

JANUARY

IN RETROSPECT

*Cupido, you wanton, obstinate boy, you begged me
To grant you merely an hour or two of shelter,
How many days and nights you have remained, becoming
Ever more demanding, the master of the household.*

*My ample couch I am expelled from; night-long
I huddle on the floorboards, self-tormented;
Fire upon fire enkindled by your mischief
Consumes my winter stores and scorches their poor owner.*

*My tools are missing or you have mislaid them,
And I, confused, am almost blind with searching:
You make such clumsy noises, I am fearful
The soul may escape from my cot to escape you.**

A reader need not take this little poem literally and think of that daemon usually called Amor. Let him imagine instead a crowd of busy spirits who compete for the interest of man's inner self, drawing him this way and that and confusing him by the variety of their divided appeals: through this symbol he will then be able to enter into my frame of mind at the time, which my letters and notes have already described, and realize what a great effort it cost me to keep my balance amid so many forces, to remain receptive to everything and not work myself to exhaustion.

MY ADMISSION INTO THE SOCIETY OF THE ARCADIAN

At the end of 1786 I was besieged on all sides by people trying to persuade me that I should allow myself to be admitted into Arcadia as a distinguished shepherd. For a long time I held out against this proposition, but in the end I had to

yield to my friends, who seemed to set great store by it. The general aims of the Arcadian Society are well known, but my readers may be interested to hear more about it.

During the course of the seventeenth century Italian poetry seems to have deteriorated in various ways, for, towards its end, men of culture and good sense began to attack the poetry of their time on two grounds.

They accused it, first, of completely ignoring content, which at that time was called inner beauty, and, second, of sacrificing grace and sweetness of form, or outer beauty, to barbaric diction, harsh-sounding verse, faulty images and tropes, and, worst of all, to a habitual use of incongruous metonymies and metaphors.

As always happens, the poets attacked did their best to suppress genuine and excellent work, so that their misuses of language might go unnoticed. Finally, feeling that this state of affairs could be tolerated no longer, in 1690 a number of far-sighted and determined men banded together to discuss the possibilities of a reform. In order not to draw attention to their meetings and provoke a counter-reaction, they used to assemble out of doors in those secluded gardens, of which so many can be found within the walls of Rome itself. There, close to Nature and breathing the fresh air, they could divine the primordial spirit of poetry. When they met in these chance places, they would lie down on the grass or sit on the fallen masonry of some ruined building—even if a cardinal was present, the only privilege he enjoyed was a softer cushion—to discuss their principles and plans and recite poems, in which they endeavoured to revive the spirit of Classical antiquity and of the noble school of Tuscany.

Perhaps one day one of them exclaimed in rapture: "Here is our Arcadia," thus giving an apt name to a society of this idyllic character. They did not depend on the protection and patronage of some influential great personage, and they refused to have a president to rule them. A custodian was to open and close the gates of the Arcadian fields, and in emergencies he was to be assisted by a council of elected elders.

Among the early members of the society, Crescimbeni des-

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erves a place of honour, for he may rightly be considered one of its founders, and, as its first custodian, for many years he laboured faithfully and successfully, nursing a better and purer taste and eliminating all that was barbaric. He propounded his doctrines in a series of dialogues on *La Poesia volgare*. This term cannot be translated as "popular poetry", but means the poetry which is true to the spirit of a nation, because it is written by men of true talent and not distorted by the idiosyncrasies of some muddle-headed minds. These dialogues are obviously the fruit of Arcadian conversations and of the highest importance because of their likeness to the aesthetic tendencies of our own times. The poems of Arcadia which he published deserve careful attention for the same reason.

One more observation. When human beings lie on the green-sward in the open air and seek to come close to Nature, love and passion have sometimes been known to insinuate themselves into their hearts. But these worthy shepherds were ecclesiastics and other men of dignity who were not allowed to be on intimate terms with the Amor of the Roman Triumvirs. That god, therefore, was expressly dethroned. But love is indispensable to poetry, so all they could do was turn to super-terrestrial, more or less platonic longings and, following in the footsteps of their great forerunners, Dante and Petrarch, indulge themselves in allegorical delights, and it is this which gives their poems their peculiarly decorous character.

When I arrived in Rome, this society had existed for exactly a century. It had often changed its places of meeting and its artistic ideals, but it still maintained its outward form with great respectability if not with an equal prestige. There were few distinguished foreign residents in Rome who had not been inveigled into joining it, the more so because it was only their contributions which provided the custodian of these poetic acres with a modest income.

The function at which I was admitted took place as follows: In the ante-room of a decently appointed building I was presented to a distinguished ecclesiastic, who was to act as my sponsor and

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introduce me. We entered a large hall, which was already rather crowded, and took our seats in the middle of the front row, facing a high desk. More and more spectators kept arriving. An imposing elderly man took the empty chair on my right, who, to judge from his clothes and the respect with which he was treated, must have been a cardinal.

Speaking from the desk, the custodian made a few general introductory remarks and then called on several persons by name, who recited either in verse or in prose. After this had gone on for quite a time, the custodian delivered an address, which I shall omit because it was almost identical with the diploma I received and which I reproduce below. When this was over, I was formally declared a member, and everybody clapped loudly, while my sponsor and I rose to our feet and returned the applause with many bows. Then he too made a well-turned speech, which was not too long and to the point. This was again applauded and then I took the opportunity to thank various members individually and say some polite words. I also did my best to make the custodian feel highly satisfied with his new fellow shepherd.

The diploma, which I received the next day, follows here in the original Italian. I have not translated it because it would lose its distinctive flavour in any other language.

C. U. C.

Nivildo Amarinzio Custode Generale d'Arcadia

Trovandosi per avventura a beare le sponde del Tebbro uno di quei Genij di prim'Ordine, ch'oggi fioriscono nella Germania qual'è l'Inclito ed Erudito Signor de Goethe Consigliere attuale di Sua Altezza Serenissima il Duca di Sassonia Weimar, ed avendo celato fra noi con filosofica moderazione la chiarezza della sua Nascita, de suoi Ministerij, e della virtù sua, non ha potuto ascondere la luce, che hanno sparso le sue dottissime produzioni tanto in Prosa ch' in Poesia per cui si è reso celebre a tutto il Mondo Letterario. Quindi essendosi compiaciuto il

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suddetto rinomato Signor de Goethe d'intervenire in una delle pubbliche nostre Accademie, appena Egli comparve, come un nuovo astro di cielo straniero tra le nostre selve, ed in una delle nostre Geniali Adunanze, che gli Arcadi in gran numero convocati co' segni del più sincero giubilo ed applauso volle distinguerlo come Autore di tante celebrate opere, con annoverarlo a viva voce tra i più illustri membri della loro Pastoral Società sotto il Nome di Megalio, e vollero altresì assegnare al Medesimo il possesso delle Campagne Melpomenie sacre alla Tragica Musa dichiarandolo con ciò Pastore Arcade di Numero. Nel tempo stesso il Ceto Universale commise al Custode Generale di registrare l'Atto pubblico e solenne di sì applaudita annoverazione tra i fasti d'Arcadia, e di presentare al Chiarissimo Novello Compastore Megalio Melpomenio il presente Diploma in segno dell'altissima stima, che fa la nostra Pastorale Letteraria Repubblica de' chiari e nobili ingegni a perpetua memoria. Dato dalla Capanna del Serbatojo dentro il Bosco Parrasio alla Neomenia di Posideone Olimpiade DCXLI Anno II. della Ristorazione d'Arcadia Olimpiade XXIV. Anno IV. Giorno lieto per General Chiamata.

*Nivildo Amarinzio Custode Generale
Corimbo Melicronio, Florimonte Egireo Sottocustodi*

The seal shows a wreath, half laurel, half pines, in the centre of which is a syrinx. Underneath, the words *Gli Arcadi*.

THE ROMAN CARNIVAL

In undertaking to write a description of the Roman Carnival, I know I shall encounter the objection that a festivity of this kind cannot really be described, that such a tumult of people, things and movements can only be absorbed by each spectator in his own way. The objection is not without point, for I must admit that, on a foreigner who sees it for the first time, the Roman Carnival cannot make an altogether agreeable impression: it will neither please his eye nor appeal to his emotions. There is no point from which the whole of the long, narrow street where it takes place can be overlooked; in the milling