The Works of Stefan George

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Marx, Olga and Ernst Morwitz.
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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.
Where before the final lap
Gorgeous trains and riders stop,
Ramparts beckon from afar,
Travelers quench their thirst, the water-
Vendors offer him the jar
And address whom no one knows
For a former prince. No rancor
Clouds his soul, He thanks the giver
With a smile, but shyly goes
For his kingship broke, a slight
Contact even makes him quiver
And he almost fears the light.

He lay alone upon a ledge of stone.
How distant were his lands and all the proffer
Of mercy and command, as in a coffer
Buried in sand, the gold and gems he owned.
And deep into his hands he bowed his head.

But through the silence sighing whispers sped.

The wayside grasses, sad and trodden down,
The dialogue of cedar trees and alders,
The plashing drops that tumbled from the boulders
Divined the grief — so strange to men — of one
Who lost his kingly heritage.

And then he heard the river surge and pledge:

VOICES IN THE RIVER

Timorous creatures, adoring, deploring,
Here in our realm is the refuge your craved.
Here is rejoicing and here is restoring,
Softly in sound and caress you are laved.