The Works of Stefan George

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EXODUS OF THE FIRSTBORN

The lot is cast and we, who still are children, must
Already seek a new abode in foreign lands.
An ivy tendril from the feast still wreathes our hair.
Our mothers on the threshold gently sighed and kissed
Us long, and then with tightened lips our fathers went
With us until we reached the city-bounds, and when
They left us hung around our neck the tablets carved
Of spruce, but some of these we are to throw into
The grave when one of our beloved brothers dies.
We parted lightly. All of us restrained our tears,
Since what we do is done to serve our people's good.
And only once we turned our heads to look behind,
Then crossed without a twinge into the far-off blue.
We want to go! A noble goal is set for us.
We burn to go! The gods keep watch upon our course.

SECRET SACRIFICE

Appeased and released
We said our farewells
To sun-lighted fields,
To Memnon, the blithe,
To Mirra, the blonde,
Who ask us to stay.
Their joys are not ours!
The temple resounds,
We follow the call
That leads us to serve
The Beautiful: gloried and boundless.

The grove is our screen
From the people we hold
In reticent awe.
With poppies and milk-
White stars we have plucked,
We garland the shrine.

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We bathe by a shore
Where violets grow,
We kindle a flame
In gardens of grace,
And wait while we falter an anthem.

And when we are fair
With the freshness of youth,
The prophet will weld
Us fast to the bronze
Of pillars and lift
The veil from the god.
We tremble and gaze
In tortuous grief,
In luminous strength,
In fires of bliss,
And die in perpetual yearning.

THE FAVOURITES OF THE PEOPLE

The Wrestler

His arm — Oh, admirable and amazing! —
Rests on his dexter hip. The sunlight plays
Across his stalwart body and his temples
Circled with laurel leaves. When he approaches
A slowly swelling clamour sweeps the rows
Along the street whose length is strewn with branches.
The women teach their children to repeat
His name with joyful tongue and lift them higher
To reach him with their palm fronds, but unsmiling
He sets his foot as squarely as a lion,
The glory of his birthplace after many
A year without renown. He does not notice
That thousands cheer, he does not even see
His parents proudly loom among the people.