The Works of Stefan George

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The mouth which spoke prophetic words, resigns
Its office charged with sanctity
And bends to kiss a foot that far outshines
The carpet white as milk and ivory.

While in my dreams I rode to victories
And savoured sequences of words,
My country was beset with enemies,
They conquered half my kingdom with their swords.

And yet my craving for revenge is lost!
My last imperial act of all
Was when they caught the traitors from the coast
And led them to my scarlet judgment hall.

Then I could fix my eyes unflinchingly
Upon the prostrate who had dared withhold
Their tribute, and at every nod from me
A head from smooth and slender body rolled.

Now I am bowed and mourn my fair domain.
Only this shall ease my fate:
The bird that unconcerned for fields of ravaged grain
Sings in the myrtles, dark and wet,
Unremittingly his sweet regret.

I flung my circlet which no longer shone,
Aside. It clanged, and surfeited I turned to flee
The hall to which the treasure of the Orient flows,
The courts where fountains fall in silken strands,
The pillared walls of bronze and lazuli,
My very throne,
And travelled far to serve a pasha who commands
A realm like Shiraz, slumbering in mists of rose.
For many weeks I nourished his content
With songs of praise I chanted faithfully,
With wreaths of eulogies I corded.
In awe and reverence my head was bent
To him who silenced every mutiny
And over many foreign foemen lorded.

After his greatest conquest home he rode
One evening through the throngs which surged around.
I had prepared a dagger for his heart:
The candle's death shall mark his own! And yet
When up the stair in pride and majesty he strode
And I had mixed the festal draught, regret
Assailed me strangely, and I stole apart
With ashen cheeks without a sound.

The cymbals and the kettledrums combine
To jar the streets and palaces with thunder,
The soldiers take their pay in love and wine,
With looted splendours they array
The girls whose lips are smouldering and gay
In gardens where the yellow torches wander.

The slave moves on. A bush which grows before
The gate unfurls a blossom, bright and broad,
From which disgrace and glory spoke,
But he no longer trusts in fraud,
He only breaks a branch of sycamore
And leaves the region where his spirit broke.

The slave moves on, he knows his part is played,
On to the shore where mortals drink release
From torment, where their fervours drown in peace.
Now he can face the waters unafraid.