

SANTA SABINA

BENET WEATHERHEAD, O.P.

Come seeking Christ and here's a husk of stone,
The last work of a master builder, thought out
With a serene compassion for mortality,
Expressing in the conventions of a courthouse
The merciful grave stillness of the sea.

Patrician woman turned contemplative,
Transcribing passages sent her by a Greek
In praise of virginity or in condemnation
Of an impulsive bishop who tends to speak,
Say inexactly, framing a new question.

Formulas, invocations, imprecations,
Senatorial diction learnt from her own father,
But something feminine transposes it,
Something acquired from a Syrian fostermother
That has to do with devotion and regret.

The wells of Isis are built over now,
The priest-king standing in a storm of petals
Fades or is whitewashed out. And yet a mode
May survive changing words, and ancient titles
May still be loved not fully understood.

This pagan beauty cleansed and canonized—
It is as though Demeter had been chastened,
Started a long penance and only then
Been turned to stone; and then at last been christened
And constituted mother of corn and men.

Light without colour, or the colour of the
Sea before sunrise when the stilted waders
Move delicately down the fringe of foam
And in Ravenna in the emperor's gardens
The dewy branches are catching the first flame.

Here every morning is an Easter morning,
This great sarcophagus is filled with grain
Spilling with life. A place of resurrections
Frequent enough for any Magdalen
Weeping and waiting the gardener's directions.

NOTICE

The next issue of *BLACKFRIARS* will be a double number for July and August. This will appear at the beginning of July (price 3s. 6d.) and will contain long articles by Joseph Bourke, O.P., on 'The Unity of the Old Testament', Herbert McCabe, O.P., on 'The Theology of Marriage', Jacques Nantet on 'The Religious Situation in Russia', and Elizabeth Jennings on 'The Vision of Joy: A Study of George Bernanos'.