PLANNING

The ideologists of the New Age rack their brains to plan
The life of modern man from the cradle to the grave:
They plan, O how they plan! plan to plan again
Another form of misery, straitjackets for the slave.

25.ix.72

FAREWELL PRAYER

Good bye Padua, City of the Bo,
Giotto and Galileo
City of Arcades
City of History and of Saints
Magnificent churches everywhere
The Basilica of Santa Giustina
Where a young Benedictine played the organ alone,
For himself and for God
Who stood by his side
Invisible presence
While votive candles
Burned to their sockets one by one
(O God, let not the last candle go out!)
Overtopping all
The Basilica of the Saint.
Saint Anthony of Padua,
Before I leave the city
That loves you so dearly
I pray you lighten the burden
Of those who pressed their hands
Against the marble altar
Where lie your bones in sacred trust.
Though I am not of Padua
But a friend among foreigners,
Like you a Portuguese by birth,
Remember me,
Remember the Bo
Remember my country
And our Alma Mater.

Padua – 15.x.72
EPITAPH

Here lies master Pollock, a poetaster, who tried to force the Muse
To stand and deliver her golden hoards of Verse and Rhyme;
Though she resisted his violence, he never stopped trying.
Had it not been for Death, he would still be wasting his time.

Padua – 11.x.72

THE UNIVERSITY OF PADUA

We gathered to celebrate the 750th anniversary
Of the University of Padua, ancient city of Learning.
Travelling back in time we met Galileo and bowed to him;
But looking ahead, what sight! – The citadels of Knowledge burning!

Venice – 16.x.72

REMINESCING

(Thoughts encouraged by a Visit to the Cappella degli Scrovegni)

As we looked up and down in admiration,
We felt what great Art is – Giotto’s mind
Communicates no less to our generation
The Artist’s Truth, God’s Beauty, unconfined
By clique or market, puffed sophistication,
Vaporous abstractions that cannot find
Response in Feeling or Imagination:
The Master’s Art is gentle and refined.

Airport of Venice – 16.x.72

GOODBYE!

Life has its pleasures
That are its treasures:
The many men and women
That we come to know,
Talk to, laugh with and love.
When the time comes to say good-bye,
We all feel what it is like to die.

Fiumicino – 16.x.72