The Works of Stefan George

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Marx, Olga and Ernst Morwitz.
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II

Yet he was trapped by crafty foes, with few
And faithful men against a horde he vied,
He fell, but by the grace of heaven knew
The victory was his, before he died.

And to his burial even princes came,
The eulogies of friends, the muffled lilt
Of prayers and the drone of trumpets built
An arch to witness bright and early fame.

Now he is dead, where shall I turn? What hand
Will keep the hounds of ruthless life at bay?
Without his greatness I shall die. Oh, may
It not be too inglorious an end!

A KNIGHT GROWING FORGETFUL

Muted clangour! Do I hear
Horses being saddled? Spear
Whirring? From the terrace flow
Cries of fear?

Only doors that creak below.

Guests who laugh and jest? Dispatch
Of the men who come and go
Under eaves with leafy thatch?
Merry watch?

Tender strings? A singing sigh
Under fingers slim and slow?
Has a Golden Age slipped by,
Fair and shy?

Only doors that creak below.
THE RECLUSE

The elders nodded by the window-sill,
The flower-season of the vines had just
Begun, when back from lands of miracle
My son returned and leaned upon my breast.

I let him tell the tale of his despair
In earthly travels, all his wounded pride,
I should so much have liked to have him share
The ease and sheltered calmness at my side.

But Destiny denied me her consent,
Rich was my ransom, yet her hand was sealed.
One dawn that promised early fame he went...
I watched his shield move through a distant field.

THE IMAGE

I sang as the guild of our worthy sires had taught,
And passed by implacable pillars and tombs of stone,
But at vespers, behind the smoke of the kilns, I caught
The freshness of twilight wavering slowly down.

When solacing shadows invaded the colours spun
By day, when the chimes had died, and the meadows slept,
I knelt in my sheltering cell, released and alone,
Before the celestial image and pleaded and wept.

My eloquent eyes were lifted, my hands were twined,
The velvet psalter had never a prayer like this
That flowed from my spirit without beginning or end,
I opened my arm and dared the imploring kiss.

I waited and dreamed — abetted by miracle tales —
Of visible guerdon which always belied my belief,
In futile rebellion and hope I more wildly assailed
The guiltless image of glory, and greatness, and grief.