The Works of Stefan George

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Beside the long and even hedge we lean.
Led by a Sister, rows of children pace,
Their voices rise in praise of heaven's grace
In earthly accents, steadfast and serene.

We, who are bathed in evening's latest rays,
Are frightened by your words, for you recall
That we were happy only when a wall
Like this was still enough to block our gaze.

Above the spring, niched in the wall, you bent
To cup the cool and dabble in the spray,
And yet it seems your fingers draw away
From the two lion heads with some constraint.

You wear a ring whose jewelled lustre dies.
I try to slip it off, but you invade
My very spirit with your misty eyes
In answer to the plea I could not hide.

Now do not lag in reaching for the boon
Of parting pomp before the turn of tide,
The clouds are grey, they swiftly mass and glide,
Perhaps the fog will be upon us soon.

A faint and fluted note from tattered tree
Tells you that goodness, wise and ultimate,
Will dip the land — before it learns the fate
Of freezing storms — in damask lambency.

The wasps with scales of golden-green are gone
From blooms that close their chalices. We row
Our boat around an archipelago
Of matted leaves in shades of bronze and fawn.
Today let us avoid the garden, for
As sometimes — unexplained and sudden — this
Elusive scent and lilting breath once more
Imbues us with a long forgotten bliss,

So that confronts us with reminding ghosts,
And grief that makes us tired and afraid.
Here from the window you can see how hosts
Of wind attacked the tree, how much is dead!

And from the gate whose iron lilies rust,
Birds light on lawns asleep in leafen stoles,
And others on the posts, in bitter frost,
Are sipping rain from empty flower-bowls.

I wrote it down: No more can I conceal
What, as a thought, no longer I can shun,
What I restrain, what you will never feel:
Our pilgrimage to joy is far from done!

And you, beside a tall and withered stalk,
Unfold my note. I stand apart and guess...
The sheet, which slipped from you, was white as chalk,
The loudest colour in the sallow grass.

Here in the spacious square of yellow stone
With fountains in the middle, though the day
Is gone, you still would like to talk and stay,
For brighter stars, you think, have never shone.

But keep from the basaltine bowl, it calls
For sepulture of faded bough and blade,
The wind is cooler where the moonlight falls
Than over there, where spruces throw their shade.