Henrik Ibsen by Edmund Gosse

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Henrik Ibsen
Ibsen in 1868
Ibsen in Dresden, October, 1873
From a drawing by Gustav Laerum
Facsimile of Ibsen's Handwriting
Ibsen. From the painting by Eilif Petersen
Bust of Ibsen, about 1865

PREFACE

Numerous and varied as have been the analyses of Ibsen's works published, in all languages, since the completion of his writings, there exists no biographical study which brings together, on a general plan, what has been recorded of his adventures as an author. Hitherto the only accepted Life of Ibsen has been _Et literært Livsbillede_, published in 1888 by Henrik Jaeger; of this an English translation was issued in 1890. Henrik Jaeger (who must not be confounded with the novelist, Hans Henrik Jaeger) was a lecturer and dramatic critic, residing near Bergen, whose book would possess little value had he not succeeded in persuading Ibsen to give him a good deal of valuable information respecting his early life in that city. In its own day, principally on this account, Jaeger's volume was useful, supplying a large number of facts which were new to the public. But the advance of Ibsen's activity, and the increase
of knowledge since his death, have so much extended and modified the poet's history that _Et literaert Livsbillede_ has become obsolete.

The principal authorities of which I have made use in the following pages are the minute bibliographical _Oplysninger_ of J. B. Halvorsen, marvels of ingenious labor, continued after Halvorsen's death by Sten Konow (1901); the _Letters of Henrik Ibsen_, published in two volumes, by H. Koht and J. Elias, in 1904, and now issued in an English translation (Hodder & Stoughton); the recollections and notes of various friends, published in the periodicals of Scandinavia and Germany after his death; T. Blanc's _Et Bidrag til den Ibsenskte Digtnings Scenehistorie_ (1906); and, most of all, the invaluable _Samliv med Ibsen_ (1906) of Johan Paulsen. This last-mentioned writer aspires, in measure, to be Ibsen's Boswell, and his book is a series of chapters reminiscent of the dramatist's talk and manners, chiefly during those central years of his life which he spent in Germany. It is a trivial, naive and rather thin production, but it has something of the true Boswellian touch, and builds up before us a lifelike portrait.

From the materials, too, collected for many years past by Mr. William Archer, I have received important help. Indeed, of Mr. Archer it is difficult for an English student of Ibsen to speak with moderation. It is true that thirty-six years ago some of Ibsen's early metrical writings fell into the hands of the writer of this little volume, and that I had the privilege, in consequence, of being the first person to introduce Ibsen's name to the British public. Nor will I pretend for a moment that it is not a gratification to me, after so many years and
after such surprising developments, to know that this was the fact. But, save for this accident of time, it was Mr. Archer and no other who was really the introducer of Ibsen to English readers. For a quarter of a century he was the protagonist in the fight against misconstruction and stupidity; with wonderful courage, with not less wonderful good temper and persistency, he insisted on making the true Ibsen take the place of the false, and on securing for him the recognition due to his genius.

Mr. William Archer has his reward; his own name is permanently attached to the intelligent appreciation of the Norwegian playwright in England and America.

In these pages, where the space at my disposal was so small, I have not been willing to waste it by repeating the plots of any of those plays of Ibsen which are open to the English reader. It would please me best if this book might be read in connection with the final edition of Ibsen's Complete Dramatic Works, now being prepared by Mr. Archer in eleven volumes (W. Heinemann, 1907). If we may judge of the whole work by those volumes of it which have already appeared, I have little hesitation in saying that no other foreign author of the second half of the nineteenth century has been so ably and exhaustively edited in English as Ibsen has been in this instance.

The reader who knows the Dano-Norwegian language may further be recommended to the study of Carl Naerup's Norsk Litteraturhistoriesiste Tidsrum (1905), a critical history of Norwegian literature since 1890, which is invaluable in giving a notion of the effect of modern ideas on the very numerous younger writers of Norway, scarcely one of
whom has not been influenced in one direction or another by the tyranny 
of Ibsen's personal genius. What has been written about Ibsen in England and France has often missed something of its historical value by not 
taking into consideration that movement of intellectual life in Norway 
which has surrounded him and which he has stimulated. Perhaps I may be 
allowed to say of my little book that this side of the subject has been 
particularly borne in mind in the course of its composition.

E. G.

KLOBENSTEIN.

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

The parentage of the poet has been traced back to a certain Danish 
skipper, Peter Ibsen, who, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, 
made his way over from Stege, the capital of the island of Moeen, and 
became a citizen of Bergen. From that time forth the men of the family, 
all following the sea in their youth, jovial men of a humorous 
disposition, continued to haunt the coasts of Norway, marrying sinister 
and taciturn wives, who, by the way, were always, it would seem, Danes 
or Germans or Scotswomen, so that positively the poet had, after a 
hundred years and more of Norwegian habitation, not one drop of pure
Norse blood to inherit from his parents. His grandfather, Henrik, was wrecked in 1798 in his own ship, which went down with all souls lost on Hesnaes, near Grimstad; this reef is the scene of Ibsen's animated poem of Terje Viken. His father, Knud, who was born in 1797, married in 1825 a German, Marichen Cornelia Martie Altenburg, of the same town of Skien; she was one year his senior, and the daughter of a merchant. It was in 1771 that the Ibsens, leaving Bergen, had settled in Skien, which was, and still is, an important centre of the timber and shipping trades on the south-east shore of the country.

It may be roughly said that Skien, in the Danish days, was a sort of Poole or Dartmouth, existing solely for purposes of marine merchandise, and depending for prosperity, and life itself, on the sea. Much of a wire-drawn ingenuity has been conjectured about the probable strains of heredity which met in Ibsen. It is not necessary to do more than to recognize the slight but obstinate exoticism, which kept all his forbears more or less foreigners still in their Norwegian home; and to insist on the mixture of adventurousness and plain common sense which marked their movements by sea and shore. The stock was intensely provincial, intensely unambitious; it would be difficult to find anywhere a specimen of the lower middle class more consistent than the Ibsens had been in preserving their respectable dead level. Even in that inability to resist the call of the sea, generation after generation, if there was a little of the dare-devil there was still more of the conventional citizen. It is, in fact, a vain attempt to detect elements of his ancestors in the extremely startling and unprecedented son who was born to Knud and Marichen Ibsen two years and three months after
their marriage.

This son, who was baptized Henrik Johan, although he never used the second name, was born in a large edifice known as the Stockmann House, in the centre of the town of Skien, on March 20. The house stood on one side of a large, open square; the town pillory was at the right of and the mad-house, the lock-up and other amiable urban institutions to the left; in front was Latin school and the grammar school, while the church occupied the middle of the square. Over this stern prospect the tourist can no longer sentimentalize, for the whole of this part of Skien was burned down in 1886, to the poet's unbridled satisfaction. "The inhabitants of Skien," he said with grim humor, "were quite unworthy to possess my birthplace."

He declared that the harsh elements of landscape, mentioned above, were those which earliest captivated his infant attention, and he added that the square space, with the church in the midst of it, was filled all day long with the dull and droning sound of many waterfalls, while from dawn to dusk this drone of waters was constantly cut through by a sound that was like the sharp screaming and moaning of women. This was caused by hundreds of saws at work beside the waterfalls, taking advantage of that force. "Afterwards, when I read about the guillotine, I always thought of those saws," said the poet, whose earliest flight of fancy seems to have been this association of womanhood with the shriek of the sawmill.

In 1888, just before his sixtieth birthday, Ibsen wrote out for Henrik
Jaeger certain autobiographical recollections of his childhood. It is from these that the striking phrase about the scream of the saws is taken, and that is perhaps the most telling of these infant memories, many of which are slight and naive. It is interesting, however, to find that his earliest impressions of life at home were of an optimistic character. "Skien," he says, "in my young days, was an exceedingly lively and sociable place, quite unlike what it afterwards became. Several highly cultivated and wealthy families lived in the town itself or close by on their estates. Most of these families were more or less closely related, and dances, dinners and music parties followed each other, winter and summer, in almost unbroken sequence. Many travellers, too, passed through the town, and, as there were as yet no regular inns, they lodged with friends or connections. We almost always had guests in our large, roomy house, especially at Christmas and Fair-time, when the house was full, and we kept open table from morning till night." The mind reverts to the majestic old wooden mansions which play so prominent a part in Thomas Krag's novels, or to the house of Mrs. Solness' parents, the burning down of which started the Master-Builder's fortunes. Most of these grand old timber houses in Norway have indeed, by this time, been so burned down.

We may speculate on what the effect of this genial open-handedness might have been, had it lasted, on the genius of the poet. But fortune had harsher views of what befitted the training of so acrid a nature. When Ibsen was eight years of age, his father's business was found to be in such disorder that everything had to be sold to meet his creditors. The only piece of property left when this process had been gone through was
a little broken-down farmhouse called Venstoeb, in the outskirts of Skien. Ibsen afterwards stated that those who had taken most advantage of his parents' hospitality in their prosperous days were precisely those who now most markedly turned a cold shoulder on them. It is likely enough that this may have been the case, but one sees how inevitably Ibsen would, in after years, be convinced that it was. He believed himself to have been, personally, much mortified and humiliated in childhood by the change in the family status. Already, by all accounts, he had begun to live a life of moral isolation. His excellent sister long afterwards described him as an unsociable child, never a pleasant companion, and out of sympathy with all the rest of the family.

We recollect, in _The Wild Duck_, the garret which was the domain of Hedvig and of that symbolic bird. At Venstoeb, the infant Ibsen possessed a like retreat, a little room near the back entrance, which was sacred to him and into the fastness of which he was accustomed to bolt himself. Here were some dreary old books, among others Harrison's folio _History of the City of London_, as well as a paint-box, an hour-glass, an extinct eight-day clock, properties which were faithfully introduced, half a century later, into _The Wild Duck_. His sister says that the only outdoor amusement he cared for as a boy was building, and she describes the prolonged construction of a castle, in the spirit of _The Master-Builder_.

Very soon he began to go to school, but to neither of the public institutions in the town. He attended what is described as a "small middle-class school," kept by a man called Johan Hansen, who was the
only person connected with his childhood, except his sister, for whom
the poet retained in after life any agreeable sentiment. "Johan Hansen,"
he says, "had a mild, amiable temper, like that of a child," and when he
died, in 1865, Ibsen mourned him. The sexton at Skien, who helped in the
lessons, described the poet afterwards as "a quiet boy with a pair of
wonderful eyes, but with no sort of cleverness except an unusual gift
for drawing." Hansen taught Ibsen Latin and theology, gently,
perseveringly, without any striking results; that the pupil afterwards
boasted of having successfully perused Phaedrus in the original is in
itself significant. So little was talent expected from him that when, at
the age of about fifteen, he composed a rather melodramatic description
of a dream, the schoolmaster looked at him gloomily, and said he must
have copied it out of some book! One can imagine the shocked silence of
the author, "passive at the nadir of dismay."

No great wild swan of the flocks of Phoebus ever began life as a more
ungainly duckling than Ibsen did. The ingenuity of biographers has done
its best to brighten up the dreary record of his childhood with
anecdotes, yet the sum of them all is but a dismal story. The only
talent which was supposed to lurk in the napkin was that for painting. A
little while before he left school, he was found to have been working
hard with water-colors. Various persons have recalled finished works of
the young Ibsen--a romantic landscape of the ironworks at Fossum, a view
from the windows at Venstoeb, a boy in peasant dress seated on a rock,
the latter described by a dignitary of the church as "awfully splendid,"
overmaade praegtigt. One sees what kind of painting this must have been,
founded on some impression of Fearnley and Tidemann, a far-away
following of the new "national" art of the praiseworthy "patriot-
painters" of the school of Dahl.

It is interesting to remember that Pope, who had considerable
intellectual relationship with Ibsen, also nourished in childhood the
ambition to be a painter, and drudged away at his easel for weeks and
months. As he to the insipid Jervases and Knellers whom he copied, so
Ibsen to the conscientious romantic artists of Norway's prime. In
neither case do we wish that an Ibsen or a Pope should be secured for
the National Gallery, but it is highly significant that such earnest
students of precise excellence in another art should first of all have
schooled their eyes to exactitude by grappling with form and color.

In 1843, being fifteen years of age, Ibsen was confirmed and taken away
from school. These events marked the beginning of adolescence with a
young middle-class Norwegian of those days, for whom the future proposed
no task in life demanding a more elaborate education than the local
schoolmaster could give. Ibsen announced his wish to be a professional
artist, but that was one which could not be indulged. Until a later date
than this, every artist in Norway was forced abroad for the necessary
technical training: as a rule, students went to Dresden, because J. C.
Dahl was there; but many settled in Duesseldorf, where the teaching
attracted them. In any case, the adoption of a plastic profession meant
a long and serious expenditure of money, together with a very doubtful
prospect of ultimate remuneration. Fearnley, who had seemed the very
genius of Norwegian art, had just (1842) died, having scarcely begun to
sell his pictures, at the age of forty. It is not surprising that Knud
Ibsen, whose health was in a worse condition than ever, refused even to consider a course of life which would entail a heavy and long-continued expense.

Ibsen hung about at home for a few months, then, shortly before his sixteenth birthday, he apprenticed to an apothecary of the name of Mann, at the little town of Grimstad, between Arendal and Christianssand, on the extreme south-east corner of the Norwegian coast. This was his home for more than five years; here he became a poet, and here the peculiar color and tone of his temperament were developed. So far as the genius of a very great man is influenced by his surroundings, and by his physical condition in those surroundings, it was the atmosphere of Grimstad and of its drug-store which moulded the character of Ibsen. Skien and his father's house dropped from him like an old suit of clothes. He left his parents, whom he scarcely knew, the town which he hated, the schoolmates and schoolmasters to whom he seemed a surly dunce. We find him next, with an apron round his middle and a pestle in his hand, pounding drugs in a little apothecary's shop in Grimstad. What Blackwood's so basely insinuated of Keats--"Back to the shop, Mr. John, stick to plasters, pills and ointment-boxes," inappropriate to the author of _Endymion_, was strictly true of the author of _Peer Gynt_.

Curiosity and hero-worship once took the author of these lines to Grimstad. It is a marvellous object-lesson on the development of genius. For nearly six years (from 1844 to 1850), and those years the most important of all in the moulding of character and talent, one of the most original and far-reaching imaginations which Europe has seen for a
century was cooped up here among ointment-boxes, pills and plasters.

Grimstad is a small, isolated, melancholy place, connected with nothing at all, visitable only by steamer. Featureless hills surround it, and it looks out into the east wind, over a dark bay dotted with naked rocks.

No industry, no objects of interest in the vicinity, a perfect uniformity of little red houses where nobody seems to be doing anything; in Ibsen's time there are said to have been about five hundred of these apathetic inhabitants. Here, then, for six interminable years, one of the acutest brains in Europe had to interest itself in fraying ipecacuanha and mixing black draughts behind an apothecary's counter.

For several years nothing is recorded, and there was probably very little that demanded record, of Ibsen's life at Grimstad. His own interesting notes, it is obvious, refer only to the closing months of the period. Ten years before the birth of Ibsen of the greatest poets of Europe had written words which seem meant to characterize an adolescence such as his. "The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted; thence proceed mawkishness and a thousand bitters."

It is easy to discover that Ibsen, from his sixth to his twentieth year, suffered acutely from moral and intellectual distemper. He was at war--the phrase is his own--with the little community in which he lived. And yet it seems to have been, in its tiny way, a tolerant and even friendly little community. It is difficult for us to realize what life in a
remote coast-town of Norway would be sixty years ago. Connection with
the capital would be rare and difficult, and, when achieved, the capital
was as yet little more than we should call a village. There would,
perhaps, be a higher uniformity of education among the best inhabitants
of Grimstad than we are prepared to suppose. A certain graceful veneer
of culture, an old-fashioned Danish elegance reflected from Copenhagen,
would mark the more conservative citizens, male and female. A fierier
generation--not hot enough, however, to set the fjord on flame--would
celebrate the comparatively recent freedom of the country in numerous
patriotic forms. It is probable that a dark boy like Ibsen would, on the
whole, prefer the former type, but he would despise them both.

He was poor, excruciatingly poor, with a poverty that excluded all
indulgence, beyond the bare necessities, in food and clothes and books.
We can conceive the meagre advance of his position, first a mere
apprentice, then an assistant, finally buoyed up by the advice of
friends to study medicine and pharmacy, in the hope of being, some
bright day, himself no less than the owner of a drug-store. Did Mr.
Anstey know this, or was it the sheer adventure of genius, when he
contrasted the qualities of the master into "Pill-Doctor Herdal,"
compounding "beautiful rainbow-colored powders that will give one a real
grip on the world"? Ibsen, it is allowable to think, may sometimes have
dreamed of a pill, "with arsenic in it, Hilda, and digitalis, too, and
strychnine and the best beetle-killer," which would decimate the
admirable inhabitants of Grimstad, strewing the rocks with their bodies
in their go-to-meeting coats and dresses. He had in him that source of
anger, against which all arguments are useless, which bubbles up in the
heart of youth who vaguely feels himself possessed of native energy, and
knows not how to stir a hand or even formulate a wish. He was savage in
manners, unprepossessing in appearance, and, as he himself has told us
with pathetic naivete, unable to express the real gratitude he felt to
the few who would willingly have extended friendship to him if he had
permitted it.

As he advanced in age, he does not seem to have progressed in grace. By
the respectable citizens of Grimstad--and even Grimstad had its little
inner circle of impenetrable aristocracy--he regarded as "not quite
good." The apothecary's assistant was a bold young man, who did not seem
to realize his menial position. He was certainly intelligent, and
Grimstad would have overlooked the pills and ointments if his manners
had been engaging, but he was rude, truculent and contradictory. The
youthful female sex is not in the habit of sharing the prejudices of its
elders in this respect, and many a juvenile Orson has, in such
conditions, enjoyed substantial successes. But young Ibsen was not a
favorite even with the girls, whom he alarmed and disconcerted. One of
the young ladies of Grimstad in after years attempted to describe the
effect which the poet made upon them. They had none of them liked him,
she said, "because"--she hesitated for the word--"because he was so
_spectral_." This gives us just the flash we want; it reveals to us for
a moment the distempered youth, almost incorporeal, displayed wandering
about at twilight and in lonely places, held in common esteem to be
malevolent, and expressing by gestures rather than by words sentiments
of a nature far from complimentary or agreeable.
Thus life at Grimstad seems to have proceeded until Ibsen reached his twenty-first year. In this quiet backwater of a seaport village the passage of time was deliberate, and the development of hard-worked apothecaries was slow. Ibsen's nature was not in any sense precocious, and even if he had not languished in so lost a corner of society, it is unlikely that he would have started prematurely in life or literature. The actual waking up, when it came at last, seems to have been almost an accident. There had been some composing of verses, now happily lost, and some more significant distribution of "epigrams" and "caricatures" to the vexation of various worthy persons. The earliest trace of talent seems to been in this direction, in the form of lampoons or "characters," as people called them in the seventeenth century, sarcastic descriptions of types in which certain individuals could be recognized. No doubt if these could be recovered, we should find them rough and artless, but containing germs of the future keenness of portraiture. They were keen enough, it seems, to rouse great resentment in Grimstad.

There is evidence to show that the lad had docility enough, at all events, to look about for some aid in the composition of Norwegian prose. We should know nothing of it but for a passage in Ibsen's later polemic with Paul Jansenius Stub of Bergen. In 1848 Stub was an invalid schoolmaster, who, it appears, eked out his income by giving instruction, by correspondence, in style. How Ibsen heard of him does not seem to be known, but when, in 1851, Ibsen entered, with needless acrimony, into a controversy with his previous teacher about the theatre, Stub complained of his ingratitude, since he had "taught the
boy to write." Stub's intervention in the matter, doubtless, was limited
to the correction of a few exercises.

Ibsen's own theory was that his intellect and character were awakened by
the stir of revolution throughout Europe. The first political event
which really interested him was the proclamation of the French Republic,
which almost coincided with his twentieth birthday. He was born again, a
child of '48. There were risings in Vienna, in Milan, in Rome. Venice
was proclaimed a republic, the Pope fled to Gaeta, the streets of Berlin
ran with the blood of the populace. The Magyars rose against Jellalic
and his Croat troops; the Czechs demanded their autonomy; in response to
the revolutionary feeling in Germany, Schleswig-Holstein was up in arms.

Each of these events, and others like them, and all occurring in the
rapid months of that momentous year, smote like hammers on the door of
Ibsen's brain, till it quivered with enthusiasm and excitement. The old
brooding languor was at an end, and with surprising clearness and
firmness he saw his pathway cut out before him as a poet and as a man.
The old clouds vanished, and though the social difficulties which hemmed
in his career were as gross as ever, he himself no longer doubted what
was to be his aim in life. The cry of revolution came to him, of
revolution faint indeed and broken, the voice of a minority appealing
frantically and for a moment against the overwhelming forces of a
respectable majority, but it came to him just at the moment when his
young spirit was prepared to receive it with faith and joy. The effect
on Ibsen's character was sudden and it was final:
Then he stood up, and trod to dust
Fear and desire, mistrust and trust,
And dreams of bitter sleep and sweet,
And bound for sandals on his feet
Knowledge and patience of what must
And what things maybe, in the heat
And cold of years that rot and rust
And alter; and his spirit's meat
Was freedom, and his staff was wrought
Of strength, and his cloak woven of thought.

We are not left to conjecture on the subject; in a document of extreme interest, which seems somehow to have escaped the notice of his commentators, the preface to the second (1876) edition of _Catilina_, he has described what the influences were which roused him out of the wretchedness of Grimstad; they were precisely the revolution of February, the risings in Hungary, the first Schleswig war. He wrote a series of sonnets, now apparently lost, to King Oscar, imploring him to take up arms for the help of Denmark, and of nights, when all his duties were over at last, and the shop shut up, he would creep to the garret where he slept, and dream himself fighting at the centre of the world, instead of lost on its extreme circumference. And here he began his first drama, the opening lines of which,

"I must, I must; a voice is crying to me
From my soul's depth, and I will follow it,"
might be taken as the epigraph of Ibsen's whole life's work.

In one of his letters to Georg Brandes he has noted, with that clairvoyance which marks some of his utterances about himself, the "full-blooded egotism" which developed in him during his last year of mental and moral starvation at Grimstad. Through the whole series of his satiric dramas we see the little narrow-minded borough, with its ridiculous officials, its pinched and hypocritical social order, its intolerable laws and ordinances, modified here and there, expanded sometimes, modernized and brought up to date, but always recurrent in the poet's memory. To the last, the images and the rebellions which were burned into his soul at Grimstad were presented over and over again to his readers.

But the necessity of facing the examination at Christiania now presented itself. He was so busily engaged in the shop that he had, as he says, to steal his hours for study. He still inhabited the upper room, which he calls a garret; it would not seem that the alteration in his status, assistant now and no longer apprentice, had increased his social conveniences. He was still the over-worked apothecary, pounding drugs with a pestle and mortar from morning till night. Someone has pointed out the odd circumstance that almost every scene in the drama of _Catilina_ takes place in the dark. This was the unconscious result of the fact that all the attention which the future realist could give to the story had to be given in the night hours. When he emerged from the
garret, it was to read Latin with a candidate in theology, a Mr. Monrad, brother of the afterwards famous professor. By a remarkable chance, the subject given by the University for examination was the Conspiracy of Catiline, to be studied in the history of Sallust and the oration of Cicero.

No theme could have been more singularly well fitted to fire the enthusiasm of Ibsen. At no time of his life a linguist, or much interested in history, it is probable that the difficulty of concentrating his attention on a Latin text would have been insurmountable had the subject been less intimately sympathetic to him. But he tells us that he had no sooner perceived the character of the man against whom these diatribes are directed than he devoured them greedily (_jeg slugte disse skrifter_). The opening words of Sallust, which every schoolboy has to read--we can imagine with what an extraordinary force they would strike upon the resounding emotion of such a youth as Ibsen. _Lucius Catilina nobili genere natus, magna vi et animi et corporis, sed ingenio malo pravoque_--how does this at once bring up an image of the arch-rebel, of Satan himself, as the poets have conceived him, how does it attract, with its effects of energy, intelligence and pride, the curiosity of one whose way of life, as Keats would say, is still undecided, his ambition still thick-sighted!

It was Sallust's picture more than Cicero's that absorbed Ibsen. Criticism likes to trace a predecessor behind every genius, a Perugino for Raffaelle, a Marlowe for Shakespeare. If we seek for the master-mind that started Ibsen, it is not to be found among the writers of his age.
or of his language. The real master of Ibsen was Sallust. There can be no doubt that the cold and bitter strength of Sallust; his unflinching method of building up his edifice of invective, stone by stone; his close, unidealistic, dry penetration into character; his clinical attitude, unmoved at the death-bed of a reputation; that all these qualities were directly operative on the mind and intellectual character of Ibsen, and went a long way to mould it while moulding was still possible.

There is no evidence to show that the oration of Cicero moved him nearly so much as the narratives of Sallust. After all, the object of Cicero was to crush the conspiracy, but what Ibsen was interested in was the character of Catiline, and this was placed before him in a more thrilling way by the austere reserve of the historian. No doubt, to a young poet, when that poet was Ibsen, there would be something deeply attractive in the sombre, archaic style, and icy violence of Sallust. How thankful we ought to be that the historian, with his long sonorous words--_flagitiosorum ac facinorosorum_--did not make of our perfervid apothecary a mere tub-thumper of Corinthian prose!

Ibsen now formed the two earliest friendships of his life. He had reached the age of twenty without, as it would seem, having been able to make his inner nature audible to those around him. He had been to the inhabitants of Grimstad a stranger within their gates, not speaking their language; or, rather, wholly "spectral," speaking no language at all, but indulging in cat-calls and grimaces. He was now discovered like Caliban, and tamed, and made vocal, by the strenuous arts of friendship.
One of those who thus interpreted him was a young musician, Due, who held a post in the custom-house; the other was Ole Schulerud (1827-59), who deserves a cordial acknowledgment from every admirer of Ibsen. He also was in the receipt of custom, and a young man of small independent means. To Schulerud and to Due, Ibsen revealed his poetic plans, and he seems to have found in them both sympathizers with his republican enthusiasms and transcendental schemes for the liberation of the peoples. It was a stirring time, in 1848, and all generous young blood was flowing fast in the same direction.

Since Ibsen's death, Due has published a very lively paper of recollections of the old Grimstad days. He says:

His daily schedule admitted few intervals for rest or sleep. Yet I never heard Ibsen complain of being tired. His health was uniformly good. He must have had an exceptionally strong constitution, for when his financial conditions compelled him to practice the most stringent economy, he tried to do without underclothing, and finally even without stockings. In these experiments he succeeded; and in winter he went without an overcoat; yet without being troubled by colds or other bodily ills.

We have seen that Ibsen was so busy that he had to steal from his duties the necessary hours for study. But out of these hours, he tells us, he stole moments for the writing of poetry, of the revolutionary poetry of which we have spoken, and for a great quantity of lyrics of a
sentimental and fanciful kind. Due was the confidant to whom he recited
the latter, and one at least of these early pieces survives, set to
music by this friend. But to Schulerud a graver secret was intrusted, no
less than that in the night hours of 1848-49 there was being composed in
the garret over the apothecary's shop a three-act tragedy in blank
verse, on the conspiracy of Catiline. With his own hand, when the first
draft was completed, Schulerud made a clean copy of the drama, and in
the autumn of 1849 he went to Christiania with the double purpose of
placing _Catilina_ at the theatre and securing a publisher for it. A
letter (October 15, 1849) from Ibsen, first printed in 1904--the only
document we possess of this earliest period--displays to a painful
degree the torturing anxiety with which the poet awaited news of his
play, and, incidentally, exposes his poverty. With all Schulerud's
energy, he found it impossible to gain attention for _Catilina_ at the
theatre, and in January, 1850, Ibsen received what he called its "death
warrant," but it was presently brought out as a volume, under the
pseudonym of Brynjolf Bjarme, at Schulerud's expense. Of _Catilina_
about thirty copies were sold, and it attracted no notice whatever from
the press.

Meanwhile, left alone in Grimstad, since Due was now with Schulerud in
Christiania, Ibsen had been busy with many literary projects. He had
been writing an abundance of lyrics, he had begun a one-act drama called
"The Normans," afterwards turned into _Kaempehoejen_; he was planning a
romance, _The Prisoner at Akershus_ (this was to deal with the story of
Christian Lofthus); and above all he was busy writing a tragedy of _Olaf
Trygvesoen. [Note: On the authority of the Breve, pp. 59, 59, where
Halvdan Koht prints "Olaf Tr." and "Olaf T." expanding these to Tr[ygvesoen]. But is it quite certain that what Ibsen wrote in these letters was not "Olaf Li." and "Olaf L.," and that the reference is not to Olaf Liljekrans, which was certainly begun at Grimstad? Is there any other evidence that Ibsen ever started an _Olaf Trygvesoen_?

One of his poems had already been printed in a Christiania newspaper. The call was overwhelming; he could endure Grimstad and the gallipots no longer. In March, 1850, at the age of twenty-one, Ibsen stuck a few dollars in his pocket and went off to try his fortune in the capital.

CHAPTER II

EARLY INFLUENCES

In middle life Ibsen, who suppressed for as long a time as he could most of his other juvenile works, deliberately lifted _Catilina_ from the oblivion into which it had fallen, and replaced it in the series of his writings. This is enough to indicate to us that he regarded it as of relative importance, and imperfect as it is, and unlike his later plays, it demands some critical examination. I not know whether any one ever happened to ask Ibsen whether he had been aware that Alexandre Dumas produced in Paris a five-act drama of _Catiline_ at the very moment (October, 1848) when Ibsen started the composition of his. It is quite possible that the young Norwegian saw this fact noted in a newspaper, and immediately determined to try what he could make of the same
subject. In Dumas' play Catiline is presented merely as a demagogue; he
is the red Flag personified, and the political situation in France is
discussed under a slight veil of Roman history. Catiline is simply a
sort of Robespierre brought up to date. There is no trace of all this in
Ibsen.

Oddly enough, though the paradox is easily explained, we find much more
similarity when we compare the Norwegian drama with that tragedy of
_Catiline_ which Ben Jonson published in 1611. Needless to state, Ibsen
had never read the old English play; it would be safe to lay a wager
that, when he died, Ibsen had never heard or seen the name of Ben
Jonson. Yet there is an odd sort of resemblance, founded on the fact
that each poet keeps very close to the incidents recorded by the Latins.
Neither of them takes Sallust's presentment of the character of Catiline
as if it were gospel, but, while holding exact touch with the narrative,
each contrives to add a native grandeur to the character of the arch-
conspirator, such as his original detractors denied him. In both poems,
Ben Jonson's and Ibsen's, Catiline is--

Armed with a glory high as his despair.

Another resemblance between the old English and the modern Norwegian
dramatist is that each has felt the solid stuff of the drama to require
lightening, and has attempted to provide this by means, in Ben Jonson's
case, of solemn "choruses," in Ibsen's of lyrics. In the latter instance
the tragedy ends in rolling and rhymed verse, little suited to the
stage.

This is a very curious example, among many which might be brought forward, of Ibsen's native partiality for dramatic rhyme. In all his early plays, his tendency is to slip into the lyrical mood. This tendency reached its height nearly twenty years later in _Brand_ and _Peer Gynt_, and the truth about the austere prose which he then adopted for his dramas is probably this, not that the lyrical faculty had quitted him, but that he found it to be hampering his purely dramatic expression, and that he determined, by a self-denying ordinance, to tear it altogether off his shoulders, like an embroidered mantle, which is in itself very ornamental, but which checks an actor's movements.

The close of Ibsen's _Catalina_ is, as we have said, composed entirely in rhyme, and the effect of this curious. It is as though the young poet could not restrain the rhythm bubbling up in him, and was obliged to start running, although the moment was plainly one for walking. Here is a fragment. Catiline has stabbed Aurelia, and left her in the tent for dead. But while he was soliloquizing at the door of the tent, Fulvia has stabbed him. He lies dying at the foot of a tree, and makes a speech which ends thus:--

See, the pathway breaks, divided! I will wander, dumb,

To the left hand.

AURELIA
(appearing, blood-stained, at the door of the tent).

Nay! the right hand! Towards Elysium.

CATILINE

(greatly alarmed).

O yon pallid apparition, how it fills me with remorse.

‘Tis herself! Aurelia! tell me, art thou living? not a corse?

AURELIA.

Yes, I live that I may full thy sea of sorrows, and may lie

With my bosom pressed a moment to thy bosom, and then die.

CATILINE

(bewildered).

What? thou livest?

AURELIA.

Death's pale herald o'er my senses threw a pall,

But my dulled eye tracked thy footsteps, and I saw, I saw it all,

And my passion a wife's forces to my wounded body gave;

Breast to breast, my Catiline, let us sink into our grave.

[Note: In 1875 Ibsen practically rewrote the whole of this part of _Catilina_, without, however, improving it. Why will great authors confuse the history of literature by tampering with their early
He had slipped far out of the sobriety of Sallust when he floundered, in this way, in the deep waters of romanticism. In the isolation of Grimstad he had but himself to consult, and the mind of a young poet who has not yet enjoyed any generous communication with life is invariably sentimental and romantic. The critics of the North have expended a great deal of ingenuity in trying to prove that Ibsen exposed his own temperament and character in the course of _Catilina_. No doubt there is a great temptation to indulge in this species of analysis, but it is amusing to note that some of the soliloquies which have been pointed out as particularly self-revealing are translated almost word for word out of Sallust. Perhaps the one passage in the play which is really significant is that in which the hero says:--

If but for one brief moment I could flame
And blaze through space, and be a falling star;
If only once, and by one glorious deed,
I could but knit the name of Catiline
With glory and with deathless high renown,--
Then should I blithely, in the hour of conquest,
Leave all, and hie me to an alien shore,
Press the keen dagger gayly to my heart,
And die; for then I should have lived indeed.

This has its personal interest, since we know, on the evidence of his
sister, that such was the tenor of Ibsen's private talk about himself at that precise time.

Very imperfect as _Catilina_ is in dramatic art, and very primitive as is the development of plot in it, it presents one aspect, as a literary work, which is notable. That it should exist at all is curious, since, surprising as it seems, it had no precursor. Although, during the thirty-five years of Norwegian independence, various classes of literature had been cultivated with extreme diligence, the drama had hitherto been totally neglected. With the exception of a graceful opera by Bjerregaard, which enjoyed a success sustained over a quarter of a century, the only writings in dramatic form produced in Norway between 1815 and 1850 were the absurd lyrical farces of Wergeland, which were devoid of all importance. Such a thing as a three-act tragedy in blank verse was unknown in modern Norway, so that the youthful apothecary in Grimstad, whatever he was doing, was not slavishly copying the fashions of his own countrymen.

The principal, if not the only influence which acted upon Ibsen at this moment, was that of the great Danish tragedian, Adam Oehlenschlaeger. It might be fantastically held that the leading romantic luminary of Scandinavia withdrew on purpose to make room for his realistic successor, since Oehlenschlaeger's latest play, _Kiartan and Gudrun_, appeared just when Ibsen was planning _Catilina_, while the death of the Danish poet (January 20, 1850) was practically simultaneous with Ibsen's arrival in Christiania. In later years, Ibsen thought that Holberg and Oehlenschlaeger were the only dramatists he had read when his own first
play was written; he was sure that he knew nothing of Schiller,
Shakespeare or the French. Of the rich and varied dramatic literature of
Denmark, in the generation between Oehlenschlaeger’s and his own, he must
also for the present have known nothing. The influence of Heiberg and of
Hertz, presently to be so potent, had evidently not yet begun. But it is
important to perceive that already Norway, and Norwegian taste and
opinion, were nothing to him in his selection of themes and forms.

It is not to be supposed that the taste for dramatic performances did
not exist in Norway, because no Norwegian plays were written. On the
contrary, in most of the large towns there were, and had long been,
private theatres or rooms which could be fitted up with a stage, at
which wandering troupes of actors gave performances that were eagerly
attended by "the best people." These actors, however, were exclusively
Danes, and there was an accepted tradition that Norwegians could not
act. If they attempted to do so, their native accents proved
disagreeable to their fellow-citizens, who demanded, as an imperative
condition, the peculiar intonation and pronunciation cultivated at the
Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, as well as an absence of all native
peculiarities of language. The stage, therefore--and this is very
important in a consideration of the career of Ibsen--had come to be the
symbol of a certain bias in political feeling. Society in Norway was
divided into two classes, the "Danomaniacs" and the "Patriots." Neither
of these had any desire to alter the constitutional balance of power,
but while the latter wished Norway to be intellectually self-productive,
and leaned to a further isolation in language, literature, art and
manners, the former thought that danger of barbarism lay in every
direction save that of keeping close to the tradition of Denmark, from which all that was witty, graceful and civilized had proceeded.

Accordingly the theatre, at which exclusively Danish plays were acted, in the Danish style, by Danish actors and actresses, was extremely popular with the conservative class, who thought, by attendance on these performances, to preserve the distinction of language and the varnish of "high life" which came, with so much prestige, from Copenhagen. By the patriotic party, on the other hand, the stage was looked upon with grave suspicion as likely to undermine the purity of national feeling.

The earliest attempt at the opening of a National Theatre had been made at Christiania by the Swede, J. P. Stroemberg, in 1827; this was not successful, and his theatre was burned down in 1835. In it some effort had been made to use the Norwegian idiom and to train native actors, but it had been to no avail. The play-going public liked their plays to be Danish, and even nationalists of a pronounced species could not deny that dramas, like the great historical tragedies of Oehlenschlaeger, many of which dealt enthusiastically with legends that were peculiarly Norwegian, were as national as it was possible for poems by a foreign poet to be. All this time, it must be remembered, Christiania was to Copenhagen as Dublin till lately was to London, or as New York was half a century ago. It is in the arts that the old colonial instinct of dependence is most loath to disappear.

The party of the nationalists, however, had been steadily increasing in
activity, and the universal quickening of patriotic pulses in 1848 had not been without its direct action upon Norway.

Nevertheless, for various reasons of internal policy, there was perhaps no country in Europe where this period of seismic disturbance led to less public turmoil than precisely here in the North. The accession of a new king, Oscar I, in 1844, had been followed by a sense of renewed national security; the peasants were satisfied that the fresh reign would be favorable to their rights and liberties; and the monarch showed every inclination to leave his country of Norway as much as possible to its own devices. The result of all this was that '48 left no mark on the internal history of the country, and the fever which burned in youthful bosoms was mainly, if not entirely, intellectual and transcendental. The young Catiline from Grimstad, therefore, met with several sympathetic rebels, but found nobody willing to conspire. But what he did find is so important in the consideration of his future development that it is needful briefly to examine it.

Norway had, in 1850, been independent of Denmark for thirty-six years. During the greater part of that time the fiery excitements of a struggle for politic existence had fairly exhausted her mental resources, and had left her powerless to inaugurate a national literature. Meanwhile, there was no such discontinuity in the literary and scientific relations of the two countries as that which had broken their constitutional union. A tremendous effort was made by certain patriots to discover the basis of an entirely independent intellectual life, something that should start like the phoenix from the ashes of the old regime, and should offer no
likeness with what continued to flourish south of the Skagarak. But all
the efforts of the University of Christiania were vain to prevent the
cultivated classes from looking to Copenhagen as their centre of light.
Such authors as there were, and they were few indeed, followed humbly in
the footsteps of their Danish brethren.

Patriotic historians of literature are not always to be trusted, and
those who study native handbooks of Norwegian criticism must be on their
guard when these deal with the three poets who "inaugurated in song the
young liberties of Norway." The writings of the three celebrated lyric
patriots, Schwach, Bjerregaard and Hansen, will not bear to have the
blaze of European experience cast upon them; their tapers dwindle to
sparks in the light of day. They gratified the vanity of the first
generation after 1815, but they deserve no record in the chronicles of
poetic art. If Ibsen ever read these rhymes of circumstance, it must
have been to treat them with contempt.

Twenty years after the Union, however, and in Ibsen's early childhood,
an event occurred which was unique in the history of Norwegian
literature, and the consequences of which were far-reaching. As is often
the case in countries where the art of verse is as yet little exercised,
there grew up about 1830 a warm and general, but uncritical, delight in
poetry. This instinct was presently satisfied by the effusion of a vast
quantity of metrical writing, most of it very bad, and was exasperated
by a violent personal feud which for a while interested all educated
persons in Norway to a far greater degree than any other intellectual
or, for the time being, even political question. From 1834 to 1838 the
interests of all cultivated people centred around what was called the "Twilight Feud" (_Daemringsfejden_), and no record of Ibsen's intellectual development can be complete without a reference to this celebrated controversy, the results of which long outlived the popularity of its skits and pamphlets.

Modern Norwegian literature began with this great fight. The protagonists were two poets of undoubted talent, whose temperaments and tendencies were so diametrically opposed that it seemed as though Providence must have set them down in that raw and inflammable civilization for the express purpose of setting the standing corn of thought on fire. Henrik Wergeland (1808-45) was a belated son of the French Revolution; ideas, fancies, melodies and enthusiasms fermented in his ill-regulated brain, and he poured forth verses in a violent and endless stream. It is difficult, from the sources of Scandinavian opinion, to obtain a sensible impression of Wergeland. The critics of Norway as persistently overrate his talents as those of Denmark neglect and ridicule his pretensions. The Norwegians still speak of him as _himmelstraevende sublim_ ("sublime in his heavenly aspiration"); the Danes will have it that he was an hysterical poetaster. Neither view commends itself to a foreign reader of the poet.

The fact, internationally stated, seems rather to be this. In Wergeland we have a typical example of the effects of excess of fancy in a violently productive but essential uncritical nature. He was ecstatic, unmeasured, a reckless improvisatore. In his ideas he was preposterously humanitarian; a prodigious worker, his vigor of mind seemed never
exhausted by his labors; in theory an idealist, in his private life he
was charged with being scandalously sensual. He was so much the victim
of his inspiration that it would come upon him like a descending wind,
and leave him physically prostrate. In Wergeland we see an instance of
the poetical temper in its most unbridled form. A glance through the
enormous range of his collected works is like an excursion into chaos.
We are met almost at the threshold by a colossal epic, _Creation, Man
and the Messiah_ (1830); by songs that turn into dithyrambic odes, by
descriptive pieces which embrace the universe, by all the froth and roar
and turbidity of genius, with none of its purity and calm. The genius is
there; it is idle to deny it; but it is in a state of violent turmoil.

It is when the ruling talent of an age is of the character of
Wergeland's--

Thundering and bursting,
In torrents, in waves,
Carolling and shouting
Over tombs, over graves--

that delicate spirits, as in Matthew Arnold's poem, sigh for the silence
and the hush, and rise at length in open rebellion against Iacchus and
his maenads, who destroy all the quiet of life and who madden innocent
blood with their riot. Johan Sebastian Welhaven (1807-73) was a student
at the University with Wergeland, and he remained silent while the
latter made the welkin ring louder and louder with his lyric shrieks.
Welhaven endured the rationalist and republican rhetoric of Wergeland as long as he could, although with growing exasperation, until the rhapsodical author of _Creation_, transgressing all moderation, accused those who held reasonable views in literature and politics of being traitors. Then it became necessary to deal with this raw and local parody of Victor Hugo. When, in the words of _The Cask of Amontillado_, Wergeland "ventured upon insult," Welhaven "vowed he would be avenged."

Welhaven formed as complete a contrast to his antagonist as could be imagined. He was of the class of Sully Prudhomme, of Matthew Arnold, of Lowell, to name three of his younger contemporaries. In his nature all was based upon equilibrium; his spirit, though full of graceful and philosophical intuitions, was critical rather than creative. He wrote little, and with difficulty, and in exquisite form. His life was as blamelessly correct as his literary art was harmonious. Wergeland knew nothing of the Danish tradition of his day, which he treated with violent and bitter contempt. Welhaven, who had moved in the circle of the friends of Rahbek, instinctively referred every literary problem to the tribunal of Danish taste. He saw that with the enthusiasm with which the poetry of Wergeland was received in Norway was connected a suspicion of mental discipline, a growing worship of the peasant and a hatred and scorn of Denmark, with all of which he had no sympathy. He thought the time had come for better things; that the national temper ought to be mollified with the improved economic situation of the country; that the students, who were taking a more and more prominent place, ought to be on the side of the angels. It was not unnatural that Welhaven should look upon the corybantic music of Wergeland as the source and origin of
an evil of which it was really the symptom; he gathered his powers
together to crush it, and he published a thunderbolt of sonnets.

The English reader, familiar with the powerlessness of even the best
verse to make any impression upon Anglo-Saxon opinion, may smile to
think of a great moral and ethical attack conducted with no better
weapon than a paper of sonnets. But the scene of the fight was a small,
intensely local, easily agitated society of persons, all keenly though
narrowly educated, and all accustomed to be addressed in verse.
Welhaven's pamphlet was entitled _The Twilight of Norway_ (1834), and
the sonnets of which it consisted were highly polished in form, filled
with direct and pointed references to familiar persons and events and
absolutely unshrinking in attack. No poetry of equal excellence had been
produced in Norway since the Union. It is not surprising that this
invective against the tendencies of the youthful bard over whose
rhapsodies all Norway was growing crazy with praise should arrest
universal attention, although in the _Twilight_ Welhaven adroitly
avoided mentioning Wergeland by name. Fanaticism gathered in an angry
army around the outraged standard of the republican poet, but the lovers
of order and discipline had found a voice, and they clustered about
Welhaven with their support. Language was not minced by the assailants,
and still less by the defenders. The lovers of Wergeland were told that
politics and brandy were their only pleasures, but those of Welhaven
were warned that they were known to be fed with bribes from Copenhagen.
Meanwhile Welhaven himself, in successive publications, calmly analyzed
the writings of his antagonist, and proved them to be "in complete
rebellion against sound thought and the laws of beauty." The feud raged
from 1834 to 1838, and left Norway divided into two rival camps of
taste.

Although the "Twilight Feud" had passed away before Ibsen ceased to be a
boy, the effect of it was too widely spread not to affect him. In point
of fact, we see by the earliest of his lyric poems that while he was at
Grimstad he had fully made up his mind. His early songs and
complimentary pieces are all in the Danish taste, and if they show any
native influence at all, it is that of Welhaven. The extreme
superficiality of Wergeland would naturally be hateful to so arduous a
craftsman as Ibsen, and it is a fact that so far as his writings reveal
his mind to us, the all-popular poet of his youth appears to be
absolutely unknown to him. What this signifies may be realized if we say
that it is as though a great English or French poet of the second half
of the nineteenth century should seem to have never heard of Tennyson or
Victor Hugo. On the other hand, at one crucial point of a late play,
_Little Eyolf_, Ibsen actually pauses to quote Welhaven.

In critical history the absence of an influence is sometimes as
significant as the presence of it. The looseness of Wergeland's style,
its frothy abundance, its digressions and parentheses, its slipshod
violence, would be to Ibsen so many beacons of warning, to be viewed
with horror and alarm. A poem of three stanzas, "To the Poets of
Norway," only recently printed, dates from his early months in
Christiania, and shows that even in 1850 Ibsen was impatient with the
conventional literature of his day. "Less about the glaciers and the
pine-forests," he cries, "less about the dusty legends of the past, and
more about what is going on in the silent hearts of your brethren!” Here already is sounded the note which was ultimately to distinguish him from all the previous writers of the North.

No letters have been published which throw light on Ibsen's first two years in the capital. We know that he did not communicate with his parents, whose poverty was equalled by his own. He could receive no help from them, nor offer them any, and he refrained, as they refrained, from letter writing. This separation from his family, begun in this way, grew into a habit, so that when his father died in 1877 no word had passed between him and his son for nearly thirty years. When Ibsen reached Christiania, in March, 1850, his first act was to seek out his friend Schulerud, who was already a student. For some time he shared the room of Schulerud and his thrifty meals; later on the two friends, in company with Theodor Abildgaard, a young revolutionary journalist, lived in lodgings kept by a certain Mother Saether.

Schulerud received a monthly allowance which was “not enough for one, and starvation for two”; but Ibsen's few dollars soon came to an end, and he seems to have lived on the kindness of Schulerud to their great mutual privation. Both young men attended the classes of a celebrated “crammer” of that day, H. A. S. Heltberg, who had opened in 1843 a Latin school where elder pupils came for a two-years' course to prepare them for taking their degree. This place, known familiarly as “the Student Factory,” holds quite a prominent place in Norwegian literary history, Ibsen, Bjørnson, Vinje and Jonas Lie having attended its classes and passed from it to the University.
Between these young men, the leading force of literature in the coming age, a generous friendship sprang up, despite the disparity in their ages. Vinje, a peasant from Thelemark, was thirty-two; he had been a village schoolmaster and had only now, in 1850, contrived to reach the University. With Vinje, the founder of the movement for writing exclusively in Norwegian patois, Ibsen had a warm personal sympathy, while he gave no intellectual adherence to his theories. Between the births of Vinje and Bjoernson there stretched a period of fourteen years, yet Bjoernson was a student before either Ibsen or Vinje. That Ibsen immediately formed Bjoernson's acquaintance seems to be proved from the fact that they both signed a protest against the deportation of a Dane called Harring on May 29, 1850. It was a fortunate chance which threw Ibsen thus suddenly into the midst of a group of those in whom the hopes of the new generation were centred. But we are left largely to conjecture in what manner their acquaintanceship acted upon his mind.

His material life during the next year is obscure. Driven by the extremity of need, it is plain that he adopted every means open to him by which he could add a few dollars to Schulerud's little store. He wrote for the poor and fugitive journals of the day, in prose and verse; but the payment of the Norwegian press in those days was almost nothing. It is difficult to know how he subsisted, yet he continued to exist. Although none of his letters of this period seem to have been preserved, a few landmarks are left us. The little play called _Kaempehoeien_ (The Warrior's Barrow), which he had brought unfinished with him from Grimstad, was completed and put into shape in May, 1850, accepted at the
Christiania Theatre, and acted three times during the following autumn. Perhaps the most interesting fact connected with this performance was that the only female part, that of Blanka, was taken by a young debutante, Laura Svendsen; this was the actress afterwards to rise to the height of eminence as the celebrated Mrs. Gundersen, no doubt the most gifted of all Ibsen's original interpreters.

It was a matter of course that the poet was greatly cheered by the acceptance of his play, and he immediately set to work on another, _Olaf Liljekrans_; but this he put aside when _Kaempehoeien_ practically failed. He wrote a satirical comedy called _Norma_. He endeavored to get certain of his works, dramatic and lyric, published in Christiania, but all the schemes fell through. It is certain that 1851 began darkly for the young man, and that his misfortunes encouraged in him a sour and rebellious temper. For the first and only time in his life he meddled with practical politics. Vinje and he—in company with a charming person, Paul Botten-Hansen (1824-69), who flits very pleasantly through the literary history of this time—founded a newspaper called _Andhrimner_, which lasted for nine months.

One of the contributors was Abildgaard, who, as we have seen, lived in the same house with Ibsen. He was a wild being, who had adopted the republican theories of the day in their crudest form. He posed as the head of a little body whose object was to dethrone the king, and to found a democracy in Norway. On July 7, 1851, the police made a raid upon these childish conspirators, the leaders being arrested and punished with a long imprisonment. The poet escaped, as by the skin of
his teeth, and the warning was a lifelong one. He never meddled with politics any more. This was, indeed, as perhaps he felt, no time for rebellion; all over Europe the eruption of socialism had spent itself, and the docility of the populations had become wonderful.

The discomfort and uncertainty of Ibsen's position in Christiania made him glad to fill a post which the violinist, Ole Bull, offered him during autumn. The newly constituted National Theatre in Bergen (opened Jan. 2, 1850) had accepted a prologue written for an occasion by the young poet, and on November 6, 1851, Ibsen entered into a contract by which he bound himself go to Bergen "to assist the theatre as dramatic author." The salary was less than L70 a year, but it was eked out by travelling grants, and little as it might be, it was substantially more than the nothing-at-all which Ibsen had been enjoying in Christiania.

It is difficult to imagine what asset could be bought to the treasuries of a public theatre by a youth of three and twenty so ill-educated, so empty of experience and so ill-read as Ibsen was in 1851. His crudity, we may be sure, passed belief. He was the novice who has not learned his business, the tyro to whom the elements of his occupation are unknown. We have seen that when he wrote _Catilina_ he had neither sat through nor read any of the plays of the world, whether ancient or modern. The pieces which belong to his student years reveal a preoccupation with Danish dramas of the older school, Oehlenschlaeger and (if we may guess what _Norma_ was) Holberg, but with nothing else. Yet Ole Bull, one of the most far-sighted men of his time, must have perceived the germs of theatrical genius in him, and it is probable that Ibsen owed his
appointment more to what this wise patron felt in his future than what Ole Bull or any one else could possibly point to as yet accomplished.

Unquestionably, a rude theatrical penetration could already he divined in his talk about the stage, vague and empirical as that must have been.

At all events, to Bergen he went, as a sort of literary manager, as a Claretie or Antoine, to compare a small thing with great ones, and the fact was of inestimable value. It may even be held, without fear of paradox, that this was the turning-point of Ibsen's life, that this blind step in the dark, taken in the magnificent freedom of youth, was what made him what he became. No Bergen in 1851, we may say, and no _Doll's House_ or _Hedda Gabler_ ultimately to follow. For what it did was to force this stubborn genius, which might so easily have slipped into sinister and abnormal paths, and have missed the real humanity of the stage, to take the tastes of the vulgar into due consideration and to acquaint himself with the necessary laws of play-composition.

Ibsen may seem to have little relation with the drama of the world, but in reality he is linked with it at every step. There is something of Shakespeare in _John Gabriel Borkman_, something Moliere in _Ghosts_, something of Goethe in _Peer Gynt_. We may go further and say, though it would have made Ibsen wince, that there is something of Scribe in _An Enemy of the People_. Is very doubtful whether, without the discipline which forced him to put on the stage, at Bergen and in Christiania, plays evidently unsympathetic to his own taste, which obliged him to do his best for the popular reception of those plays, and which forced him minutely to analyze their effects, he would ever have been the world-
moving dramatist which, as all sane critics must admit, he at length became.

He made some mistakes at first; how could he fail to do so? It was the recognition of these blunders, and perhaps the rough censure of them the local press, which induced the Bergen theatre to scrape a few dollars together and send him, in charge of some of the leading actors and actresses, to Copenhagen and Dresden for instruction. To go from Bergen to Copenhagen was like travelling from Abdera to Athens, and to find a species of Sophocles in J. A. Heiberg, who had since 1849 been sole manager of the Royal Theatre. Here the drama of the world, all the salutary names, all the fine traditions, burst upon the pilgrims from the North. Heiberg, the gracious and many-sided, was the centre of light in those days; no one knew the stage as he knew no one interpreted it with such splendid intelligence, and he received the crude Norwegian "dramatist-manager" with the utmost elegance of cordiality. Among the teachers of Ibsen, Heiberg ranks as the foremost. We may farther and say that he was the last. When Ibsen had learned the lesson of Heiberg, only nature and his own genius had anything more to teach him. [See Note below] In August, 1852, rich with the spoils of time, but otherwise poor indeed, Ibsen made his way back to his duties in Bergen.

[Note: Perhaps no author, during the whole of his career, more deeply impressed Ibsen with reverence and affection than Johan Ludvig Heiberg did. When the great Danish poet died (at Bonderup, August 25, 1860), Ibsen threw on his tomb the characteristic bunch of bitter herbs called _Til de genlevende_--"To the Survivors," in which he expressed the
faintest appreciation of those who lavished posthumous honor on Heiberg in Denmark:

In your land a torch he lifted;
With its flame ye scorched his forehead.

How to swing the sword he taught you,
And,--ye plunged it in his bosom.

While he routed trolls of darkness,--
With your shields you tripped and bruised him.

But his glittering star of conquest
Ye must guard, since he has left you:

Try, at least, to keep it shining,
While the thorn-crowned conqueror slumbers.]

CHAPTER III

LIFE IN BERGEN (1852-57)

Ibsen's native biographers have not found much to record, and still less that deserves to recorded, about his life during the next five years. He
remained in Bergen, cramped by want of means in his material condition, and much harassed and worried by the little pressing requirements of the theatre. It seems that every responsibility fell upon his shoulders, and that there was no part of stage-life that it was not his duty to look after. The dresses of the actresses, the furniture, the scene-painting, the instruction of raw Norwegian actors and actresses, the selection of plays, now to please himself, now to please the bourgeois of Bergen, all this must be done by the poet or not done at all. Just so, two hundred years earlier, we may imagine Moliere, at Carcassonne or Albi, bearing up in his arms, a weary Titan, all the frivolities and anxieties and misdeeds of a whole company of comedians.

So far as our very scanty evidence goes, we find the poet isolated from his fellows, so far as isolation was possible, during his long stay at Bergen. He was not accused, and if there had been a chance he would have been accused, of dereliction. No doubt he pushed through the work of the theatre doggedly, but certainly not in a convivial spirit. The Norwegians are a hospitable and festal people, and there is no question that the manager of the theatre would have unusual opportunities of being jolly with his friends. But it does not appear that Ibsen made friends; if so, they were few, and they were as quiet as himself. Even in these early years he did not invite confidences, and no one found him wearing his heart upon his sleeve. He went through his work without effusion, and there is no doubt that what leisure he enjoyed he spent in study, mainly of dramatic literature.

His reading must have been limited by his insensitivity to foreign
languages. All through his life he forgot the tongues of other countries almost faster than he gained them. Probably, at this time, he had begun to know German, a language in which he did ultimately achieve a fluency which was, it appears, always ungrammatical. But, as is not unfrequent with a man who is fond of reading but no linguist, Ibsen's French and English came and went in a trembling uncertainty. As time passed on, he gave up the effort to read, even a newspaper, in either language.

The mile-stones in this otherwise blank time are the original plays which, perhaps in accordance with some clause in his agreement, he produced at his theatre in the first week of January in each year. A list of them cannot be spared in this place to the most indolent of readers, since it offers, in a nutshell, a resume of what the busy imagination of Ibsen was at work upon up to his thirtieth year. His earliest new-year's gift to the play-goers of Bergen was _St. John's Night_, 1853, a piece which has not been printed; in 1854 he revived _The Warrior's Barrow_; in 1855 he made an immense although irregular advance with _Lady Inger at Oestraat_; in 1856 he produced _The Feast at Solhoug_; in 1857 a rewritten version of the early _Olaf Liljekrans_. These are the juvenile works of Ibsen, which are scarcely counted in the recognized canon of his writings. None of them is completely representative of his genius, and several are not yet within reach of the English reader. Yet they have a considerable importance, and must detain us for a while. They are remarkable as showing the vigor of the effort by which he attempted to create an independent style for himself, no less than the great difficulties which he encountered in following this admirable aim.
_Lady Inger at Oestraat_, written in the winter of 1854 but not published until 1857, is unique among Ibsen's works as a romantic exercise in the manner of Scribe. It is the sole example of a theme taken by him directly from comparatively modern history, and treated purely for its value as a study of contemporary intrigue. From this point of view it curiously exemplifies a remark of Hazlitt: "The progress of manners and knowledge has an influence on the stage, and will in time perhaps destroy both tragedy and comedy. ... At last, there will be nothing left, good nor bad, to be desired or dreaded, on the theatre or in real life."

When Ibsen undertook to write about Inger Gyldenloewe, he was but little acquainted with the particulars of her history. He conceived her, as he found her in the incomplete chronicles he consulted, as a Matriarch, a wonderful and heroic elderly woman around whom all the hopes of an embittered patriotism were legitimately centred. Unfortunately, "the progress of knowledge," as Hazlitt would say, exposed the falsity of this conception. A closer inspection of the documents, and further analysis of the condition of Norway in 1528, destroyed the fair illusion, and showed Ibsen in the light of an indulgent idealist.

Here is what Jaeger [Note: In _En literaert Livsbillede_] has to give us of the disconcerting results of research:

In real life Lady Inger was not a woman formed upon so grand a plan. She
was the descendant of an old and noble family which had preserved its
dignity, and she consequently was the wealthiest landowner in the
country. This, and this alone, gives her a right to a place in history.

If we study her life, we find no reason to suppose that patriotic
considerations ever affected her conduct. The motive power of her
actions was on a far lower plane, and seems to have consisted mainly in
an amazingly strong instinct for adding to her wealth and her status. We
find her, for instance, on one occasion seizing the estates of a
neighbor, and holding them till she was actually forced to resign them.

When she gave her daughters in marriage to Danish noblemen, it was to
secure direct advantage from alliance with the most high-born sons-in-
law procurable. When she took a convent under her protection, she
contrived to extort a rent which well repaid her. Even for a good action
she exacted a return, and when she offered harbor to the persecuted
Chancellor, she had the adroitness to be well rewarded by a large sum in
rose-nobles and Hungarian gulden.

All this could not fail to be highly exasperating to Ibsen, who had set
out to be a realist, and was convicted by the spiteful hand of history
of having been an idealist of the rose-water class. No wonder that he
never touched the sequence of modern events any more.

There is some slight, but of course unconscious, resemblance to
_Macbeth_ in the external character of _Lady Inger_. This play has
something of the roughness of a mediaeval record, and it depicts a
condition of life where barbarism uncouthly mingles with a certain
luxury of condition. There is, however, this radical difference that in
Lady Inger there is nothing preternatural, and it is, indeed, in this play that Ibsen seems first to appreciate the value of a stiff attention to realism. The romantic elements of the story, however, completely dominate his imagination, and when we have read the play carefully what remains with us most vividly is the picturesqueness and unity of the scene. The action, vehement and tumultuous as it is, takes place entirely within the walls of Oestraat castle, a mysterious edifice, sombre and ancient, built on a crag over the ocean, and dimly lighted by Magic casements opening on the foam

Of perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn.

The action is exclusively nocturnal, and so large a place in it is taken by huge and portable candlesticks that it might be called the Tragedy of the Candelabra. Through the windows, on the landward side, a procession of mysterious visitors go by in the moonlight, one by one, each fraught with the solemnity of fate. The play is full of striking pictures, groups in light and shade, pictorial appeals to terror and pity.

The fault of the drama lies in the uncertain conception of the characters, and particularly of that of the Matriarch herself. Inger is described to us as the Mother of the Norwegian People, as the one strong, inflexible and implacable brain moving in a world of depressed and irritated men. "Now there is no knight left in our land," says Finn, but--and this is the point from which the play starts--there is Inger Gyldenloeve. We have approached the moment of crisis when the fortunes
and the fates of Norway rest upon the firmness of this majestic woman.

Inger is driven forward on the tide of circumstance, and, however she
may ultimately fail, we demand evidence of her inherent greatness. This,
however, we fail to receive, and partly, no doubt, because Ibsen was
still distracted at the division of the ways.

Oehlenschlaeger, if he had attempted this theme, would have made no
attempt after subtlety of character painting and still less after
correctness of historic color. He would have given small shrift to Olaf
Skaktavl, the psychological outlaw. But he would have drawn Inger, the
Mother of her People, in majestic strokes, and we should have had a
great simplicity, a noble outline with none of the detail put in. Ibsen,
already, cannot be satisfied with this; to him the detail is every
thing, and the result is a hopeless incongruity between the cartoon and
the finished work.

Lady Inger, in Ibsen's play, fails to impress us with greatness. "The
deed no less than the attempt confounds" her. She displays, from the
opening scene, a weakness that is explicable, but excludes all evidence
of her energy. The ascendancy of Nils Lykke, over herself and over her
singularly and unconvincingly modern daughter, Elima, in what does it
consist? In a presentation of a purely physical attractiveness; Nils
Lykke is simply a voluptuary, pursuing his good fortunes, with impudent
ease, in the home of his ancestral enemies. In his hands, and not in his
only, the majestic Inger is reduced from a queen to a pawn. All manhood,
we are told, is dead in Norway; if this be so, then what a field is
cleared where a heroine like Inger, not young and a victim to her
passions, nor old and delivered to decrepit fears, may show us how a
woman of intellect and force can take the place of man. Instead of this,
one disguised and anonymous adventurer after another comes forth out of
the night, and confuses her with pretensions and traps her with deceits
against which her intellect protests but her will is powerless to
contend.

Another feature in the conduct of _Lady Inger_ portrays the ambitious
but the inexperienced dramatist. No doubt a pious commentator can
successfully unravel all the threads of the plot, but the spectator
demands that a play should be clearly and easily intelligible. The
audience, however, is sorely puzzled by the events of this awful third
night after Martinmas, and resents the obscurity of all this intrigue by
candlelight. Why do the various persons meet at Oestraat? Who sends them?
Whence do they come and whither do they go? To these questions, no
doubt, an answer can be found, and it is partly given, and very
awkwardly, by the incessant introduction of narrative. The confused and
melodramatic scene in the banquet-hall between Nils Lykke and Skaktavl
is of central importance, but what is it about? The business with
Lucia's coffin is a kind of nightmare, in the taste of Webster or of
Cyril Tourneur. All these shortcomings are slurred over by the
enthusiastic critics of Scandinavia, yet they call for indulgence. The
fact is that _Lady Inger_ is a brilliant piece of romantic extravagance,
which is extremely interesting in illuminating the evolution of Ibsen's
genius, and particularly as showing him in the act of emancipating
himself from Danish traditions, but which has little positive value as a
drama.
The direct result of the failure of _Lady Inger_—for it did not please
the play-goers of Bergen and but partly satisfied its author—was,
however, to send him back, for the moment, more violently than ever to
the Danish tradition. Any record of this interesting phase in Ibsen's
career is, however, complicated by the fact that late in his life (in
1883) he did what was very unusual with him: he wrote a detailed account
of the circumstances of his poetical work in 1855 and 1856. He denied,
in short, that he had undergone any influence from the Danish poet whom
he had been persistently accused of imitating, and he traced the
movement of his mind to purely Norwegian sources. During the remainder
of his lifetime, of course, this statement greatly confounded criticism,
and there is still a danger of Ibsen's disclaimer being accepted for
gospel. However, literary history must be built on the evidence before
it, and the actual text of _The Feast at Solhoug_, and of _Olaf
Liljekrans_ must be taken in spite of anything their author chose to say
nearly thirty years afterwards. Great poets, without the least wish to
mystify, often, in the cant phrase, "cover their tracks." Tennyson, in
advanced years, denied that he had ever been influenced by Shelley or
Keats. So Ibsen disclaimed any effect upon his style of the lyrical
dramas of Hertz. But we must appeal from the arrogance of old age to the
actual works of youth.

Henrik Hertz (1798-1870) was the most exquisite, the most delicate, of
the Danish writers of his age. He was deeply impressed with the
importance of form in drama, and at the height of his powers he began to
compose rhymed plays which were like old ballads put into dialogue. His
comedy of _Cupid's Strokes of Genius_ (1830) began a series of tragi-comedies which gradually deepened in passion and melody, till they culminated in two of the acknowledged masterpieces of the Danish stage, _Svend Dyring's House_ (1837) and _King Rene's Daughter_ (1845). The genius of Hertz was diametrically opposed to that of Ibsen; in all Europe there were not two authors less alike. Hertz would have pleased Kenelm Digby, and if that romantic being had read Danish, the poet of chivalry must have had a niche in _The Broad Stone of Honour_. Hertz's style is delicate to the verge of sweetness; his choice of words is fantastically exquisite, yet so apposite as to give an impression of the inevitable. He cares very little for psychological exactitude or truth of observation; but he is the very type of what we mean by a verbal artist.

Ibsen made acquaintance with the works, and possibly with the person, of Hertz, when he was in Copenhagen in 1852. There can be no doubt whatever that, while he was anxiously questioning his own future, and conscious of crude faults in _Lady Inger_, he set himself, as a task, to write in the manner of Hertz. It is difficult to doubt that it was a deliberate exercise, and we see the results in _The Feast at Solhoug_ and in _Olaf Liljekrans_. These two plays are in ballad-rhyme and prose, like Hertz's romantic dramas; there is the same determination to achieve the chivalric ideal; but the work is that of a disciple, not of a master.

Where Hertz, with his singing-robcs fluttering about him, dances without an ungraceful gesture through the elaborate and yet simple masque that he has set before him to perform, Ibsen has high and sudden flights of metrical writing, but breaks down surprisingly at awkward intervals, and
displays a hopeless inconsistency between his own nature and the medium
in which he is forcing himself to write. As a proof that the similarity
between _The Feast at Solhoug_ and _Svend Dyring's House_ is accidental,
it has been pointed out that Ibsen produced his own play on the Bergen
stage in January, 1856, and revived Hertz's a month later. It might,
surely, be more sensibly urged that this fact shows how much he was
captivated by the charm of the Danish dramatist.

The sensible thing, in spite of Ibsen's late disclaimer, is to suppose
that, in the consciousness of his crudity and inexperience as a writer,
he voluntarily sat at the feet of the one great poet whom he felt had
most to teach him. On the boards at Bergen, _The Feast at Solhoug_ was a
success, while _Olaf Liljekrans_ was a failure; but neither incident
could have meant very much to Ibsen, who, if there ever was a poet who
lived in the future, was waiting and watching for the development of his
own genius. Slowly, without precocity, without even that joy in strength
of maturity which comes to most great writers before the age of thirty,
he toiled on in a sort of vacuum. His youth was one of unusual darkness,
because he had not merely poverty, isolation, citizenship of a remote
and imperfectly civilized country to contend against, but because his
critical sense was acute enough to teach him that he himself was still
unripe, still unworthy of the fame that he thirsted for. He had not even
the consolation which a proud confidence in themselves gives to the
unappreciated young, for in his heart of hearts he knew that he had as
yet done nothing which deserved the highest praise. But his imagination
was expanding with a steady sureness, and the long years of his
apprenticeship were drawing to a close.
Ibsen was now, like other young Norwegian poets, and particularly
Bjoernson, coming into the range of that wind of nationalistic
inspiration which had begun to blow down from the mountains and to fill
every valley with music. The Norwegians were discovering that they
possessed a wonderful hidden treasure in their own ancient poetry and
legend. It was a gentle, clerically minded poet--himself the son of a
peasant--Joergen Moe (1813-82), long afterwards Bishop of Christianssand,
who, as far back as 1834, began to collect from peasants the folk-tales
of Norway. The childlike innocence and playful humor of these stories
were charming to the mind of Moe, who was fortunately joined by a
stronger though less delicate spirit in the person of Peter Christian
Asbjoernsen. Their earliest collection of folk-lore in collaboration
appeared in 1841, but it was the full edition of 1856 which produced a
national sensation, and doubtless awakened Ibsen in Bergen. Meanwhile,
in 1853, M. B. Landstad had published the earliest of his collections of
the folkeviser, or national songs, while L. M. Lindeman in the same
years (1853-59) was publishing, in installments, the peasant melodies of
Norway. Moreover, Ibsen, who read no Icelandic, was studying the ancient
sagas in the faithful and vigorous paraphrase of Petersen, and all
combined to determine him to make an experiment in a purely national and
archaistic direction.

Ibsen, whose practice is always better than his theory, has given rather
a confused account of the circumstances that led to the composition of
his next play, _The Vikings at Helgeland_. But it is clear that in
looking through Petersen for a subject which would display, in broad and
primitive forms, the clash of character in an ancient Norwegian family, he fell upon "Volsungasaga," and somewhat rashly responded to its vigorous appeal. He thought that in this particular episode, "the titanic conditions and occurrences of the 'Nibelungenlied' and other pro-mediaeval legends had "been reduced to human dimensions." He believed that to dramatize such a story would lift what he called "our national epic material" to a higher plane. There is one phrase in his essay which is very interesting, in the light it throws upon the object which the author had before him in writing _The Vikings at Helgeland_. He says clearly--and this was intended as a revolt against the tradition of Oehlenschlaeger--"it was not my aim to present our mythic world, but simply our life in primitive times." Brandes says of this departure that it is "indeed a new conquest, but, like so many conquests, associated with very extensive plundering."

In turning to an examination of _The Vikings_, the first point which demands notice is that Ibsen has gained a surprising mastery over the arts of theatrical writing since we met with him last. There is nothing of the lyrical triviality of the verse in _The Feast at Solhoug_ about the trenchant prose of _The Vikings_, and the crepuscular dimness of _Lady Inger_ is exchanged for a perfect lucidity and directness. Whatever we may think about the theatrical propriety of the conductor of the vikings, there is no question at all as to what it is they do and mean. Ibsen has gained, and for good, that master quality of translucent presentation without which all other stage gifts are shorn of their value. When we have, however, praised the limpidity of _The Vikings at Helgeland_, we have, in honesty, to make several reservations in our
criticism of the author's choice of a subject. It is valuable to compare Ibsen's treatment of Icelandic family-saga with that of William Morris; let us say, in _The Lovers of Gudrun_. That enchanting little epic deals with an episode from one of the great Iceland narratives, and follows it much more closely than Ibsen's does. But we are conscious of a less painful effort and of a more human result. Morris does successfully what Ibsen unsuccessfully aimed at doing: he translates the heroic and half-fabulous action into terms that are human and credible.

It was, moreover, an error of judgment on the part of the Norwegian playwright to make his tragedy a mosaic of effective bits borrowed hither and thither from the Sagas. Scandinavian bibliography has toiled to show his indebtedness to this tale and to that, and he has been accused of concealing his plagiarisms. But to say this is to miss the mark. A poet is at liberty to steal what he will, if only he builds his thefts up into a living structure of his own. For this purpose, however, it is practically found that, owing perhaps to the elastic consistency of individual human nature, it is safest to stick to one story, embroidering and developing it along its own essential lines.

There is great vigor, however, in many of the scenes in _The Vikings_. The appearance of Hioerdis on the stage, in the opening act, marks, perhaps, the first occasion on which Ibsen had put forth his full strength as a playwright. This entrance of Hioerdis ought to be extremely effective; in fact, we understand, it rarely is. The cause of this disappointment can easily be discovered. It is the misfortune of The Vikings that it is hardly to be acted by mortal men. Hioerdis herself is
superhuman; she has eaten the heart of a wolf, she claims direct descent from a race of fighting giants. There is a grandeur about the conception of her form and character, but it is a grandeur which might well daunt a human actress. One can faintly imagine the part being played by Mrs. Siddons, with such an extremity of fierceness and terror that ladies and gentlemen would be carried out of the theatre in hysterics, as in the days of Byron. Where Hioerdís insults her guests, and contrives the horrid murder of the boy Thorolf before their eyes, we have a stage-dilemma presented to us—either the actress must treat the scene inadequately, or else intolerably. _Ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet_, and we shrink from Hioerdís with a physical disgust. Her great hands and shrieking mouth are like Bellona's, and they smell of blood.

What is true of Hioerdís is true in less degree of all the characters in _The Vikings_. They are "great beautiful half-witted men," as Mr. Chesterton would say:

Our sea was dark with dreadful ships
Full of strange spoil and fire,
And hairy men, as strange as sin,
With horrid heads, came wading in
Through the long low sea-mire.

This is the other side of the picture; this is how Oermulf and his seven terrible sons must have appeared to Kaare the peasant, and this is how, to tell the truth, they would in real life appear to us. The persons in
_The Vikings at Helgeland_ are so primitive that they scarcely appeal to our sense of reality. In spite of all the romantic color that the poet has lavished upon them, and the majestic sentiments which he has put into their mouths, we feel that the inhabitants of Helgeland must have regarded them as those of Surbiton regarded the beings who were shot down from Mars in Mr. Wells' blood-curdling story.

_The Vikings at Helgeland_ is a work of extraordinary violence and agitation. The personages bark at one another like seals and roar like sea-lions; they "cry for blood, like beasts at night." Oernulf, the aged father of a grim and speechless clan, is sorely wounded at the beginning of the play, but it makes no difference to him; no one binds up his arm, but he talks, fights, travels as before. We may see here foreshadowed various features of Ibsen's more mannered work. Here is his favorite conventional tame man, since, among the shouting heroes, Gunnar whimpers like a Tesman. Here is Ibsen's favorite trick of unrequited self-sacrifice; it is Sigurd, in Gunnar's armor, who kills the mystical white bear, but it is Gunnar who reaps the advantage. It is only fair to say that there is more than this to applaud in _The Vikings at Helgeland_; it moves on a consistent and high level of austere romantic beauty. Mr. William Archer, who admires the play more than any Scandinavian critic has done, justly draws attention to the nobility of Oernulf's entrance in the third act. Yet, on the whole, I confess myself unable to be surprised at the severity with which Heiberg judged _The Vikings_ at its first appearance, a severity which must have wounded Ibsen to the quick.

The year 1857 was one of unsettlement in Ibsen's condition. The period
for which he had undertaken to manage the theatre at Bergen had now come
to a close, and he was not anxious to prolong it. He had had enough of
Bergen, to which only one chain now bound him. Those who read the
incidents of a poet's life into the pages of his works may gratify their
tendency by seeing in the discussions between Dagny and Hioerdis some
 echo of the thoughts which were occupying Ibsen's mind in relation to
the married state. Since his death, the story has been told of his love-
affair with a very young girl, Rikke Holst, who had attracted his notice
by throwing a bunch of wild flowers in his face, and whom he followed
and desired to marry. Her father had rejected the proposal with
indignation. Ibsen had suffered considerably, but this was, after all,
an early and a very fugitive sentiment, which made no deep impression on
his heart, although it seems to have always lingered in his memory.

There had followed a sentiment much deeper and much more emphatic. A
charming, though fragmentary, set of verses, addressed in January, 1856,
to Miss Susannah Thoresen, show that already for a long while he had
come to regard this girl of twenty as "the young dreaming enigma," the
possible solution of which interested him more than that of any other
living problem. It was more than the conversation of a versifying lover
which made Ibsen speak of Miss Thoresen's "blossoming child-soul" as the
bourne of his ambitions. In his dark way, he was already violently in
love with her.

The household of her father, Hans Conrad Thoresen, was the most
cultivated in Bergen. He himself, the rector of Holy Cross, was a
bookish, meditative man of no particular initiative, but he had married,
as his third wife, Anna Maria Kragh, a Dane by birth, and for a long
time, with the possible exception of Camilla Collett, Wergeland's
sister, the most active woman of letters in Norway. Mrs. Thoresen was
the step-mother of Susannah, the only child of her husband's second
marriage. Between Magdalene Thoresen and Ibsen a strong friendship had
sprung up, which lasted to the end of their lives, and some of Ibsen's
best letters are those written to his wife's step-mother. She worked
hard for him at the Bergen theatre, translating plays from the French,
and it was during Ibsen's management of the theatre that several of her
own pieces were produced. Her prose stories, in connection with which
her name lives in Norwegian literature, were not yet written; so long as
Ibsen was at her side, her ideas seem to have been concentrated on the
stage. Constant communication with this charming woman only nine years
his senior, and much his superior in conventional culture, must have
been a school of refinement to the crude and powerful young poet. And
now the wise Magdalene appeared to him in a new light, dedicating to him
the best treasure of the family circle, the gay and yet mysterious
Susannah.

While he was writing _The Vikings at Helgeland_, and courting Susannah
Thoresen, Ibsen received what seemed a timely invitation to settle in
Christiania as director of the Norwegian Theatre; he returned,
thereupon, to the capital in the summer of 1857, after an absence of six
years. Now began another period of six years more, these the most
painful in Ibsen's life, when, as Halvorsen has said, he had to fight
not merely for the existence of himself and his family, but for the very
existence of Norwegian poetry and the Norwegian stage. This struggle was
an excessively distressing one. He had left Bergen crippled with debts, and his marriage (June 26, 1856) weighed him down with further responsibilities. The Norwegian Theatre at Christiania was, a secondary house, ill-supported by its patrons, often tottering at the brink of bankruptcy, and so primitive was the situation of literature in the country that to attempt to live by poetry and drama was to court starvation. His slender salary was seldom paid, and never in full. The only published volume of Ibsen's which had (up to 1863) sold at all was _The Warriors_, by which he had made in all 227 specie dollars (or about L25).

The Christiania he had come to, however, was not that which he had left. In many directions it had developed rapidly. From an intellectual point of view, the labors of the nationalists had made themselves felt; the folk-lore of Landstad, Moe and Asbjørnsen had impressed young imaginations. In some of its forms the development was unpleasing and discouraging to Ibsen; the success of the blank-verse tragedies of Andreas Munch (_Salomon de Caus_, 1855; _Lord William Russell_, 1857) was, for instance, an irritating step in the wrong direction. The newborn school of prose fiction, with Bjørnson as its head (_Synnoeve Solbakken_, 1857; _Arne_, 1858), with Camilla Collett's _Prefect's Daughters_, 1855, as its herald; with Oestgaard's sketches of peasant life and humors in the mountains (1852)--all this was a direct menace to the popularity of the national stage, offering an easy and alluring alternative for home-loving citizens. Was it certain that the classic Danish, which alone Ibsen cared to write, would continue to be the language of the cultivated classes in Norway? Here was Ivar Aasen (in
1853) showing that the irritating landsmaal could be used for prose and verse.

Wherever he turned Ibsen saw increased vitality, but in shapes that were either useless or antagonistic to himself, and all that was harsh and saturnine in his nature awakened. We see Ibsen, at this moment of his life, like Shakespeare in his darkest hour, "in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes," unappreciated and ready to doubt the reality of his own genius; and murmuring to himself:--

Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope.
With what I most enjoy contented least.

How little his greatness was perceived in the Christiania literary coteries may be gathered from the little fact that the species of official anthology of _Modern Norwegian Poets_, published in 1859, though it netted the shallows of national song very closely, contained not a line by the author of the lovely lyrics in _The Feast at Solhoug_.
It was at this low and miserable moment that Ibsen's talent suddenly took wings; he conceived, in the summer of 1858, what finally became, five years later, his first acknowledged masterpiece, and perhaps the most finished of all his writings, the sculptural tragedy of _The Pretenders_.


The Pretenders (Kongsemnerne, properly stuff from which Kings can be made) is the earliest of the plays of Ibsen in which the psychological interest is predominant, and in which there is no attempt to disguise the fact. Nothing that has since been written about this drama, the very perfection of which is baffling to criticism, has improved upon the impression which Georg Brandes received from it when he first read it forty years ago. The passage is classic, and deserves to be cited, if only as perhaps the very earliest instance in which the genius of Ibsen was rewarded by the analysis of a great critic. Brandes wrote (in 1867):--

What is it that The Pretenders treats of? Looked at simply, it is an old story. We all know the tale of Aladdin and Nureddin, the simple legend in the Arabian Nights, and our great poet's [Oehlenschlaeger's] incomparable poem. In The Pretenders two figures again stand opposed to one another as the superior and the inferior being, an Aladdin and a Nureddin nature. It is towards this contrast that Ibsen has hitherto unconsciously directed his endeavors, just as Nature feels her way in her blind preliminary attempts to form her types. Hakon and Skule are pretenders to the same throne, scions of royalty out of whom a king may be made. But the first is the incarnation of fortune, victory, right and confidence; the second--the principal figure in the play, masterly in its truth and originality--is the brooder, a prey to inward struggle and endless distrust, brave and ambitious, with perhaps every qualification and claim to be king, but lacking the inexpressible, impalpable somewhat that would give a value to all the rest--the wonderful Lamp. "I am a king's arm," he says, "mayhap a king's brain as well; but Hakon is the
whole king." "You have wisdom and courage, and all noble gifts of the
mind," says Hakon to him; "you are born to stand nearest a king, but not
to be a king yourself."

To a poet the achievements of his greatest contemporaries in their
common art have all the importance of high deeds in statesmanship and
war. It is, therefore, by no means extravagant to see in the noble
 emulation of the two dukes in _The Pretenders_ some reflection of
Ibsen's attitude to the youthful and brilliant Bjoernson. The luminous
self-reliance, the ardor and confidence and good fortune of Bjoernson-
Hakon could not but offer a violent contrast with the gloom and
hesitation, the sick revulsions of hope and final lack of conviction, of
Ibsen-Skule. It was Bjoernson's "belt of strength," as it was Hakon's,
that he had utter belief in himself, and with this his rival could not
yet girdle himself. "The luckiest man is the greatest man," says Bishop
Nicholas in the play, and Bjoernson seemed in these melancholy years as
lucky as Ibsen was unlucky. But the Bishop's views were not wide enough,
and the end was not yet.

CHAPTER IV

THE SATIRES (1857-67)

Temperament and environment combined at the period we have now reached
to turn Ibsen into a satirist. It was during his time of _Sturm und
Drang_, from 1857 to 1864, that the harshest elements in his nature were
awakened, and that he became one who loved to lash the follies of his age. With the advent of prosperity and recognition this phase melted away, leaving Ibsen without illusions and without much pity, but no longer the scourge of his fellow-citizens. Although _The Pretenders_, a work of dignified and polished aloofness, was not completed until 1863, it really belongs to the earlier and more experimental section of Ibsen's works, and is so completely the outcome and the apex of his national studies that it has seemed best to consider it with _The Vikings at Helgeland_, in spite of its immense advance upon that drama.

But we must now go back a year, and take up an entirely new section which overlaps the old, namely, that of Ibsen's satires in dramatic rhyme.

With regard to the adoption of that form of poetic art, a great difference existed between Norwegian and English taste, and this must be borne in mind. Almost exactly at the date when Ibsen was inditing the sharp couplets of his _Love's Comedy_, Tennyson, in _Sea Dreams_, was giving voice to the English abandonment of satire--which had been rampant in the generation of Byron--in the famous words:--

I loathe it: he had never kindly heart,
Nor ever cared to better his own kind,
Who first wrote satire, with no pity in it.

What England repudiated, Norway comprehended, and in certain hands enjoyed. Polemical literature, if seldom of a high class, was abundant
and was much appreciated. The masterpiece of modern Norwegian poetry
was, still, the satiric cycle of Welhaven. In ordinary controversy, the
tone was more scathing, the bludgeon was whirled more violently, than
English taste at that period could endure. Those whom Ibsen designed to
crush had not minced their own words. The press was violence itself, and
was not tempered with justice; when the poet looked round he saw
"afflicted virtue insolently stabbed with all manner of reproaches," as
Dryden said.

Yet it was not an age of gross and open vices; manners were not
flagitious, they were merely of a nauseous insipidity. Ibsen, flown with
anger as with wine, could find no outrageous offences to lash, and all
he could invite the age to do was to laugh at certain conventions and to
reconsider some prejudiced opinions. He had to be pungent, not openly
ferocious; he had to be sarcastic and to treat the current code of
morals as a jest. He found the society around him excessively
distasteful to him, but there were no crying evils of a political or
ethical kind to be stigmatized. What was open to him was what an old
writer of our own defined as "a sharp, well-mannered way of laughing a
folly out of countenance."

Unfortunately, the people laughed at will never consent to think the way
well mannered, and Ibsen was bitterly blamed for "want of taste," that
vaguest and most insidious of accusations. We are told that he began his
enterprise in prose [Note: "_Svanhild_: a Comedy in three acts and in
prose: 1860," is understood to exist still in manuscript], but found
that too stiff and bald a medium for a satire on the social crudity of
Norway. In writing satire, it is all-important that the form should be adequate, and at this time Ibsen had not reached the impeccable perfection of his later colloquial prose. He started _Love's Comedy_, therefore, anew, and he wrote it as a pamphlet in rhyme. It is not certain that he had any very definite idea of the line which his attack should take. He was very poor, very sore, very uncomfortable, and he was easily convinced that the times were out of joint. Then he observed that if there was anything that the Norwegian upper classes prided themselves upon it was their conduct of betrothal and marriage. Plato had said that the familiarity of young persons before marriage prevented enmity and disappointment in later years, that it was useful to know the peculiarities of temperament beforehand, and so, being accustomed to them, to discount them. But Ibsen was not of this opinion, or rather, perhaps, he did not choose to be. The extremely slow and public method of betrothal in the North gave him his first opportunity.

It is with a song, in the original one of the most delicious of his lyrics, that he opens the campaign. To a miscellaneous party of Philistines circled around the tea table, "all sober and all ----" the rebellious hero sings:--

In the sunny orchard-closes,
While the warblers sing and swing,
Care not whether blustering Autumn
Break the promises of Spring;
Rose and white the apple-blossom
Hides you from the sultry sky;
Let it flutter, blown and scattered,
On the meadow by and by.

In the sexual struggle, that is to say, the lovers should not pause to
consider the worldly advantages of their match, but should fly in secret
to each other's arms. By the law of battle, the female should be
snatched to the conqueror's saddle-bow, and ridden away with into the
night, not subjected to the jokes and the good advice and the
impertinent congratulations of the clan. Young Lochinvar does not wait
to ask the counsel of the bride's cousins, nor to run the gantlet of her
aunts; he fords the Esk river with her, where ford there is none. Ibsen
is in favor of the _mariage de convenance_, which suppresses, without
favor, the absurdity of love-matches. Above all, anything is better than
the publicity, the meddling and long-drawn exposure of betrothal, which
kills the fine delicacy of love, as birds are apt to break their own
eggs if intruding hands have touched them.

This is the central point in _Love's Comedy_, but there is much beside
this in its reckless satire on the "sanctities" of domestic life. The
burden of monogamy is frivolously dealt with, and the impertinent poet
touches with levity upon the question of the duration of marriage:

With my living, with my singing,
I will tear the hedges down!
Sweep the grass and heap the blossom!
Let it shrivel, pale and blown!
Throw the wicket wide! Sheep, cattle,
Let them browse among the best!
_I_ broke off the flowers; what matter
Who may graze among the rest!

_Love's Comedy_ is perhaps the most diverting of Ibsen's works; it is
certainly the most impertinent. If there was one class in Norwegian
society which was held to be above criticism it was the clerical. A
prominent character in Ibsen's comedy is the Rev. Mr. Strawman, a gross,
unctuous and uxorious priest, blameless and dull, upon whose inert body
the arrows of satire converge. This was never forgotten and long was
unforgiven. As late as 1866 the Storthing refused a grant to Ibsen
definitely on the ground of the scandal caused by his sarcastic portrait
of Pastor Strawman. But the gentler sex, to which every poet looks for
an audience, was not less deeply outraged by the want of indulgence
which he had shown for all forms of amorous sentiment, although Ibsen
had really, through his satire on the methods of betrothal, risen to
something like a philosophical examination of the essence of love
itself.

To Brandes, who reproached him for not recording the history of ideal
engagements, and who remarked, "You know, there are sound potatoes and
rotten potatoes in this world," Ibsen cynically replied, "I am afraid
none of the sound ones have come under my notice"; and when Guldstad
proves to the beautiful Svanhild the paramount importance of creature
comforts, the last word of distrust in the sustaining power of love had
been said. The popular impression of Ibsen as an "immoral" writer seems
to be primarily founded on the paradox and fireworks of _Love's Comedy_.

Much might be forgiven to a man so wretched as Ibsen was in 1862, and
more to a poet so lively, brilliant and audacious in spite of his
misfortunes. These now gathered over his head and threatened to submerge
him altogether. He was perhaps momentarily saved by the publication of
_Terje Vigen_, which enjoyed a solid popularity. This is the principal
and, indeed, almost the only instance in Ibsen's works of what the
Northern critics call "epic," but what we less ambitiously know as the
tale in verse. _Terje Figen_ will never be translated successfully into
English, for it is written, with brilliant lightness and skill, in an
adaptation of the Norwegian ballad-measure which it is impossible to
reproduce with felicity in our language.

Among Ibsen's writings _Terje Vigen_ is unique as a piece of pure
sentimentality carried right rough without one divagation into irony or
pungency. It is the story of a much-injured and revengeful Norse pilot,
who, having the chance to drown his old enemies, Milord and Milady,
saves them at the mute appeal of their blue-eyed English baby. _Terje
Vigen_ is a masterpiece of what we may define as the "dash-away-a-manly-
tear" class of narrative. It is extremely well written and picturesque,
but the wonder is that, of all people in the world, Ibsen should have
written it.

His short lyric poems of this period betray much more clearly the real
temper of the man. They are filled full and brimming over with longing
and impatience, with painful passion and with hope deferred. It is in
the strident lyrics Ibsen wrote between 1857 and 1863 that we can best
read the record of his mind, and share its exasperations, and wonder at
its elasticity. The series of sonnets _In a Picture Gallery_ is a
strangely violent confession of distrust in his own genius; the _Epistle
to H. O. Blom_ a candid admission of his more than distrust in the
talent and honesty of others. It was the peculiarity and danger of
Ibsen’s position that he represented no one but himself. For instance,
the liberty of many of the expressions in _Love’s Comedy_ led those who
were beginning a movement in favor of the emancipation of women to
believe that Ibsen was in sympathy with them, but he was not. All
through his life, although his luminous penetration into character led
him to be scrupulously fair in his analysis of female character, he was
never a genuine supporter of the extension of public responsibility to
the sex. A little later (in 1869), when John Stuart Mill’s _Subjection
of Women_ produced a sensation in Scandinavia, and met with many
enthusiastic supporters, Ibsen coldly reserved his opinion. He was
always an observer, always a clinical analyst at the bedside of society,
ever a prophet, never a propagandist.

His troubles gathered upon him. Neither theatre consented to act _Love’s
Comedy_, and it would not even have been printed but for the zeal of the
young novelist Jonas Lie, who, to his great honor, bought for about L35
the right to publish it as a supplement to a newspaper that he was
editing. Then the storm broke out; the press was unanimously adverse,
and in private circles abuse amounted almost to a social taboo. In 1862
the second theatre became bankrupt, and Ibsen was thrown on the world,
the most unpopular man of his day, and crippled with debts. It is true
that he was engaged at the Christiania Theatre at a nominal salary of
about a pound a week, but he could not live on that. In August, 1860, he
had made a pathetic appeal to the Government for a _digter-gage_, a
payment to a poet, such as is freely given to talent in the Northern
countries. Sums were voted to Bjoernson and Vinje, but to Ibsen not a
penny. By some influence, however, for he was not without friends, he
was granted in March, 1862, a travelling grant of less than L20 to
enable him to wander for two months in western Hardanger and the
districts around the Sognefjord for the purpose of collecting folk-songs
and legends. The results of this journey were prepared for publication,
but never appeared. This interesting excursion, however, has left its
mark stamped broadly upon _Brand_ and _Peer Gynt_.

All through 1863 his condition was critical. He determined that his only
hope was to exile himself definitely from Norway, which had become too
hot to hold him. Various private friends generously helped him over this
dreadful time of adversity, earning a gratitude which, if it was not
expansive, was lifelong. Very grudging recognition of his gifts was at
length made by the Government in the shape of another trifling
travelling grant (March, 1863), again a handsome sum being awarded to
Bjoernson, his popular rival. In May Ibsen applied, in despair, to the
King himself, who conferred upon him a small pension of L90 a year,
which for the immediate future stood between this great poet and
starvation. The news of it was received in Christiania by the press in
terms of despicable insult.
But in June of this terrible year, Ibsen had a flash of happiness. He was invited down to Bergen to the fifth great "Festival of Song," a national occurrence, and he and his poems met with a warm reception. Moreover, he found his brilliant antagonist, Bjørnson, at Bergen on a like errand, and renewed an old friendship with this warm-hearted and powerful man of genius, destined to play through life the part of Hakon to Ibsen’s Skule. They spent much of the subsequent winter together. As Halvdan Koht has excellently said: "Their intercourse brought them closer to each other than they had ever been before. They felt that they were inspired by the same ideas and the same hopes, and they suffered the same bitter disappointments. With anguish they watched the Danish brother-nation’s desperate struggle against the superior power of Germany, and save a province with a population of Scandinavian race and speech taken from Denmark and incorporated in a foreign kingdom, whilst the Norwegian and Swedish kinsmen, in spite of solemn promises, refrained from yielding any assistance." An attack on Holstein (December 22, 1863) had introduced the Second Danish War, to which a disastrous and humiliating termination was brought in the following August.

In April, 1864, Ibsen took the momentous step of quitting his native country. He entered Copenhagen at the dark hour when Schleswig as well as Holstein had been abandoned, and when the citadel of Dueper alone stood between Denmark and ruin. His agonized sympathy may be read in the indignant lyrics of that spring. A fortnight later he set out, by Luebeck and Trieste, for Rome, where he had now determined to reside. He reached that city in due time, and sank with ineffable satisfaction into the arms of its antique repose. "Here at last," he wrote to Bjørnson, "there
is blessed peace,” and he settled himself down to the close
contemplation of poetry.

The change from the severities of an interminable Northern winter to the
glow and splendor of Italy acted on the poet's spirit like an
enchantment. Ibsen came, another Pilgrim of Eternity, to Rome’s “azure
sky, flowers, ruins, statues, music,” and at first the contrast between
the crudity he had left and the glory he had found was almost
intolerable. He could not work; all he did was to lie in the flushed air
and become as a little child. There has scarcely been another example of
a writer of the first class who, deeply solicitous about beauty, but
debarred from all enjoyment of it until his thirty-seventh year, has
been suddenly dipped, as if into a magic fountain, into the heart of
unclouded loveliness without transition or preparation. Shelley and
Keats were dead long before they reached the age at which Ibsen broke
free from his prison-house of ice, while Byron, in the same year of his
life, was closing his romantic career.

Ibsen's earliest impressions of what these poets had become accustomed
to at a ductile age were contradictory and even incoherent. The passion
of pagan antiquity for a long while bewildered him. He wandered among
the vestiges of antique art, unable to perceive their relation to modern
life, or their original significance. He missed the impress of the
individual on classic sculpture, as he had missed it--the parallel is
strange, but his own--on the Eddaic poems of ancient Iceland. He liked a
lyric or a statue to speak to him of the man who made it. He felt more
at home with Bernini among sculptors and with Bramante among architects
than with artists of a more archaic type. Shelley, we may remember, labored under a similar heresy; to each of these poets the attractiveness of individual character overpowered the languid flavor of the age in which the artist had flourished. Ibsen’s admiration of a certain overpraised monument of Italian architecture would not be worth recording but for the odd vigor with which he adds that the man who made that might have made the moon in his leisure moments.

During the first few months of Ibsen’s life in Rome all was chaos in his mind. He was plunged in stupefaction at the beauties of nature, the amenities of mankind, the interpenetration of such a life with such an art as he had never dreamed of and could yet but dimly comprehend. In September, 1864, he tells Bjoernson that he is at work on a poem of considerable length. This must have been the first draft of _Brand_, which was begun, we know, as a narrative, or as the Northerns call it, an "epic" poem; although a sketch for the _Julianus Apostata_ was already forming in the back of his head, as a subject which would, sooner or later, demand poetic treatment. He had left his wife and little son in Copenhagen, but at the beginning of October they joined him in Rome. The family lived on an income which seems almost incredibly small, a maximum of 40 scudi a month. But it was a different thing to be hungry in Christiania and in Rome, and Ibsen makes no complaints. A sort of blessed languor had fallen upon him after all his afflictions. He would loll through half his days among the tombs on the Via Latina, or would loiter for hours and hours along the Appian Way. It took him weeks to summon energy to visit S. Pietro in Vincoli, although he knew that Michelangelo’s "Moses" was there, and though he was weary with longing
to see it. All the tense chords of Ibsen's nature were loosened. His soul was recovering, through a long and blissful convalescence, from the aching maladies of its youth.

He took some part in the society of those Scandinavian writers, painters and sculptors who gathered in Rome through the years of their distress. But only one of them attracted him strongly, the young Swedish lyrical poet, Count Carl Snoilsky, then the hope and already even the glory of his country. There was some quaint diversity between the rude and gloomy Norwegian dramatist, already middle-aged, and the full-blooded, sparkling Swedish diplomatist of twenty-three, rich, flattered, and already as famous for his fashionable _bonnes fortunes_ as Byron. But two things Snoilsky and Ibsen had in common, a passionate enthusiasm for their art, and a rebellious attitude towards their immediate precursors in it. Each, in his own way, was the leader of a new school. The friendship of Ibsen and Snoilsky was a permanent condition for the rest of their lives, for it was founded on a common basis.

A few years later the writer of these pages received an amusing impression of Ibsen at this period from the Danish poet, Christian Molbech, who was also in Rome in 1865 and onwards. Ibsen wandering silently about the streets, his hands plunged far into the pockets of his invariable jacket of faded velveteen, Ibsen killing conversation by his sudden moody appearances at the Scandinavian Club, Ibsen shattering the ideals of the painters and the enthusiasms of the antiquaries by a running fire of sarcastic paradox, this is mainly what the somewhat unsympathetic Molbech was not unwilling to reproduce. He painted a more
agreeable Ibsen when he spoke of his summer flights to the Alban Hills, planned on terms of the most prudent reference to resources which seemed ever to be expected and never to arrive. Nevertheless, under the vines in front of some inn at Genzano or Albano, Ibsen would duly be discovered, placid and dreamy, always self-sufficient and self-contained, but not unwilling to exchange, over a flask of thin wine, commonplaces with a Danish friend. It was at Ariccia, in one of these periods of _villegiatura_, during the summer and autumn of 1865, that _Brand_, which had long been under considerature, suddenly took final shape, and was written throughout, without pause or hesitation. In July the poet put everything else aside to begin it, and before the end of September he had completed it.

_Brand_ placed Ibsen at a bound among the greatest European poets of his age. The advance over the sculptural perfection of _The Pretenders_ and the graceful wit of _Love's Comedy_ was so great as to be startling. Nothing but the veil of a foreign language, which the best translations are powerless to tear away from noble verse, prevented this mastery from being perceived at once. In Scandinavia, where that veil did not exist, for those who had eyes to see, and who were not blinded by prejudice, it was plain that a very great writer had arisen in Norway at last. Bjornson had seemed to slip ahead of Ibsen; his _Sigurd Slembe_ (1862) was a riper work than the elder friend had produced; but _Mary Stuart in Scotland_ (1864) had marked a step backward, and now Ibsen had once more shot far ahead of his rival. When we have admitted some want of clearness in the symbolism which runs through _Brand_, and some shifting of the point of view in the two last acts, an incoherency and a
turbidity which are natural in the treatment of so colossal a theme,
there is very little but praise to be given to a poem which is as
manifold in its emotion and as melodious in its versification as it is
surprising in its unchallenged originality. In the literatures of
Scandinavia it has not merely been unsurpassed, but in its own peculiar
province it has not been approached. It bears some remote likeness to
_Faust_, but with that exception there is perhaps nothing in the
literature of the world which can be likened to _Brand_, except, of
course, _Peer Gynt_.

For a long while it was supposed that the difficulties in the way of
performing _Brand_ on the public stage were too great to be overcome.
But the task was attempted at length, first in Stockholm in 1895; and
within the last few years this majestic spectacle has been drawn in full
before the eyes of enraptured audiences in Copenhagen, Berlin, Moscow
and elsewhere. In spite of the timid reluctance of managers, wherever
this play is adequately presented, it captures an emotional public at a
run. It is an appeal against moral apathy which arouses the languid. It
is a clear and full embodiment of the gospel of energy which awakens and
upbraids the weak. In the original, its rush of rhymes produces on the
nerves an almost delirious excitement. If it is taken as an oration, it
is responded to as a great civic appeal; if as a sermon, it is sternly
religious, and fills the heart with tears. In the solemn mountain air,
with vague bells ringing high up among the glaciers, no one asks exactly
what _Brand_ expounds, nor whether it is perfectly coherent. Witnessed
on the living stage, it takes the citadel of the soul by storm. When it
is read, the critical judgment becomes cooler.
Carefully examined, _Brand_ is found to present a disconcerting mixture of realism and mysticism. Two men seem at work in the writing of it, and their effects are sometimes contradictory. It has constantly been asked, and it was asked at one, "Is _Brand_ the expression of Ibsen's own nature?" Yes, and no. He threw much of himself into his hero, and yet he was careful to remain outside. Ibsen, as we have already pointed out, was ready in later life to discuss his own writings, and what he said about them is often dangerously mystifying. He told Georg Brandes that the religious vocation of Brand was not essential. "I could have applied the whole syllogism just as well to a sculptor, or a politician, as to a priest." (He was to deal with each of these alternations later on, but with what a difference!) "I could quite as well," he persisted, "have worked out the impulse which drove me to write, by taking Galileo, for instance, as my hero--assuming, of course, that Galileo should stand firm and never concede the fixity of the earth--or you yourself in your struggle with the Danish reactionaries." This is not to the point, since in fact neither Georg Brandes nor Galileo, as hero of a mystical drama, could have produced such a capacity for evolution as is presented by the stern priest whose absolute certitude, although founded, one admits, on no rational theory of theology, is yet of the very essence of religion.

Brand becomes intelligible when we regard him as a character of the twelfth century transferred to the nineteenth. He has something of Peter the Hermit in him. He ought to have been a crusading Christian king, fighting against the Moslem for the liberties of some sparkling city of God. He exists in his personage, under the precipice, above the fjord,
like a rude mediaeval anchorite, who eats his locusts and wild honey in
the desert. We cannot comprehend the action of Brand by any reference to
accepted creeds and codes, because he is so remote from the religious
conventions as hardly to seem objectively pious at all. He is violent
and incoherent; he knows not clearly what it is he wants, but it must be
an upheaval of all that exists, and it must bring Man into closer
contact with God. Brand is a king of souls, but his royal dignity is
marred, and is brought sometimes within an inch of the ridiculous, by
the prosaic nature of his modern surroundings. He is harsh and cruel; he
is liable to fits of anger before which the whole world trembles; and it
is by an avalanche, brought down upon him by his own wrath, that he is
finally buried in the ruins of the Ice-Church.

The judicious reader may like to compare the character of Brand with
that extraordinary study of violence, the _Abbe Jules_ of Octave
Mirbeau. In each we have the history of revolt, in a succession of
crises, against an invincible vocation. In each an element of weakness
is the pride of a peasant priest. But in Ibsen there is fully developed
what the cynicism of Octave Mirbeau avoids, a genuine conception of such
a rebel's ceaseless effort after personal holiness. Lammers or
Lammenais, what can it matter whether some existing priest of
insurrection did or did not set Ibsen for a moment on the track of his
colossal imagination? We may leave these discussions to the
commentators; _Brand_ is one of the great poems of the world, and
endless generations of critics will investigate its purpose and analyze
its forms.
There is, however, another than the priestly side. The poem contains a great deal of superficial and rather ephemeral satire of contemporary Scandinavian life, echoes of a frightened Storthing in Christiania, of a crafty court in Stockholm, and of Denmark stretching her bleeding hands to her sisters in an agony of despair. There is the still slighter local strain of irony, which lightens the middle of the third act. Here Ibsen comes not to heal but to slay; he exposes the corpse of an exhausted age, and will bury it quickly, with sexton's songs and peals of elfin laughter, in some chasm of rock above a waterfall. "It is Will alone that matters," and for the weak of purpose there is nothing but ridicule and six feet of such waste earth as nature carelessly can spare from her rude store of graves. Against the mountain landscape, Brand holds up his motto "All or Nothing," persistently, almost tiresomely, like a modern advertising agent affronting the scenery with his panacea. More truculently still, he insists upon the worship of a deity, not white-bearded, but as young as Hercules, a scandal to prudent Lutheran theologians, a prototype of violent strength.

Yet Brand's own mission remains undefined to him--if it ever takes exact shape--until Agnes reveals it to him:--

Choose thy endless loss or gain!
Do thy work and bear thy pain. ...
Now (he answers) I see my way aright.
In _ourselves_ is that young Earth,
Ripe for the divine new-birth.
And it is in Agnes--as the marvellous fourth act opens where her love for the little dear dead child is revealed, and where her patience endures all the cruelties of her husband's fanaticism--it is in Agnes that Ibsen's genius for the first time utters the clear, unembittered note of full humanity. He has ceased now to be parochial; he is a nurslng of the World and Time. If the harsh Priest be, in a measure, Ibsen as Norway made him, Agnes and Einar, and perhaps Gerd also, are the delicate offspring of Italy.

Considerable postponements delayed the publication of _Brand_, which saw the light at length, in Copenhagen, in March, 1866. It was at once welcomed by the Danish press, which had hitherto known little of Ibsen, and the poet's audience was thus very considerably widened. The satire of the poem awakened an eager polemic; the popular priest Wexels preached against its tendency. A novel was published, called _The Daughters of Brand_, in which the results of its teaching were analyzed. Ibsen enjoyed, what he had never experienced before, the light and shade of a disputed but durable popular success. Four large editions of _Brand_ were exhausted within the year of its publication, and it took its place, of course, in more leisurely progress, among the few books which continued, and still continue, steadily to sell. It has always been, in the countries of Scandinavia, the best known and the most popular of all Ibsen's writings.

This success, however, was largely one of sentiment, not of pecuniary
fortune. The total income from four editions of a poem like _Brand_, in the conditions of Northern literary life forty years ago, would not much exceed L100. Hardly had Ibsen become the object of universal discussion than he found himself assailed, as never before, by the paralysis of poverty. He could not breathe, he could not move; he could not afford to buy postage stamps to stick upon his business letters. He was threatened with the absolute extinction of his resources. At the very time when Copenhagen was ringing with his praise Ibsen was borrowing money for his modest food and rent from the Danish Consul in Rome.

In the winter of 1865 he fell into a highly nervous condition, in the midst of which he was assailed by a malarious fever which brought him within sight of the grave. To the agony of his devoted wife, he lay for some time between life and death, and the extreme poverty from which they suffered made it difficult, and even impossible, for her to provide for him the alleviations which his state demanded. He gradually recovered, however, thanks to his wife's care and to his own magnificent constitution, but the springs of courage seemed to have snapped within his breast.

In March, 1866, worn out with illness, poverty and suspense, he wrote a letter to Bjoernson, "my one and only friend," which is one of the most heart-rending documents in the history of literature. Few great spirits have been nearer the extinction of despair than Ibsen was, now in his thirty-ninth year. His admirers, at their wits' end to know what to advise, urged him to write directly to Carl, King of Sweden and Norway, describing his condition, and asking for support. Simultaneously came
the manifest success of _Brand_, and, for the first time, the Norwegian press recognized the poet's merit. There was a general movement in his favor; King Carl graciously received his petition of April 15, and on May 10 the Storthing, almost unanimously, voted Ibsen a "poet's pension," restricted in amount but sufficient for his modest needs.

The first use he made of his freedom was to move out of Rome, where he found it impossible to write, and to settle at Frascati among the hills. He hired a nest of cheap rooms in the Palazzo Gratiosi, two thousand feet above the sea. Thither he came, with his wife and his little son, and there he fitted himself up a study; setting his writing table at a window that overlooked an immensity of country, and Mont Soracte closing the horizon with its fiery pyramid. In his correspondence of this time there are suddenly noticeable a gayety and an insouciance which are elements wholly new in his letters. The dreadful burden was lifted; the dreadful fear of sinking in a sea of troubles and being lost for ever, the fear which animates his painful letter to King Carl, was blown away like a cloud and the heaven of his temper was serene. At Frascati he knew not what to be at; he tried that subject, and this, waiting for the heavenly spark to fall. It seems to have been at Tusculum, and in the autumn of 1866, that the subject he was looking for descended upon him. He hurried back to Rome, and putting all other schemes aside, he devoted himself heart and soul to the composition of _Peer Gynt_, which he described as to be "a long dramatic poem, having as its chief figure one of the half-mythical and fantastical personages from the peasant life of _modern_ Norway."
He wrote this work slowly, more slowly than was his wont, and it was a whole year on the stocks. It was in the summer that Ibsen habitually composed with the greatest ease, and _Peer Gynt_ did not trove smoothly until the poet settled in the Villa Pisani, at Casamicciola, on the island of Ischia. His own account was: "After _Brand_ came _Peer Gynt_, as though of itself. It was written in Southern Italy, in Ischia and at Sorrento. So far away from one's readers one becomes reckless. This poem contains much that has its origin in the circumstances of my own youth.

My own mother--with the necessary exaggeration--served as the model for Ase." _Peer Gynt_ was finished before Ibsen left Sorrento at the end of the autumn, and the MS. was immediately posted to Copenhagen. None of the delays which had interfered with the appearance of _Brand_ now afflicted the temper of the poet, and _Peer Gynt_ was published in November, 1867.

In spite of the plain speaking of Ibsen himself, who declared that _Peer Gynt_ was diametrically opposed in spirit to _Brand_, and that it made no direct attack upon social questions, the critics of the later poem have too often persisted in darkening it with their educational pedantries. Ibsen did well to be angry with his commentators. "They have discovered," he said, "much more satire in _Peer Gynt_ than was intended by me. Why can they not read the book as a poem? For as such I wrote it." It has been, however, the misfortune of Ibsen that he has particularly attracted the attention of those who prefer to see anything in a poem except its poetry, and who treat all tulips and roses as if they were cabbages for the pot of didactic morality. Yet it is surprising that after all that the author said, and with the lovely poem
shaking the bauble of its fool's cap at them, there can still be
commentators who see nothing in _Peer Gynt_ but the "awful interest of
the universal problems with which it deals." This obsession of the
critic to discover "problems" in the works of Ibsen has been one of the
main causes of that impatience and even downright injustice with which
his writings have been received by a large section of those readers who
should naturally have enjoyed them. He is a poet, of fantastic wit and
often reckless imagination, and he has been travestied in a long black
costume and white choker, as though he were an embodiment of the
Nonconformist conscience.

Casting aside, therefore, the spurious "lessons" and supposititious
"problems" of this merry and mundane drama, we may recognize among its
irregularities and audacities two main qualities of merit. Above
everything else which we see in _Peer Gynt_ we see its fun and its
picturesqueness. Written at different times and in different moods,
there is an incoherency in its construction which its most whole-hearted
admirers cannot explain away. The first act is an inimitable burst of
lyrical high spirits, tottering on the verge of absurdity, carried along
its hilarious career with no less peril and with no less brilliant
success than Peer fables for himself and the reindeer in their ride
along the vertiginous blade of the Gjende. In the second act, satire and
fantasy become absolutely unbridled; the poet's genius sings and dances
under him, like a strong ship in a storm, but the vessel is rudderless
and the pilot an emphatic libertine. The wild impertinence of fancy, in
this act, from the moment when Peer and the Girl in the Green Gown ride
off upon the porker, down to the fight with the Boeig, gigantic
gelatinous symbol of self deception, exceeds in recklessness anything else written since the second part of _Faust_. The third act, culminating with the drive to Soria Moria Castle and the death of Ase, is of the very quintessence of poetry, and puts Ibsen in the first rank of creators. In the fourth act, the introduction of which is abrupt and grotesque, we pass to a totally different and, I think, a lower order of imagination. The fifth act, an amalgam of what is worst and best in the poem, often seems divided from it in tone, style and direction, and is more like a symbolic or mythical gloss upon the first three acts than a contribution to the growth of the general story.

Throughout this tangled and variegated scene the spirits of the author remain almost preposterously high. If it were all hilarity and sardonic laughter, we should weary of the strain. But physical beauty of the most enchanting order is liberally provided to temper the excess of irony. It is, I think, no exaggeration to say that nowhere to the dramatic literature of the world, not by Shakespeare himself, is there introduced into a play so much loveliness of scenery, and such varied and exquisite appeal to the eyes, as there is in _Peer Gynt_. The fifth act contains much which the reader can hardly enjoy, but it opens with a scene so full of the glory of the mountains and the sea that I know nothing else in drama to compare with it. This again is followed by one of the finest shipwrecks in all poetry. Scene after scene, the first act portrays the cold and solemn beauty of Norwegian scenery as no painter's brush has contrived to do it. For the woodland background of the Saeter Girls there is no parallel in plastic art but the most classic of Norwegian paintings, Dahl's "Birch in a Snow Storm." Pages might be filled with
praise of the picturesqueness of tableau after tableau in each act of _Peer Gynt._

The hero is the apotheosis of selfish vanity, and he is presented to us, somewhat indecisively, as the type of one who sets at defiance his own life's design. But is Peer Gynt designed to be a useful, a good, or even a successful man? Certainly Ibsen had not discovered it when he wrote the first act, in which scarcely anything is observable except a study, full of merriment and sarcasm, of the sly, lazy and parasitical class of peasant rogue. This type was not of Ibsen's invention; he found it in those rustic tales, inimitably resumed by Asbjoernson and Moe, in which he shows us that his memory was steeped. Here, too, he found the Boeig, a monster of Norse superstition, vast and cold, slippery and invisible, capable of infinite contraction and expansion. The conception that this horror would stand in symbol for a certain development of selfish national instability seems to have seized him later, and _Peer Gynt_, which began as a farce, continued as a fable. The nearest approach to a justification of the moral or "problem" purpose, which Ibsen's graver prophets attribute to him, is found in the sixth scene of the fifth act, where, quite in the manner of Goethe, thoughts and watchwords and songs and tears take corporeal form and assail the aged _Peer Gynt_ with their reproaches.

_Peer Gynt_ was received in the North with some critical bewilderment, and it has never been so great a favorite with the general public as _Brand_. But Ibsen, with triumphant arrogance, when he was told that it did not conform to the rules of poetic art, asserted that the rules must
be altered, not _Peer Gynt_. "My book," he wrote, "is poetry; and if it
is not, then it shall be. The Norwegian conception of what poetry is
shall be made to fit my book." There was a struggle at first against
this assumption, but the drama has become a classic, and it is now
generally allowed, that so long as poetry is a term wide enough to
include _The Clouds_ and the Second Part of _Faust_, it must be made
wide enough to take in a poem as unique as they are in its majestic
intellectual caprices.

[Note.--By far the most exhaustive analysis of _Peer Gynt_ which has
hitherto been given to the world is that published, as I send these
pages to the press, by the executors of Otto Weininger, in his
posthumous _Ueber die letzte Dinge_ (1907). This extraordinary young
man, who shot himself on October 4, 1903, in the house at Vienna where
Beethoven died, was only twenty-three years of age when he violently
deprived philosophical literature in Europe of by far its most promising
and remarkable recruit. If I confess myself unable to see in _Peer Gynt_
all that Weininger saw in it, the fault is doubtless mine. But in Ibsen,
unquestionably, time will _create_ profundities, as it has in
Shakespeare. The greatest works grow in importance, as trees do after
the death of the mortal men who planted them.]

CHAPTER V

1868-75
Ibsen's four years in Italy were years of rest, of solitude, of calm.

The attitude of Ibsen to Italy was totally distinct from that of other illustrious exiles of his day and generation. The line of pilgrims from Stendhal and Lamartine down to Ruskin and the Brownings had brought with them a personal interest in Italian affairs; Italian servitude had roused some of them to anger or irony; they had spent nights of insomnia dreaming of Italian liberty. _Casa Guidi Windows_ may be taken as the extreme type of the way in which Italy did not impress Ibsen. He sought there, and found, under the transparent azure of the Alban sky, in the harmonious murmurs of the sea, in the violet shadows of the mountains, above all in the gray streets of Rome, that rest of the brain, that ripening of the spiritual faculties, which he needed most after his rough and prolonged adolescence in Norway. In his attitude of passive appreciation he was, perhaps, more like Landor than like any other of the illustrious exiles--Landor, who died in Florence a few days after Ibsen settled in Rome. There was a side of character, too, on which the young Norwegian resembled that fighting man of genius.

When, therefore, on September 8, 1867, Garibaldi, at Genoa, announced his intention of marching upon Rome, an echo woke in many a poet's heart "by rose hung river and light-foot rill," but left Ibsen simply disconcerted. If Rome was to be freed from Papal slavery, it would no longer be the somnolent and unupbraiding haunt of quietness which the Norwegian desired for the healing of his spleen and his moral hypochondria. In October the heralds of liberty crossed the Papal frontier; on the 30th, by a slightly prosaic touch, it was the French who entered Rome. Of Ibsen, in these last months of his disturbed
sojourn—for he soon determined that if there was going to be civil war in Italy that country was no home for him—we hear but little. This autumn, however, we find him increasingly observant of the career of Georg Brandes, the brilliant and revolutionary Danish critic, in whom he was later on to find his first great interpreter. And we notice the beginnings of a difference with Bjoernson, lamentable and hardly explicable, starting, it would vaguely seem, out of a sense that Bjoernson did not appreciate the poetry of _Peer Gynt_ at its due value.

Clemens Petersen, who, since the decease of Heiberg, had been looked upon as the _doyen_ of Danish critics—had pronounced against the poetry of _Peer Gynt_, and Ibsen, in one of his worst moods, in a bearish letter, had thrown the blame of this judgment upon Bjoernson.

All through these last months in Rome we find Ibsen in the worst of humors. If it be admissible to compare him with an animal, he seems the badger among the writers of his time, nocturnal, inoffensive, solitary, but at the rumor of disturbance apt to rush out of its burrow and bite with terrific ferocity. The bite of Ibsen was no joke, and in moments of exasperation he bit, without selection, friend and foe alike. Among other snaps of the pen, he told Bjoernson that if he was not taken seriously as a poet, he should try his "fate as a photographer."

Bjoernson, genially and witilly, took this up at once, and begged him to put his photography into the form of a comedy. But the devil, as Ibsen himself said, was throwing his shadow between the friends, and all the benefits and all the affection of the old dark days were rapidly forgotten. They quarrelled, too, rather absurdly, about decorations from kings and ministers; Bjoernson having determined to reject all such
gewgaws, Ibsen announced his intention of accepting (and wearing) every cross and star that was offered to him. At this date, no doubt, the temptation was wholly problematical in both cases, yet each poet acted on his determination to the end. But Bjoernson's hint about the comedy seems to have been, for some years, the last flicker of friendship between the two. On this Ibsen presently acted in a manner very offensive to Bjoernson.

In March, 1868, Ibsen was beginning to be very much indeed incensed with things in general. "What Norway wants is a national disaster," he amiably snarled. It was high time that the badger should seek shelter in a new burrow, and in May we find him finally quitting Rome. There was a farewell banquet, at which Julius Lange, who was present, remarks that Ibsen showed a spice of the devil, but "was very witty and amiable." He went to Florence for June, then quitted Italy altogether, settling for three months at Berchtesgaden, the romantic little "sunbath" in the Salzburg Alps, then still very quiet and unfashionable. There he started his five-act comedy, _The League of Youth_. All September he spent in Munich, and in October, 1868, took root once more, this time at Dresden, which became his home for a considerable number of years. Almost at once he sank down again into his brooding mood of isolation and quietism, roaming about the streets of Dresden, as he hail haunted those of Rome, by night or at unfrequented hours, very solitary, seeing few visitors, writing few letters, slowly finishing his "photographic" comedy, which he did not get off his hands until March, 1869. Although he was still very poor, he refused all solicitations from editors to write for journals or magazines; he preferred to appear before the public at long
intervals, with finished works of importance.

It is impossible for a critic who is not a Norwegian, or not closely
instructed in the politics and manners of the North, to take much
interest in _The League of Youth_, which is the most provincial of all
Ibsen's mature works. There is a cant phrase minted in the course of it,
_de lokale forhold_, which we may awkwardly translate as "the local
conditions" or "situation." The play is all concerned with _de lokale
forhold_, and there is an overwhelming air of Little Pedlington about
the intrigue. This does not prevent _The League of Youth_ from being, as
Mr. Archer has said, "the first prose comedy of any importance in
Norwegian literature," [Note: It is to be supposed that Mr. Archer
deliberately prefers _The League of Youth_ to Bjoernson's _The Newly
Married Couple_ (1865), a slighter, but, as it seems to me, a more
amusing comedy.] but it excludes it from the larger European view. Oddly
enough, Ibsen believed, or pretended to believe, that _The League of
Youth_ was a "placable" piece of foolery, which could give no annoyance
to the worst of offenders by its innocent and indulgent banter. Perhaps,
like many strenuous writers, he underestimated the violence of his own
language; perhaps, living so long at a distance from Norway and catching
but faintly the reverberations of its political turmoil, he did not
realize how sensitive the native patriot must be to any chaff of "de
lokale forhold." When he found that the Norwegians were seriously angry,
Ibsen bluntly told them that he had closely studied the ways and the
manners of their "pernicious and lie-steeped clique." He was always
something of a snake in the grass to his poetic victims.
Mr. Archer, whose criticism of this play is extraordinarily brilliant, does his best to extenuate the stiffness of it. But to my own ear, as I read it again after a quarter of a century, there rise the tones of the stilted, the unsmiling, the essentially provincial and boringly solemn society of Christiania as it appeared to a certain young pilgrim in the early seventies, condensing, as it then seemed to do, all the sensitiveness, the arrogance, the crudity which made communication with the excellent and hospitable Norwegians of that past epoch so difficult for an outsider--so difficult, in particular, for one coming freshly from the grace and sweetness, the delicate, cultivated warmth of Copenhagen. The political conditions which led to the writing of _The League of Youth_ are old history now. There was the "liberal" element in Norwegian politics, which was in 1868 becoming rapidly stronger and more hampering to the Government, and there was the increasing influence of Soeren Jaabaek (1814-94), a peasant farmer of ultra-socialistic views, who had, almost alone, opposed in the Storthing the grant of any pensions to poets, and whose name was an abomination to Ibsen.

Now Bjoernson, in the development of his career as a political publicist, had been flirting more and more outrageously with these extreme ideas and this truculent peasant party. He had even burned incense before Jaabaek, who was the accursed Thing. Ibsen, from the perspective of Dresden, genuinely believed that Bjoernson, with his ardor and his energy and his eloquence, war, becoming a national danger. We have seen that Bjoernson had piqued Ibsen's vanity about _Peer Gynt_, and nothing exasperates a friendship more fatally than public principle grafted on a private slight. Moreover, the whole nature of Bjoernson was gregarious,
that of Ibsen solitary; Bjoernson must always be leading the majority, Ibsen had scruples of conscience if ten persons agreed with him. They were doomed to disagreement. Meanwhile, Ibsen burned his ships by creating the figure of Stensgaard, in _The League of Youth_, a frothy and mischievous demagogue whose rhetoric irresistibly reminded every one of Bjoernson's rolling oratory. What Bjoernson, not without dignity, objected to was not so much the personal attack, as that the whole play attempted "to paint our young party of liberty as a troop of pushing, phrase-mongering adventurers, whose patriotism lay solely in their words." Ibsen acknowledged that that was exactly his opinion of them, and what could follow for such a disjointed friendship but anger and silence?

The year 1869, which we now enter, is remarkable in the career of Ibsen as being that in which he travelled most, and appeared on the surface of society in the greatest number of capacities. He was enabled to do this by a considerable increase in his pension. First of all, he was induced to pay a visit of some months to Stockholm, being seized with a sudden strong desire to study conditions in Sweden, a country which he had hitherto professed to dislike. He had a delightful stay of two months, received from King Carl the order of the Wasa, was feted at banquets, renewed his acquaintance with Snoilsky, and was treated everywhere with the highest distinction. Ibsen and Bjoernson were how beginning to be recognized as the two great writers of Norway, and their droll balance as the Mr. and Mrs. Jack Sprat of letters was already becoming defined. It was doubtless Bjoernson's emphatic attacks on Sweden that at this moment made Ibsen so loving to the Swedes and so beloved. He was in such
clover at Stockholm that he might have lingered on there indefinitely, if the Khedive had not invited him, in September, to be his guest at the opening of the Suez Canal. This sudden incursion of an Oriental potentate into the narrative seems startling until we recollect that illustrious persons were invited from all countries to this ceremony. The interesting thing is to see that Ibsen was now so fatuous as to be naturally so selected; the only other Norwegian guest being Professor J. D. C. Lieblein, the Egyptologist.

The poet started for Egypt, by Dresden and Paris, on September 28. _The League of Youth_ was published on the 29th, and first performed on October 18; Ibsen, therefore, just missed the scandal and uproar caused by the play in Norway. In company with eighty-five other people, all illustrious guests of the Khedive, and under the care of Mariette Bey, Ibsen made a twenty-four days’ expedition up the Nile into Nubia, and then back to Cairo and Port Said. There, on November 17, in the company of an empress and several princes of the blood, he saw the Canal formally opened and graced a grand processional fleet that sailed out from Port Said towards Ismaila. But on the quay at Port Said Ibsen’s Norwegian mail was handed to him, and letters and newspapers alike were full of the violent scenes in the course of which _The League of Youth_ had been hissed down at Christiania. Then and there he sent his defiance back to Norway in _At Port Said_, one of the most pointed and effective of all his polemical lyrics. A version in literal prose must suffice, though it does cruel injustice to the venomous melody of the original:

The dawn of the Eastern Land
Over the haven glittered;
Flags from all corners of the globe
Quivered from the masts.
Voices in music
Bore onward the cantata;
A thousand cannon
Christened the Canal.

The steamers passed on
By the obelisk.
In the language of my home
Came to me the chatter of news.
The mirror-poem which I had polished
For masculine minxes
Had been smeared at home
By splutterings from penny whistles.

The poison-fly stung;
It made my memories loathsome.
Stars, be thanked!-
My home is what is ancient!
We hailed the frigate
From the roof of the river-boat;
I waved my hat
And saluted the flag.
To the feast, to the feast,
In spite of the fangs of venomous reptiles!
A selected guest
Across the Lakes of Bitterness!
At the close of day
Dreaming, I shall slumber
Where Pharaoh was drowned--
And when Moses passed over.

In this mood of defiance, with rage unabated, Ibsen returned home by Alexandria and Paris, and was in Dresden again in December.

The year of 1870 drove him out of Dresden, as the French occupation had driven him out of Rome. It was essential for him to be at rest in the midst of a quiet and alien population. He was drawn towards Denmark, partly for the sake of talk with Brandes, who had now become a factor in his life, partly to arrange about the performance of one of his early works, and in particular of _The Pretenders_. No definite plan, however, had been formed, when, in the middle of June, war was declared between Germany and France; but a fortnight later Ibsen quitted Saxony, and settled for three months in Copenhagen, where his reception was charmingly sympathetic. By the beginning of October, after the fall of Strasburg and the hemming in of Metz, however, it was plain on which side the fortunes of the war would lie, and Ibsen returned "as from a rejuvenating bath" of Danish society to a Dresden full of French prisoners, a Dresden, too, suffering terribly from the paralysis of trade, and showing a plentiful lack of enthusiasm for Prussia.
Ibsen turned his back on all such vexatious themes, and set himself to the collecting and polishing of a series of lyrical poems, the _Digte_ of 1871, the earliest, and, indeed, the only such collection that he published. We may recollect that, at the very same moment, with far less cause to isolate himself from the horrors of war, Theophile Gautier was giving the last touches to _Emaux et Camees_. In December, 1870, Ibsen addressed to Fru Limnell, a lady in Stockholm, his “Balloon-Letter,” a Hudibrastic rhymed epistle in nearly 400 lines, containing, with a good deal that is trivial, some striking symbolical reminiscences of his trip through Egypt, and some powerful ironic references to the caravan of German invaders, with its Hathor and its Horus, which was then rushing to the assault of Paris under the doleful colors of the Prussian flag. Ibsen's sarcasms are all at the ugliness and prosaic utilitarianism of the Germans; "Moltke," he says, "has killed the poetry of battles."

Ibsen was now greatly developing and expanding his views, and forming a world-policy of his own. The success of German discipline deeply impressed him, and he thought that the day had probably dawned which would be fatal to all revolt and "liberal rebellion" for the future. More than ever he dreaded the revolutionary doctrines of men like Jaabaek and Bjoernson, which would lead, he thought, to bloodshed and national disaster. The very same events were impressing Goldwin Smith at the very same moment with his famous prophecy that the abolition of all dynastic and aristocratic institutions was at hand, with "the tranquil inauguration" of elective industrial governments throughout the world. So history moves doggedly on, _propheten rechts, propheten links_, a
perfectly impassive _welt-kind_ in the middle of them. In Copenhagen
Ibsen had, after all, missed Brandes, delayed in Rome by a long and
dangerous illness; and all he could do was to exchange letters with this
still unseen but increasingly sympathetic and beloved young friend. To
Brandes Ibsen wrote more freely than to any one else about the great
events which were shaking the face of Europe and occupying so much of
both their thoughts:--

The old, illusory France has collapsed [he wrote to Brandes on December
20, 1870, two days after the engagement at Nuits]; and as soon as the
new, real Prussia does the same, we shall be with one bound in a new
age. How ideas will then come tumbling about our ears! And it is high
time they did. Up till now we have been living on nothing but the crumbs
from the revolutionary table of last century, a food out of which all
nutriment has long been chewed. The old terms require to have a new
meaning infused into them. Liberty, equality and fraternity are no
longer the things they were in the days of the late-lamented Guillotine.
This is what the politicians will not understand, and therefore, I hate
them. They want their own special revolutions--revolutions in externals,
in politics and so forth. But all this is mere trifling. What is
all-important is the revolution of the Spirit of Man.

This revolution, as exemplified by the Commune in Paris, did not satisfy
the anticipations which Ibsen had formed, and Brandes took advantage of
this to tell him that he .had not yet studied politics minutely enough
from the scientific standpoint. Ibsen replied that what he did not
possess as knowledge came to him, to a certain degree, as intuition or
instinct. "Let this be as it may, the poet's essential task is to see, not to reflect. For me in particular there would be danger in too much reflection." Ibsen seems, at this time, to be in an oscillating frame of mind, now bent on forming some positive theory of life out of which his imaginative works shall crystallize, harmoniously explanatory; at another time, anxious to be unhampered by theories and principles, and to represent individuals and exceptions exactly as experience presents them to him. In neither attitude, however, is there discernible any trace of the moral physician, and this is the central distinction between Tolstoi and Ibsen, whose methods, at first sight, sometimes appear so similar. Tolstoi analyzes a morbid condition, but always with the purpose, if he can, of curing it; Ibsen gives it even closer clinical attention, but he leaves to others the care of removing a disease which his business is solely to diagnose.

The _Poems_, after infinite revision, were published at length, in a very large edition, on May 3, 1871. One reason why Ibsen was glad to get this book off his hands was that it enabled him to concentrate his thoughts on the great drama he had been projecting, at intervals, for seven years past, the trilogy (as he then planned it) on the story of Julian the Apostate. At last Brandes came to Dresden (July, 1871) and found the tenebrous poet plunged in the study of Neander and Strauss, Gibbon unfortunately being a sealed book to him. All through the autumn and winter he was kept in a chronic state of irritability by the intrigues and the menaces of a Norwegian pirate, who threatened to reprint, for his own profit, Ibsen's early and insufficiently protected writings. This exacerbated the poet's dislike to his own country, where
the very law courts, he thought, were hostile to him. On this subject he
used language of tiresome over-emphasis. "From Sweden, from Denmark,
from Germany, I hear nothing but what gives me pleasure; it is from
Norway that everything bad comes upon me." It was indicated to would-be
Norwegian visitors that they were not welcome at Dresden. Norwegian
friends, he said, were "a costly luxury" which he was obliged to deny
himself.

The First Part of _Julian_ was finished on Christmas Day, but it took
over a year more before the entire work, as we now possess it, was
completed. "A Herculean labor," the author called it, when he finally
laid down a weary pen in February, 1873. The year 1872 had been very
quietly spent in unremitting literary labor, tempered by genial visits
from some illustrious Danes of the older generation, as particularly
Hans Christian Andersen and Meyer Aron Goldschmidt, and by more formal
intercourse with a few Germans such as Konrad Maurer and Paul Heyse; all
this time, let us remember, no Norwegians--"by request." The summer was
spent in long rambles over the mountains of Austria, ending up with a
month of deep repose in Berchtesgaden. The next year was like unto this,
except that its roaming, restless summer closed with several months in
Vienna; and on October 17, 1873, _nonum in annum_, after the Horatian
counsel, the prodigious masterpiece, _Emperor and Galilean_, was
published in Copenhagen at last.

Of all the writings of Ibsen, his huge double drama on the rise and fall
of Julian is the most extensive and the most ambitious. It is not
difficult to understand what it was about the most subtle and the most
speculative of the figures which animate the decline of antiquity that fascinated the imagination of Ibsen. Successive historians have celebrated the flexibility of intelligence and firmness of purpose which were combined in the brain of Julian with a passion for abstract beauty and an enthusiasm for a restored system of pagan Hellenic worship. There was an individuality about Julian, an absence of the common purple convention, of the imperial rhetoric, which strongly commended him to Ibsen, and in his perverse ascetic revolt against Christianity he offered a fascinating originality to one who thought the modern world all out of joint. As a revolutionary, Julian presented ideas of character which could not but passionately attract the Norwegian poet. His attitude to his emperor and to his God, sceptical, in each case, in each case inspired by no vulgar motive but by a species of lofty and melancholy fatalism, promised a theme of the most entrancing complexity.

But there are curious traces in Ibsen's correspondence of the difficulty, very strange in his case, which he experienced in forming a concrete idea of Julian in his own mind. He had been vaguely drawn to the theme, and when it was too late to recede, he found himself baffled by the paradoxes which he encountered, and by the contradictions of a figure seen darkly through a mist of historical detraction.

He met these difficulties as well as he could, and as a prudent dramatic poet should, by close and observant study of the document. He endeavored to reconcile the evident superiority of Julian with the absurd eccentricities of his private manners and with the futility of his public acts. He noted all the Apostate's foibles by the side of his virtues and his magnanimities. He traced without hesitation the course
of that strange insurrection which hurled a coarse fanatic from the
throne, only to place in his room a literary pedant with inked fingers
and populous beard. He accepted everything, from the parasites to the
purple slippers. The dangers of so humble an attendance upon history
were escaped with success in the first instalment of his "world drama."
In the strong and mounting scenes of _Caesar's Apostacy_, the rapidity
with which the incidents succeed one another, their inherent
significance, the innocent splendor of Julian's mind in its first
emancipation from the chains of false faith, combine to produce an
effect of high dramatic beauty. Georg Brandes, whose instinct in such
matters was almost infallible, when he read the First Part shortly after
its composition, entreated Ibsen to give this, as it stood, to the
public, and to let _The Emperor Julian's End_ follow independently. Had
Ibsen consented to do this, _Caesar's Fall_ would certainly take a
higher place among his works than it does at present, when its effect is
somewhat amputated and its meaning threatened with incoherence by the
author's apparent _volteface_ in the Second Part.

It was a lifelong disappointment to Ibsen that _Emperor and Galilean_,
on which he expended far more consideration and labor than on any other
of his works, was never a favorite either with the public or among the
critics. With the best will in the world, however, it is not easy to
find full enjoyment in this gigantic work, which by some caprice of
style defiant of analysis, lacks the vitality which is usually
characteristic of Ibsen's least production. The speeches put into the
mouths of antique characters are appropriate, but they are seldom vivid;
as Bentley said of the epistles of Julian's own teacher Libanius, "You
feel by the emptiness and deadness of them, that you converse with some dreaming pedant, his elbow on his desk." The scheme of Ibsen's drama was too vast for the very minute and meticulous method he chose to adopt. What he gives us is an immense canvas, on which he has painted here and there in miniature. It is a pity that he chose for dramatic representation so enormous a field. It would have suited his genius far better to have abandoned any attempt to write a conclusive history, and have selected some critical moment in the life of Julian. He should rather have concentrated his energies, independent of the chroniclers, on the resuscitation of that episode, and in the course of it have trembled less humbly under the uplifted finger of Ammianus.

Of _Emperor and Galilean_ Ibsen afterwards said: "It was the first" (but he might have added "the only") "poem which I have written under the influence of German ideas." He was aware of the danger of living too long away from his own order of thought and language. But it was always difficult for him, once planted in a place, to pull up his roots. A weariness took possession of him after the publication of his double drama, and he did practically nothing for four years. This marks a central joint in the structure of his career, what the architects call a "channel" in it, adding to the general retrospect of Ibsen's work an aspect of solidity and resource. During these years he revised some of his early writings, made a closer study of the arts of sculpture and painting, and essayed, without satisfaction, a very brief sojourn in Norway. In the spring of 1875 he definitely moved with his family from Dresden to Munich.
The brief visit to Christiania in 1874 proved very unfortunate. Ibsen was suspicious, the Norwegians of that generation were constitutionally stiff and reserved; long years among Southern races had accustomed him to a plenitude in gesture and emphasis. He suffered, all the brief time he was in Norway, from an intolerable malaise. Ten years afterwards, in writing to Bjoernson, the discomfort of that experience was still unallayed. "I have not yet saved nearly enough," he said, "to support myself and my family in the case of my discontinuing my literary work. And I should be obliged to discontinue it if I lived in Christiania. ...

This simply means that I should not write at all. When, ten years ago, after an absence of ten years, I sailed up the fjord, I felt a weight settling down on my breast, a feeling of actual physical oppression. And this feeling lasted all the time I was at home; I was not myself under the stare of all those cold, uncomprehending Norwegian eyes at the windows and in the streets."

Ibsen had now been more than ten years am exile from Norway, and his sentiments with regard to his own people were still what they were when, in July, 1872, he had sent home his Ode for the Millenary Festival.

That very striking poem, one of the most solid of Ibsen's lyrical performances, had opened in the key of unmitigated defiance to popular opinion at home. It was intended to show Norwegians that they must alter their attitude towards him, as he would never change his behavior towards them. "My countrymen," he said:--

My countrymen, who filled for me deep bowls
Of wholesome bitter medicine, such as gave
The poet, on the margin of his grave,
Fresh force to fight where broken twilight rolls,--
My countrymen, who sped me o'er the wave,
An exile, with my griefs for pilgrim-soles,
My fears for burdens, doubts for staff, to roam,--
From the wide world I send you greeting home.

I send you thanks for gifts that help and harden,
Thanks for each hour of purifying pain;
Each plant that springs in my poetic garden
Is rooted where your harshness poured its rain;
Each shoot in which it blooms and burgeons forth
It owes to that gray weather from the North;
The sun relaxes, but the fog secures!
My country, thanks! My life's best gifts were yours.

In spite of these sardonic acknowledgments. Ibsen's fame in Norway,
though still disputed, was now secure. In Denmark and Sweden it was
almost unchallenged, and he was a name, at least, in Germany. In
England, since 1872, he had not been without a prophet. But in Italy,
Russia, France--three countries upon the intelligence of which he was
presently to make a wide and durable impression--he was still quite
unknown.

Meanwhile, in glancing over the general literature of Europe, we see his
figure, at the threshold of his fiftieth year, taking greater and
greater prominence. He had become, in the sudden extinction of the
illustrious old men of Denmark, the first living writer of the North. He
was to Norway what Valera was to Spain, Carducci to Italy, Swinburne or
Rossetti to England, and Leconte de Lisle to France. These were mainly
lyrical poets, but it must not be forgotten that Ibsen, down at least
till 1871, was prominently illustrious as a writer in metrical form. If,
in the second portion of his career, he resolutely deprived himself of
all indulgence in the ornament of verse, it was a voluntary act of
austerity. It was Charles V at Yuste, wilfully exchanging the crown of
jewels for the coarse brown cowl of St. Jerome. And now, after a year or
two of prayer and fasting, Ibsen began a new intellectual career.

CHAPTER VI

1875-82

While Ibsen was sitting at Munich, in this climacteric stage of his
career, dreaming of wonderful things and doing nothing, there came to
him, in the early months of 1875, two new plays by his chief rival.
These were _The Editor_ and _A Bankruptcy_, in which Bjoernson suddenly
swooped from his sagas and his romances down into the middle of sordid
modern life. This was his first attempt at that "photography by comedy"
which he had urged on Ibsen in 1868. It is not, I think, recorded what
was Ibsen's comment on these two plays, and particularly on _A
Bankruptcy_, but it is written broadly over the surface of his own next
work. It is obvious that he perceived that Bjoernson had carried a very
spirited raid into his own particular province, and he was determined to
drive this audacious enemy back by means of greater audacities.

Not at once, however; for an extraordinary languor seemed to have fallen upon Ibsen. His isolation from society became extreme; for nearly a year he gave no sign of life. In September, 1875, indeed, if not earlier, he was at work on a five-act play, but what this was is unknown. It seems to have been in the winter of 1876, after an unprecedented period of inanimation, that he started a new comedy, _The Pillars of Society_, which was finished in Munich in July, 1877, that summer being unique in the fact that the Ibsens do not seem to have left town at all.

Ibsen was now a good deal altered in the exteriors of character. With his fiftieth year he presents himself as no more the Poet, but the Man of Business. Molbech told me that at this time the velveteen jacket, symbol of the dear delays of art, was discarded in favor of a frock-coat, too tight across the chest. Ibsen was now beginning, rather shyly, very craftily, to invest money; he even found himself in frequent straits for ready coin from his acute impatience to set every rix-dollar breeding. He cast the suspicion of poetry from him, and with his gold spectacles, his Dundreary whiskers, his broadcloth bosom and his quick staccato step, he adopted the pose of a gentleman of affairs, very positive and with no nonsense about him.

He had long determined on the wilful abandonment of poetic form, and the famous statement made in a letter to myself (January 15, 1874) must be quoted, although it is well known, since it contains the clearest of all
You are of opinion that the drama [*Emperor and Galilean*] ought to have been written in verse, and that it would have gained by this. Here I must differ from you. The play is, as you will have observed, conceived in the most realistic style: the illusion I wished to produce is that of reality. I wished to produce the impression on the reader that what he was reading was something that had really happened. If I had employed verse, I should have counteracted my own intention and prevented the accomplishment of the task I had set myself. The many ordinary insignificant characters whom I have intentionally introduced into the play would have become indistinct, and indistinguishable from one another, if I had allowed all of them to speak in one and the same rhythmical measure. We are no longer living in the days of Shakespeare. Among sculptors there is already talk of painting statues in the natural colors. Much can be said both for and against this. I have no desire to see the Venus of Milo painted, but I would rather see the head of a negro executed in black than in white marble. Speaking generally, the style must conform to the degree of ideality which pervades the representation. My new drama is no tragedy in the ancient acceptation; what I desired to depict were human beings, and therefore I would not let them talk "the language of the Gods."

This revolt against dramatic verse was a feature of the epoch. In 1877 Alphonse Daudet was to write of a comedy, "Mais, helas! cette piece est en vers, et l'ennui s'y promene librement entre les rimes."
No poet, however, sacrificed so much, or held so rigidly to his
intention of reproducing the exact language of real life, as did Ibsen
in the series of plays which opens with _The Pillars of Society_. This
drama was published in Copenhagen in October, 1877, and was acted almost
immediately in Denmark, Sweden and Norway; it had the good fortune to be
taken up warmly in Germany. What Ibsen's idea was, in the new sort of
realistic drama which he was inventing, was, in fact, perceived at once
by German audiences, although it was not always approved of. He was the
guest of the theatromaniac Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, and _The Pillars of
Society_ was played in many parts of Germany. In Scandinavia the book of
the play sold well, and the piece had some success on the boards, but it
did not create anything like so much excitement as the author had hoped
that it would. Danish taste pronounced it "too German."

For the fact that _The Pillars of Society_, except in Scandinavia and
Germany, did not then, and never has since, taken a permanent hold upon
the theatre, Mr. William Archer gives a reason which cannot be
controverted, namely, that by the time the other foreign publics had
fully awakened to the existence of Ibsen, he himself had so far outgrown
the phase of his development marked by _Pillars of Society_, that the
play already seemed commonplace and old-fashioned. It exactly suited the
German public of the eighties; it was exactly on a level with their
theatrical intelligence. But it was above the theatrical intelligence of
the Anglo-American public, and ... below that of the French public. This
is of course an exaggeration. What I mean is that there was no possible
reason why the countrymen of Augier and Dumas should take any special
interest in _Pillars of Society_. It was not obviously in advance of
these masters in technical skill, and the vein of Teutonic sentiment
running through it could not greatly appeal to the Parisian public of
that period.

The subject of _The Pillars of Society_ was the hollowness and
rotteness of those supports, and the severe and unornamented prose
which Ibsen now adopted was very favorable to its discussion. He was
accused, however, of having lived so long away from home as to have
fallen out of touch with real Norwegian life, which he studied in the
convex mirror of the newspapers. It is more serious objection to _The
Pillars of Society_ that in it, as little as in _The League of Youth_,
had Ibsen cut himself off from the traditions of the well-made play.
Gloomy and homely as are the earlier acts, Ibsen sees as yet no way out
of the imbroglio but that known to Scribe and the masters of the "well-
made" play. The social hypocrisy of Consul Bernick is condoned by a sort
of death-bed repentance at the close, which is very much of the usual
"bless-ye-my-children" order. The loss of the Indian Girl is
miraculously prevented, and at the end the characters are solemnized and
warned, yet are left essentially none the worse for their alarm. This,
unfortunately, is not the mode in which the sins of scheming people find
them out in real life. But to the historical critic it is very
interesting to see Bjoernson and Ibsen nearer one another in _A
Bankruptcy_ and _The Pillars of Society_ than they had ever been before.
They now started on a course of eager, though benevolent, rivalry which
was eminently to the advantage of each of them.
No feature of Ibsen's personal career is more interesting than his relation to Bjoernson. Great as the genius of Ibsen was, yet, rating it as ungrudgingly as possible, we have to admit that Bjoernson's character was the more magnetic and more radiant of the two. Ibsen was a citizen of the world; he belonged, in a very remarkable degree, to the small class of men whose intelligence lifts them above the narrowness of local conditions, who belong to civilization at large, not to the system of one particular nation. He was, in consequence, endowed, almost automatically, with the instinct of regarding ideas from a central point; if he was to be limited at all, he might be styled European, although, perhaps, few Western citizens would have had less difficulty than he in making themselves comprehended by a Chinese, Japanese or Indian mind of unusual breadth and cultivation. On the other hand, in accepting the advantages of this large mental outlook, he was forced to abandon those of nationality. No one can say that Ibsen was, until near the end of his life, a good Norwegian, and he failed, by his utterances, to vibrate the local mind. But Bjoernson, with less originality, was the typical patriot in literature, and what he said, and thought, and wrote was calculated to stir the local conscience to the depths of its being.

When, therefore, in 1867, Ibsen, who was bound by all natural obligations and tendencies to remain on the best terms with Bjoernson, allowed the old friendship between them to lapse into positive antagonism, he was following the irresistible evolution of his fate, as Bjoernson was following his. It was as inevitable that Ibsen should grow to his full height in solitude as it was that Bjoernson should pine unless he was fed by the dew and sunlight of popular meetings,
torchlight processions of students and passionate appeals to local
sentiment. Trivial causes, such as those which we have chronicled
earlier, might seem to lead up to a division, but that division was
really inherent in the growth of the two men.

Ibsen, however, was not wholly a gainer at first even in genius, by the
separation. It cut him off from Norway too entirely, and it threw him
into the arms of Germany. There were thirteen years in which Ibsen and
Bjoernson were nothing to one another, and these were not years of
unmingled mental happiness for either of them. But during this long
period each of these very remarkable men "came into his kingdom," and
when there was no longer any chance that either of there could warp the
nature of the other, fate brought them once more together.

The reconciliation began, of course, with a gracious movement from
Bjoernson. At the end of 1880, writing for American readers, Bjoernson had
the generous candor to say: "I think I have a pretty thorough
acquaintance with the dramatic literature of the world, and I have not
the slightest hesitation in saying that Henrik Ibsen possesses more
dramatic power than any other play-writer of our day." When we remember
that, in France alone, Augier and Dumas _fils_ and Hugo, Halevy and
Meilhac and Labiche, were all of them alive, the compliment, though a
sound, was a vivid one. Sooner or later, everything that was said about
Ibsen, though it were whispered in Choctaw behind the altar of a Burmese
temple, came round to Ibsen's ears, and this handsome tribute from the
rival produced its effect. And when, shortly afterwards, still in
America, Bjoernson was nearly killed in a railway accident, Ibsen broke
the long silence by writing to him a most cordial letter of congratulation.

The next incident was the publication of _Ghosts_, when Bjoernson, now thoroughly roused, stood out almost alone, throwing the vast prestige of his judgment into the empty scale against the otherwise unanimous black-balling. Then the reconcilement was full and fraternal, and Ibsen wrote from Rome (January 24, 1882), with an emotion rare indeed for him: "The only man in Norway who has frankly, boldly and generously taken my part is Bjoernson. It is just like him; he has, in truth, a great, a kingly soul; and I shall never forget what he has done now." Six months later, on occasion of Bjoernson's jubilee, Ibsen telegraphed: "My thanks for the work done side by side with me in the service of freedom these twenty-five years." These words wiped away all unhappy memories of the past; they gave public recognition to the fact that, though the two great poets had been divided for half a generation by the forces of circumstance, they had both been fighting at wings of the same army against the common enemy.

This, however, takes us for the moment a little too far ahead. After the publication of _The Pillars of Society_, Ibsen remained quiet for some time; indeed, from this date we find him adopting the practice which was to be regular with him henceforth, namely, that of letting his mind lie fallow for one year after the issue of each of his works, and then spending another year in the formation of the new play. Munich gradually became tedious to him, and he justly observed that the pressure of German surroundings was unfavorable to the healthy evolution of his
genius. In 1878 he went back to Rome, which, although it was no longer the quiet and aristocratic Rome of Papal days, was still immensely attractive to his temperament. He was now, in some measure, "a person of means," and he made the habit of connoisseurship his hobby. He formed a small collection of pictures, selecting works with, as he believed, great care. The result could be seen long afterwards by those who visited him in his final affluence, for they hung round the rooms of the sumptuous flat in which he spent his old age and in which he died. His taste, as far as one remembers, was for the Italian masters of the decline, and whether he selected pictures with a good judgment must be left for others to decide. Probably he shared with Shelley a fondness for the Guercinos and the Guido Renis, whom we can now admire only in defiance of Ruskin.

In April, 1879, it is understood, a story was told him of an incident in the Danish courts, the adventure of a young married woman in one of the small towns of Zealand, which set his thoughts running on a new dramatic enterprise. He was still curiously irritated by contemplating, in his mind's eye, the "respectable, estimable narrowmindedness and worldliness" of social conditions in Norway, where there was no aristocracy, and where a lower middle-class took the place of a nobility, with, as he thought, sordid results. But he was no longer suffering from what he himself had called "the feeling of an insane man staring at one single, hopelessly black spot." He went to Amalfi for the summer, and in that delightful spot, so curiously out of keeping with his present rigidly prosaic mood, he set himself to write what is probably the most widely famous of all his works, _A Doll's House_. The
day before he started he wrote to me from Rome (in an unpublished letter of July 4, 1879): “I have been living here with my family since September last, and most of that time I have been occupied with the idea of a new dramatic work, which I shall now soon finish, and which will be published in October. It is a serious drama, really a family drama, dealing with modern conditions and in particular with the problems which complicate marriage.” This play he finished, lingering at Amalfi, in September, 1879. It was an engineer's experiment at turning up and draining a corner of the moral swamp which Norwegian society seemed to be to his violent and ironic spirit.

_A Doll's House_ was Ibsen's first unqualified success. Not merely was it the earliest of his plays which excited universal discussion, but in its construction and execution it carried out much further than its immediate precursors Ibsen's new ideal as an unwavering realist. Mr. Arthur Symons has well said [Note: The _Quarterly Review_ for October, 1906.] that "_A Doll's House_ is the first of Ibsen's plays in which the puppets have no visible wires." It may even be said that it was the first modern drama in which no wires had been employed. Not that even here the execution is perfect, as Ibsen afterwards made it. The arm of coincidence is terribly shortened, and the early acts, clever and entertaining as they are, are still far from the inevitability of real life. But when, in the wonderful last act, Nora issues from her bedroom, dressed to go out, to Helmer's and the audience's stupefaction, and when the agitated pair sit down to "have it out," face to face across the table, then indeed the spectator feels that a new thing has been born in drama, and, incidentally, that the "well-made play" has suddenly become
as dead as Queen Anne. The grimness, the intensity of life, are amazing in this final scene, where the old happy ending is completely abandoned for the first time, and where the paradox of life is presented without the least shuffling or evasion.

It was extraordinary how suddenly it was realized that _A Doll's House_ was a prodigious performance. All Scandinavia rang with Nora’s "declaration of independence." People left the theatre, night after night, pale with excitement, arguing, quarrelling, challenging. The inner being had been unveiled for a moment, and new catchwords were repeated from mouth to mouth. The great statement and reply--"No man sacrifices his honor, even for one he loves," "Hundreds of thousands of women have done so!"--roused interminable discussion in countless family circles. The disputes were at one time so violent as to threaten the peace of households; a school of imitators at once sprang up to treat the situation, from slightly different points of view, in novel, poem and drama. [Note: The reader who desires to obtain further light on the technical quality of _A Doll's House_ can do no better than refer to Mr. William Archer's elaborate analysis of it (_Fortnightly Review_, July, 1906.)]

The universal excitement which Ibsen had vainly hoped would be awakened by _The Pillars of Society_ came, when he was not expecting it, to greet _A Doll's House_. Ibsen was stirred by the reception of his latest play into a mood rather different from that which he expressed at any other period. As has often been said, he did not pose as a prophet or as a reformer, but it did occur to him now that he might exercise a strong
moral influence, and in writing to his German translator, Ludwig
Passarge, he said (June 16, 1880):

Everything that I have written has the closest possible connection with
what I have lived through, even if it has not been my own personal
experience; in every new poem or play I have aimed at my own spiritual
emancipation and purification--for a man shares the responsibility and
the guilt of the society to which he belongs.

It was in this spirit of unusual gravity that he sat down to the
composition of _Ghosts_. There is little or no record of how he occupied
himself at Munich and Berchtesgaden in 1880, except that in March he
began to sketch, and then abandoned, what afterwards became _The Lady
from the Sea_. In the autumn of that year, indulging once more his
curious restlessness, he took all his household gods and goods again to
Rome. His thoughts turned away from dramatic art for a moment, and he
planned an autobiography, which was to deal with the gradual development
of his mind, and to be called _From Skien to Rome_. Whether he actually
wrote any of this seems uncertain; that he should have planned it shows
a certain sense of maturity, a suspicion that, now in his fifty-third
year, he might be nearly at the end of his resources. As a matter of
fact, he was just entering upon a new inheritance. In the summer of 1881
he went, as usual now, to Sorrento, and there [Note: So the authorities
state: but in an unpublished letter to myself, dated Rome, November 26,
1880, I find Ibsen saying, "Just now I am beginning to exercise my
thoughts over a new drama; I hope I shall finish it in the course of
next summer." It seems to have been already his habit to meditate long
about a subject before it took any definite literary form in his mind.

the plot of _Ghosts_ revealed itself to him. This work was composed with
more than Ibsen's customary care, and was published at the beginning of
December, in an edition of ten thousand copies.

Before the end of 1881 Ibsen was aware of the terrific turmoil which
_Ghosts_ had begun to occasion. He wrote to Passarge: "My new play has
now appeared, and has occasioned a terrible uproar in the Scandinavian
press. Every day I receive letters and newspaper articles decrying or
praising it. I consider it absolutely impossible that any German theatre
will accept the play at present. I hardly believe that they will dare to
play it in any Scandinavian country for some time to come." It was, in
fact, not acted publicly anywhere until 1883, when the Swedes ventured
to try it, and the Germans followed in 1887. The Danes resisted it much
longer.

Ibsen declared that he was quite prepared for the hubbub; he would
doubtless have been much disappointed if it had not taken place;
nevertheless, he was disconcerted at the volume and the violence of the
attacks. Yet he must have known that in the existing condition of
society, and the limited range of what was then thought a defensible
criticism of that condition, _Ghosts_ must cause a virulent scandal.
There has been, especially in Germany, a great deal of medico-
philosophical exposure of the under-side of life since 1880. It is
hardly possible that, there, or in any really civilized country, an
analysis of the causes of what is, after all, one of the simplest and
most conventional forms of hereditary disease could again excite such a
startling revulsion of feeling. Krafft-Ebing and a crew of
investigators, Strindberg, Brieux, Hauptmann, and a score of probing
playwrights all over the Continent, have gone further and often fared
much worse than Ibsen did when he dived into the family history of
Kammerherre Alving. When we read _Ghosts_ to-day we cannot recapture the
"new shudder" which it gave us a quarter of a century ago. Yet it must
not be forgotten that the publication of it, in that hide-bound time,
was an act of extraordinary courage. Georg Brandes, always clearsighted,
was alone in being able to perceive at once that _Ghosts_ was no attack
on society, but an effort to place the responsibilities of men and women
on a wholesomer and surer footing, by direct reference to the relation
of both to the child.

When the same eminent critic, however, went on to say that _Ghosts_ was
"a poetic treatment of the question of heredity," it was more difficult
to follow him. Now that the flash and shock of the playwright's audacity
are discounted, it is natural to ask ourselves whether, as a work of
pure art, _Ghosts_ stands high among Ibsen's writings. I confess, for my
own part, that it seems to me deprived of "poetic" treatment, that is to
say, of grace, charm and suppleness, to an almost fatal extent. It is
extremely original, extremely vivid and stimulating, but, so far as a
foreigner may judge, the dialogue seems stilted and uniform, the
characters, with certain obvious exceptions, rather types than persons.
In the old fighting days it was necessary to praise _Ghosts_ with
extravagance, because the vituperation of the enemy was so stupid and
offensive, but now that there are no serious adversaries left, cooler
judgment admits--not one word that the idiot-adversary said, but--that
there are more convincing plays than _Ghosts_ in Ibsen's repertory.

Up to this time, Ibsen had been looked upon as the mainstay of the Conservative party in Norway, in opposition to Bjoernson, who led the Radicals. But the author of _Ghosts_, who was accused of disseminating anarchism and nihilism, was now smartly drummed out of the Tory camp without being welcomed among the Liberals. Each party was eager to disown him. He was like Coriolanus, when he was deserted by nobles and people alike, and

suffer'd by the voice of slaves to be Whoop'd out of Rome.

The situation gave Ibsen occasion, from the perspective of his exile, to form some impressions of political life which were at once pungent and dignified:

"I am more and more confirmed" [he said, Jan, 3, 1882] "in my belief that there is something demoralizing in politics and parties. I, at any rate, shall never be able to join a party which has the majority on its side. Bjoernson says, 'The majority is always right'; and as a practical politician he is bound, I suppose, to say so. I, on the contrary, of necessity say, 'The minority is always right.'"

In order to place this view clearly before his countrymen, he set about composing the extremely vivid and successful play, perhaps the most
successful pamphlet-play that ever was written, which was to put forward
in the clearest light the claim of the minority. He was very busy with
preparations for it all through the summer of 1882, which he spent at
what was now to be for many years his favorite summer resort, Gossensass
in the Tyrol, a place which is consecrated to the memory of Ibsen in the
way that Pornic belongs to Robert Browning and the Bel Alp to Tyndall,
holiday homes in foreign countries, dedicated to blissful work without
disturbance. Here, at a spot now officially named the "Ibsenplatz," he
composed _The Enemy of the People_, engrossed in his invention as was
his wont, reading nothing and thinking of nothing but of the persons
whose history he was weaving. Oddly enough, he thought that this, too,
was to be a "placable" play, written to amuse and stimulate, but
calculated to wound nobody's feelings. The fact was that Ibsen, like
some ocelot or panther of the rocks, had a paw much heavier than he
himself realized, and his "play," in both senses, was a very serious
affair, when he descended to sport with common humanity.

Another quotation, this time from a letter to Brandes, must be given to
show what Ibsen's attitude was at this moment to his fatherland and to
his art:

"When I think how slow and heavy and dull the general intelligence is at
home, when I notice the low standard by which everything is judged, a
deep despondency comes over me, and it often seems to me that I might
just as well end my literary activity at once. They really do not need
poetry at home; they get along so well with the party newspapers and the
_Lutheran Weekly_."
If Ibsen thought that he was offering them "poetry" in _The Enemy of the People_, he spoke in a Scandinavian sense. Our criticism has never opened its arms wide enough to embrace all imaginative literature as poetry, and in the English sense nothing in the world's drama is denser or more unqualified prose than _The Enemy of the People_, without a tinge of romance or rhetoric, as "unideal" as a blue-book. It is, nevertheless, one of the most certainly successful of its author's writings; as a stage-play it rivets the attention; as a pamphlet it awakens irresistible sympathy; as a specimen of dramatic art, its construction and evolution are almost faultless. Under a transparent allegory, it describes the treatment which Ibsen himself had received at the hands of the Norwegian public for venturing to tell them that their spa should be drained before visitors were invited to flock to it. Nevertheless, the playwright has not made the mistake of identifying his own figure with that of Dr. Stockmann, who is an entirely independent creation. Mr. Archer has compared the hero with Colonel Newcome, whose loquacious amicability he does share, but Stockmann's character has much more energy and initiative than Colonel Newcome's, whom we could never fancy rousing himself "to purge society."

Ibsen's practical wisdom in taking the bull by the horns in his reply to the national reception of _Ghosts_ was proved by the instant success of _The Enemy of the People_. Presented to the public in this new and audacious form, the problem of a "moral water-supply" struck sensible Norwegians as less absurd and less dangerous than they had conceived it to be. The reproof was mordant, and the worst offenders crouched under
the lash. _Ghosts_ itself was still, for some time, tabooed, but _The Enemy of the People_ received a cordial welcome, and has remained ever since one of the most popular of Ibsen's writings. It is still extremely effective on the stage, and as it is lightened by more humor than the author is commonly willing to employ, it attracts even those who are hostile to the intrusion of anything solemn behind the footlights.

CHAPTER VII

1883-91

With the appearance of _An Enemy of the People_, which was published in November, 1882, Ibsen entered upon a new stage in his career. He had completely broken with the Conservative party in Norway, without having gratified or won the confidence of the Liberals. He was now in personal relations of friendliness with Bjoernson, whose generous approval of his work as a dramatist sustained his spirits, but his own individualism had been intensified by the hostile reception of _Ghosts_. His life was now divided between Rome in the winter and Gossensass in the summer, and in the Italian city, as in the Tyrolese village, he wandered solitary, taciturn, absorbed in his own thoughts. His meditations led him more and more into a lonely state. He floated, as on a prophet's carpet, between the political heavens and earth, capriciously refusing to ascend or to alight. He had come to a sceptical stage in his mental evolution, a stage in which he was to remain for a considerable time, gradually modifying it in a conservative direction. One wonders what the simple-minded and stalwart Bjoernson thought of being quietly told (March 28, 1884) that the lower classes are nowhere liberal-minded or self-
sacrificing, and that "in the views expressed by our [Norwegian] peasants there is not an atom more of real Liberalism than is to be found among the ultramontane peasantry of the Tyrol." In politics Ibsen had now become a pagan; "I do not believe," he said, "in the emancipatory power of political measures, nor have I much confidence in the altruism and good will of those in power." This sense of the uselessness of effort is strongly marked in the course of the next work on which he was engaged, the very brilliant, but saturnine and sardonic tragi-comedy of _The Wild Duck_. The first sketch of it was made during the spring of 1884 in Rome, but the dramatist took it to Gossensass with him for the finishing touches, and did not perfect it until the autumn.

It is remarkable that Ibsen invariably speaks of _The Wild Duck_, when he mentions it in his correspondence, in terms of irony. He calls it a collection of crazy tricks or tomfooleries, _galskaber_, an expression which carries with it, in this sense, a confession of wilful paradox. In something of the same spirit, Robert Browning, in the old days before he was comprehended, used to speak of "the entirely unintelligible _Sordello_," as if, sarcastically, to meet criticism half-way.

When _The Wild Duck_ was first circulated among Ibsen's admirers, it was received with some bewilderment. Quite slowly the idea received acceptance that the hitherto so serious and even angry satirist was, to put it plainly, laughing at himself. The faithful were reluctant to concede it. But one sees now, clearly enough, that in a sense it was so. I have tried to show, we imagine Ibsen saying, that your hypocritical sentimentality needs correction--you live in "A Doll's House." I have dared to point out to you that your society is physically and morally
rotten and full of "Ghosts." You have repudiated my honest efforts as a reformer, and called me "An Enemy of the People." Very well, then, have it so if you please. What a fool am I to trouble about you at all. Go down a steep place in Gadara and drown yourselves. If it amuses you, it can amuse me also to be looked upon as Gregers Werle. _Vogue la galere_.

"But as the play is neither to deal with the Supreme Court, nor the right of absolute veto, nor even with the removal of the sign of the union from the flag," burning questions then and afterwards in Norwegian politics, "it can hardly count upon arousing much interest in Norway"; it will, however, amuse me immensely to point out the absurdity of my caring. It is in reading _The Wild Duck_ that for the first time the really astonishing resemblance which Ibsen bears to Euripides becomes apparent to us. This is partly because the Norwegian dramatist now relinquishes any other central object than the presentation to his audience of the clash of temperament, and partly because here at last, and for the future always, he separates himself from everything that is not catastrophe. More than any earlier play, more even than _Ghosts_, _The Wild Duck_ is an avalanche which has begun to move, and with a movement unaffected by the incidents of the plot, long before the curtain rises. The later plays of Ibsen, unlike almost all other modern dramas, depend upon nothing that happens while they are being exhibited, but rush downwards to their inevitable close in obedience to a series of long-precedent impulses. In order to gain this effect, the dramatist has to be acquainted with everything that has ever happened to his personages, and we are informed that Ibsen used to build up in his own mind, for months at a time, the past history of his puppets. He was now master of this practice. We are not surprised, therefore, to find one of the most penetrating of dramatic critics remarking of _The Wild Duck_
that "never before had the poet displayed such an amazing power of fascinating and absorbing us by the gradual withdrawal of veil after veil from the past."

The result of a searching determination to deal with personal and not typical forms of temperament is seen in the firmness of the portraiture in _The Wild Duck_, where, I think, less than ever before, is to be found a trace of that incoherency which is to be met with occasionally in all the earlier works of Ibsen, and which seems like the effect of a sudden caprice or change of the point of view. There is, so far as I can judge, no trace of this in _The Wild Duck_, where the continuity of aspect is extraordinary. Confucius assures us that if we tell him our past, he will tell us our future, and although several of the characters in _The Wild Duck_ are the most sordid of Ibsen's creations, the author has made himself so deeply familiar with them that they are absolutely lifelike. The detestable Hialmar, in whom, by the looking-glass of a disordered liver, any man may see a picture of himself; the pitiable Gregers Werle, perpetually thirteenth at table, with his genius for making an utter mess of other people's lives; the vulgar Gina; the beautiful girlish figure of the little martyred Hedvig—all are wholly real and living persons.

The subject of the play, of course, is one which we do not expect, or had not hitherto expected, from Ibsen. It is the danger of "a sick conscience" and the value of illusion. Society may be full of poisonous vapors and be built on a framework of lies; it is nevertheless prudent to consider whether the ideal advantages of disturbing it outweigh the
practical disadvantages, and above all to bear in mind that if you rob
the average man of his illusions, you are almost sure to rob him of his
happiness. The topsy-turvy nature of a this theme made Ibsen as nearly
"rollicking" as he ever became in his life. We can imagine than as he
wrote the third act of _The Wild Duck_, where so horrible a luncheon
party--"we'll all keep a corner"--gloats over the herring salad, he
indulged again and again in those puffs of soundless and formidable
mirth which Mr. Johan Paulsen describes as so surprising an element of
conversation with Ibsen.

To the gossip of that amiable Boswell, too, we must turn for a valuable
impression of the solidification of Ibsen's habits which began about
this time, and which marked then even before he left Munich. He had now
successfully separated himself from all society, and even his family saw
him only at meals. Visitors could not penetrate to him, but, if
sufficiently courageous, must hang about on the staircase, hoping to
catch him for a moment as he hurried out to the cafe. Within his study,
into which the daring Paulsen occasionally ventured, Ibsen, we are to
believe, did nothing at all, but "sat bent over the pacific ocean of his
own mind, which mirrored for him a world far more fascinating, vast and
rich than that which lay spread around him." [Note: _Samliv med Ibsen_,
1906, p. 30.]

And now the celebrated afternoons at the cafes had begun. In Rome Ibsen
had his favorite table, and he would sit obliquely facing a mirror in
which, half hidden by a newspaper and by the glitter of his gold
spectacles, he could command a sight of the whole restaurant, and
especially of the door into the street. Every one who entered, every
couple that conversed, every movement of the scene, gave something to
those untiring eyes. The newspaper and the cafe mirror--these were the
books which, for the future, Ibsen was almost exclusively to study; and
out of the gestures of a pair of friends at a table, out of a paragraph
in a newspaper, even out of the terms of an advertisement, he could
build up a drama. Incessant observation of real life, incessant capture
of unaffected, unconsidered phrases, actual living experience leaping in
his hands like a captive wild animal, this was now the substance from
which all Ibsen's dreams and dramas were woven. Concentration of
attention on the vital play of character, this was his one interest.

Out of this he was roused by a sudden determination to go at last and
see for himself what life in Norway was really like. A New England wit
once denied that a certain brilliant and Europe-loving American author
was a cosmopolitan. "No," he said, "a cosmopolitan is at home even in
his own country." Ibsen began to doubt whether he was not too far off to
follow events in Norway--and these were now beginning to be very
exciting--well enough to form an independent judgment about them; and
after twenty years of exile there is no doubt that the question was
fairly put. _The Wild Duck_ had been published in November, 1884, and
had been acted everywhere in Scandinavia with great success. The critics
and the public were agreed for the first time that Ibsen was a very
great national genius, and that if Norway was not proud of him it would
make a fool of itself in the eyes of Europe.

Ibsen had said that Norway was a barbarous country, inhabited by two
millions of cats and dogs, but so many agreeable and highly-civilized compliments found their way to him in Rome that he began to fancy that the human element was beginning to be introduced. At all events, he would see for himself, and in June, 1885, instead of stopping at Gossensass, he pushed bravely on and landed in Christiania.

At first all went well, but from the very beginning of the visit he observed, or thought he observed, awkward phenomena. The country was thrilled with political excitement, and it vibrated with rhetorical resolutions which seemed to Ibsen very empty. He had a constitutional horror of purely theoretical questions, and these were occupying Norway from one end to the other. The King's veto, the consular difficulty, the Swedish emblem in the national flag, these were the subjects of frenzied discussion, and in none of these did Ibsen take any sort of pleasure. He was not politically far-sighted, it must be confessed, nor did he guess what practical proportions these "theoretical questions" were to assume in the immediate future.

That great writer and delightful associate, the Swedish poet, Count Snoilsky, one of the few whose company never wearied or irritated Ibsen, joined him in the far north. They spent a pleasant, quiet time together at Molde, that enchanting little sub-arctic town, where it looks southward over the shining fjord, with the Romsdalhorn forever guarding the mountainous horizon. Here no politics intruded, and Ibsen, when Snoilsky had left him, already thinking of a new drama, lingered on at Molde, spending hours on hours at the end of the jetty, gazing into the clear, cold sea. His passion for the sea had never betrayed him, and at
Rome, where he had long given up going to any galleries or studios, he
still haunted the house of a Norwegian marine painter, Nils Hansteen,
whose sketches reminded him of old days and recollected waters.

But the autumn comes on apace in these high latitudes, and Ibsen had to
return to Christiania with its torchlight processions, and late noisy
feasts, and triumphant revolutionary oratory. He disliked it extremely,
and he made up his mind to go back to the indifferent South, where
people did not worry about such things. Unfortunately, the inhabitants
of Christiania did not leave him alone. They were not content to have
him among them as a retired observer, they wanted to make him stand out
definitely on one political side or the other. He was urged, at the end
of September, to receive the inevitable torchlight procession planned in
his honor by the Union of Norwegian Students. He was astute enough to
see that this might compromise his independence, but he was probably too
self-conscious in believing that a trap was being laid for him. He said
that, not having observed that his presence gave the Union any great
pleasure, he did not care to have its expression of great joy at t his
departure. This was not polite, for it does not appear that the students
had any idea that he intended to depart. He would not address a reply to
the Union as a body, but to "my friends among the students."

A committee called upon him to beg him to reconsider his resolution, but
he roundly told them that he knew that they were reactionaries, and
wanted to annex him to their party, and that he was not blind to their
tricks. They withdrew in confusion, and Ibsen, in an agony of nervous
ness, determined to put the sea between himself and their machinations.
Early in October he retreated, or rather fled, to Copenhagen, and thence to Munich, where he breathed again. Meanwhile, the extreme liberal faction among the students claimed that his action had meant that he was heart and soul with them, as against the reactionaries. A young Mr. Ove Rode, who had interviewed him, took upon himself to say that these were Ibsen's real sentiments. Ibsen fairly stamped with rage, and declared, in furious communications, that all these things were done on purpose.

"It was an opportunity to insult a poet which it would have been a sad pity to lose," he remarked, with quivering pen. A reverberant controversy sprang up in the Norwegian newspapers, and Ibsen, in his Bavarian harbor of refuge, continued to vibrate all through the winter of 1885. The exile's return to his native country had proved to be far from a success.

Already his new play was taking shape, and the success of his great personal ambition, namely that his son, Sigurd, should be taken with honor into the diplomatic service of his country, did such to calm his spirits. Ibsen was growing rich now, as well as famous, and if only the Norwegians would let him alone, he might well be happy. The new play was _Rosmersholm_, and it took its impulse from a speech which Ibsen had made during his journey, at Trondhjem, where he expounded the gospel of individualism to a respectful audience of workingmen, and had laid down the necessity of introducing an aristocratic strain, _et adeligt element_, into the life of a truly democratic state, a strain which woman and labor were to unite in developing. He said: "I am thinking, of course, not of birth, nor of money, nor even of intellect, but of the nobility which grows out of character. It is _character_ alone which can
make us free." This nobility of character must be fostered, mainly, by
the united efforts of motherhood and labor. This was quite a new creed
in Norway, and it bewildered his hearers, but it is remarkable to notice
how the best public feeling in Scandinavia has responded to the appeal,
and how little surprise the present generation would express at a
repetition of such sentiments. And out of this idea of "nobility" of
public character _Rosmersholm_ directly sprang.

We are not left to conjecture in this respect. In a letter to Bjoern
Kristensen (February 13, 1887), Ibsen deliberately explained, while
correcting a misconception of the purpose of _Rosmersholm_, that "the
play deals with the struggle which all serious-minded human beings have
to wage with themselves in order to bring their lives into harmony with
their convictions. ... Conscience is very conservative. It has its deep
roots in tradition and the past generally, and hence the conflict." When
we come to read _Rosmersholm_ it is not difficult to see how this order
of ideas dominated Ibsen's mind when he wrote it. The mansion called by
that name is typical of the ancient traditions of Norwegian bourgeois
aristocracy, which are not to be subservient to such modern and timid
conservatism as is represented by Rector Kroll, with his horror of all
things new because they are new. The Rosmer strain, in its inherent
nobility, is to be superior to a craven horror of the democracy, and is
to show, by the courage with which it fulfils its personal destiny, that
it looks above and beyond all these momentary prejudices, and accepts,
from all hands, whatever is wise and of good report.

The misfortune is that Ibsen, in unconscious bondage to his ideas, did
not construct his drama sturdily enough on realistic lines. While not
one of his works is more suggestive than _Rosmersholm_, there is not one
which gives the unbeliever more opportunity to blaspheme. This ancestral
house of a great rich race, which is kept up by the ministrations of a
single aged female servant, stands in pure Cloud-Cuckoo Land. The
absence of practical amenities in the Rosmer family might be set down to
eccentricity, if all the other personages were not equally ill-provided.
Rebecca, glorious heroine according to some admirers, "criminal, thief
and murderess," as another admirer pleonastically describes her, is a
sort of troll; nobody can explain--and yet an explanation seems
requisite--what she does in the house of Rosmer. In his eagerness to
work out a certain sequence of philosophical ideas, the playwright for
once neglected to be plausible. It is a very remarkable feature of
_Rosmersholm_ that in it, for the first time, and almost for the last,
Ibsen, in the act of theorizing, loses his hold upon reality. He places
his ingenious, elaborate and--given the premises--inevitable denouement
in a scene scarcely more credible than that of a Gilbert and Sullivan
opera, and not one-tenth as amusing. Following, as it does, immediately
on the heels of _The Wild Duck_, which was as remarkable a slice of real
life as was ever brought before a theatrical audience, the artificiality
of _Rosmersholm_ shows Ibsen as an artist clearly stepping backward that
he may leap the further forward.

In other words, _Rosmersholm_ is the proof of Ibsen's desire to conquer
another field of drama. He had now for some years rejected with great
severity all temptations from the poetic spirit, which was nevertheless
in eradicable in him. He had wished to produce on the mind of the
spectator no other impression than that he was observing something which had actually happened, exactly in the way and the words in which it would happen. He had formulated to the actress, Lucie Wolf, the principle that ideal dramatic poetry should be considered extinct, "like some preposterous animal form of prehistoric times." But the soul of man cannot be fed with a stone, and Ibsen had now discovered that perfectly prosaic "slices of life" may be salutary and valuable on occasion, but that sooner or later a poet asks for more. He, therefore, a poet if ever there was one, had grown weary of the self-made law by which he had shut himself out from Paradise. He determined, grudgingly, and hardly knowing how to set about it, that he would once more give the spiritual and the imaginative qualities their place in his work. These had now been excluded for nearly twenty years, since the publication of _Peer Gynt_, and he would not resume them so far as to write his dramas again in verse. Verse in drama was doomed; or if not, it was at least a juvenile and fugitive skill not to be rashly picked up again by a business-like bard of sixty. But he would reopen the door to allegory and symbol, and especially to fantastic beauty of landscape.

The landscape of Rosmersholm has all, or at least much, of the old enchantment. The scene at the mill-dam links us once more with the woods and the waters which we had lost sight of since _Peer Gynt_. But this element was still more evident in _The Lady from the Sea_, which was published in 1888. We have seen that Ibsen spent long hours, in the summer of 1885, at the end of the pier at Molde, gazing down into the waters, or watching the steamers arriving and departing, coming from the great sea beyond the fjord or going towards it. As was his wont, he
stored up these impressions, making no immediate use of them. He actually prepared _The Lady from the Sea_ in very different, although still marine surroundings. He went to Jutland, and settled for the summer at the pretty and ancient, but very mild little town of Saeby, with the sands in front of him and rolling woods behind. From Saeby it was a short journey to Frederikshavn, "which he liked very much—he could knock about all day among the shipping, talking to the sailors, and so forth. Besides, he found the neighborhood of the sea favorable to contemplation and constructive thought." So Mr. Archer, who visited him at Saeby; and I myself, a year or two later, picked up at Frederikshavn an oral tradition of Ibsen, with his hands behind his back, and the frock-coat tightly buttoned, stalking, stalking alone for hours on the interminable promenade between the great harbor moles of Frederikshaven, no one daring to break in upon his formidable contemplation.

In several respects, though perhaps not in concentration of effect, _The Lady from the Sea_ shows a distinct advance on _Rosmersholm_. It is never dull, never didactic, as its predecessor too often was, and there is thrown over the whole texture of it a glamour of romance, of mystery, of beauty, which had not appeared in Ibsen's work since the completion of _Peer Gynt_. Again, after the appearance of so many strenuous tragedies, it was pleasant to welcome a pure comedy. _The Lady from the Sea_ is connected with the previous plays by its emphatic defence of individuality and its statement of the imperative necessity of developing it; but the tone is sunny, and without a tinge of pessimism.
It is in some respects the reverse of _Rosmersholm_; the bitterness of restrained and balked individuality, which ends in death, being contrasted with the sweetness of emancipated and gratified individuality, which leads to health and peace. To the remarkable estimate of _The Lady from the Sea_ formed by some critics, and in particular by M. Jules de Gaultier, we shall return in a general consideration of the symbolic plays, of which it is the earliest. Enough to say here that even those who did not plunge so deeply into its mysteries found it a remarkably agreeable spectacle, and that it has continued to be, in Scandinavia and Germany, one of the most popular of its author's works.

Ibsen left his little tavern at Saeby towards the end of September, 1887, in consequence of an invitation to proceed directly to Stockholm, where his Swedish admirers, now very numerous and enthusiastic, would no longer be deprived of the pleasure of entertaining him publicly. He appeared before them, the breast of his coat sparkling with foreign stars and crosses, the Urim and Thummim of general European recognition. He was now in his sixtieth year, and he had out lived all the obscurity of his youth. In the three Scandinavian countries--even in recalcitrant Norway--he was universally hailed as the greatest dramatist of the age. In Germany his fame was greater than that of any native writer of the sang class. In Italy and Russia he was entering on a career of high and settled popularity. Even in France and England his work was now discussed with that passionate interest which shows the vitality of what is even, for the moment, misinterpreted and disliked. His admirers at Stockholm told him that he had taken a foremost place in re-creating
their sense of life, that he was a fashioner and a builder of new social forms, that he was, indeed, to thousands of them, the Master-Builder.

The reply he made to their enthusiasm was dignified and reserved, but it revealed a sense of high gratification. Skule's long doubt was over; he believed at last in his own kingdom, and that the world would be ultimately the better for the stamp of his masterful soul upon its surface.

It was in an unusually happy mood that he sat dreaming through the early part of the uneventful year 1889. But it gradually sank into melancholy when, in the following year, he settled down to the composition of a new play which was to treat of sad thoughts and tragic passions. He told Snoilsky that for several reasons this work made very slow progress, "and it robbed him of his summer holidays." From May to November, 1890, he was uninterruptedly in Munich writing what is known to us now as _Hedda Gabler_. He finished it at last, saying as he did so, "It has not been my desire to deal in this play with so-called problems. What I principally wanted to do was to depict human beings, human emotions and human destinies, upon a groundwork of certain of the social conditions and principles of the present day." It was a proof of the immense growth of Ibsen's celebrity that editions of _Hedda Gabler_ were called for almost simultaneously, in the winter of 1890, in London, New York, St. Petersburg, Leipzig, Berlin and Moscow, as well as in Copenhagen, Stockholm and Christiania. There was no other living author in the world at that moment who excited so much curiosity among the intellectual classes, and none who exercised so much influence on the younger generation of authors and thinkers.
In _Hedda Gabler_ Ibsen returned, for the last time, but with concentrated vigor, to the prosaic ideal of his central period. He never succeeded in being more objective in drama, he never kept more closely to the bare facts of nature nor rejected more vigorously the ornaments of romance and rhetoric than in this amazing play. There is no poetic suggestion here, no species of symbol, white horse, or gnawing thing, or monster from the sea. I am wholly in agreement with Mr. Archer when he says that he finds it impossible to extract any sort of general idea from _Hedda Gabler_ or to accept it as a satire of any condition of society. Hedda is an individual, not a type, and it was as an individual that she interested Ibsen. We have been told, since the poet's death, that he was greatly struck by the case, which came under his notice at Munich, of a German lady who poisoned herself because she was bored with life, and had strayed into a false position. _Hedda Gabler_ is the realization of such an individual case. At first sight, it seemed as though Ibsen had been influenced by Dumas _fils_, which might have been true, in spite of the marked dislike which each expressed for the other; [Note: It is said that _La Route de Thebes_, which Dumas had begun when he died, was to have been a deliberate attack on the methods and influence of Ibsen. Ibsen, on his part, loathed Dumas.] but closer examination showed that Hedda Gabler had no sort of relation with the pamphlets of the master of Parisian problem-tragedy.

The attempt to show that _Hedda Gabler_ "proved" anything was annoying to Ibsen, who said, with more than his customary firmness, "It was not my purpose to deal with what people call problems in this play. What I
chiefly tried to do was to paint human beings, human emotions and human fate, against a background of some of the conditions and laws of society as it exists to-day." The German critics, a little puzzled to find a longitude and latitude for Tesman's "tastefully decorated" villa, declared that this time Ibsen had written an "international," not a locally Norwegian, play. Nothing could be further from the truth. On the contrary, _Hedda Gabler_ is perhaps the most fatally local and Norwegian of all Ibsen's plays, and it presents, not of course the highly civilized Christiania of to-day, but the half-suburban, half-rural little straggling town of forty years ago. When I visited Norway as a lad, I received kind but sometimes rather stiff and raw hospitality in several tastefully decorated villas, which were as like that of the Tesmans as pea is like pea. Why Ibsen chose to paint a "west end of Christiania" of 1860 rather than of 1890 I cannot guess, unless it was that to so persistent an exile the former was far more familiar than the latter.

A Russian actress of extreme talent, Madame Alla Nazimova, who has had special opportunities of studying the part of Hedda Gabler, has lately (1907) depicted her as "aristocratic and ill-mated, ambitious and doomed to a repulsive alliance with a man beneath her station, whom she had mistakenly hoped would give her position and wealth. In other circumstances, Hedda would have been a power for beauty and good." If this ingenious theory be correct, _Hedda Gabler_ must be considered as the leading example of Ibsen's often-repeated demonstration, that evil is produced by circumstances and not by character. The portrait becomes thrillingly vital if we realize that the stains upon it are the impact
of accidental conditions on a nature which might otherwise have been useful and fleckless. Hedda Gabler is painted as Mr. Sargent might paint a lady of the London fashionable world; his brush would divine and emphasize, as Ibsen's pen does, the disorder of her nerves, and the ravaging concentration of her will in a sort of barren and impotent egotism, while doing justice to the superficial attractiveness of her cultivated physical beauty. He would show, as Ibsen shows, and with an equal lack of malice prepense, various detestable features which the mask of good manners had concealed. Each artist would be called a caricaturist because his instinctive penetration had taken him into regions where the powder-puff and the rouge-pot lose their power.

CHAPTER VIII

LAST YEARS

With the publication of _Hedda Gabler_ Ibsen passed into what we may call his final glory. Almost insensibly, and to an accompaniment of his own growls of indignation, he had taken his place, not merely as the most eminent imaginative writer of the three Scandinavian countries, but as the type there of what literature should be and the prophet of what it would become. In 1880, Norway, the youngest and long the rawest of the three civilizations, was now the foremost in activity, and though the influence of Bjoernson and Jonas Lie was significant, yet it was not to be compared for breadth and complexity with that of Ibsen. The nature of the revolution, exercised by the subject of this memoir between 1880
and 1890, that is to say from _Ghosts_ to _Hedda Gabler_, was destructive before it was constructive. The poetry, fiction and drama of the three Northern nations had become stagnant with commonplace and conventional matter, lumbered with the recognized, inevitable and sacrosanct forms of composition. This was particularly the case in Sweden, where the influence of Ibsen now proved more violent and catastrophic than anywhere else. Ibsen destroyed the attraction of the old banal poetry; his spirit breathed upon it in fire, and in all its faded elegance it withered up and vanished.

The next event was that the new generation in the three Northern countries, deprived of its traditional authorities, looked about for a prophet and a father, and they found what they wanted in the exceedingly uncompromising elderly gentleman who remained so silent in the cafes of Rome and of Munich. The zeal of the young for this unseen and unsympathetic personage was extraordinary, and took forms of amazing extravagance. Ibsen's impassivity merely heightened the enthusiasm of his countless admirers, who were found, it should be stated, almost entirely among persons who were born after his exile from Norway. His writings supplied a challenge to character and intelligence which appealed to those who disliked the earlier system of morals and aesthetics against which he had so long fought single-handed.

Among writers in the North Ibsen began to hold very much the position that Whistler was taking among painters and etchers in this country, that is to say the abuse and ridicule of his works by a dwindling group of elderly conventional critics merely stung into more frenzied
laudation an ever-widening circle of youthful admirers. Ibsen repented, for a time almost exclusively, "serious" aims in literature, and with those of Herbert Spencer, and in less measure of Zola, and a little later of Nietzsche, his books were the spiritual food of all youthful minds of any vigor or elasticity.

In Sweden, at this time, the admiration for Ibsen took forms of almost preposterous violence. The great Swedish novelist, Gustaf af Geijerstam, has given a curious and amusing account of the rage for Ibsen which came to its height about 1880. The question which every student asked his friend, every lover his mistress, was "What do you think of Ibsen?" Not to be a believer in the Norwegian master was a reef upon which love or friendship might easily be shipwrecked. It was quoted gravely as an insufferable incompatibility for the state of marriage. There was a curious and secret symbolism running through the whole of youthful Swedish society, from which their elders were cunningly excluded, by which the volumes of Ibsen, passed from hand to hand, presented on solemn occasions, became the emblems of the problems interesting to generous youth, flags carried in the moral fight for liberty and truth. The three Northern countries, in their long stagnation, had become clogged and deadened with spiritual humbug, which had sealed the sources of emotion. It seemed though, after the long frost of the seventies, spring had come and literature had budded a at last, and that it was Ibsen who had blown the clarion of the West Wind and heralded the emancipation.

The enthusiasm for the Norwegian dramatist was not always according to
knowledge, and sometimes it took grotesque forms. Much of the abuse
showered in England and France upon Ibsen at the time we are now
describing was due to echoes of the extravagance of his Scandinavian and
German idolaters. A Swedish satirist [Note: "Stella Kleve" (Mathilda
Malling, in _Framat_ 1886)] said that if Ibsen could have foreseen how
many "misunderstood" women would leave their homes in imitation of Nora,
and how many lovesick housekeepers drink poison on account of Rebecca,
he would have thrown ashes on his head and have retreated into the
deserts of Tartary. The suicide of the novelist, Ernst Ahlgren, was the
tragic circumstance where much was so purely comic. But if there were
elements of tragicomedy in the Ibsen idolatry, there were far more
important elements of vigorous and wholesome intellectual independence;
and it was during this period of Ibsen's almost hectic popularity that
the foundations of a new fiction and a new drama were laid in Sweden,
Denmark and Norway. A whole generation sucked strength and energy from
his early writings, since it is to be remarked that, from 1880 to 1890,
the great prestige of Ibsen did not depend so much on the dramas he was
then producing, as on the earlier works of his poetic youth, now reread
with an unexampled fervor. So, with us, the tardy popularity of Robert
Browning, which faintly resembles that of Ibsen, did not attract the
younger generation to the volumes which succeed _The Ring and the Book_,
but sent them back to the books which their fathers had despised, to
_Pippa Passes_ and _Men and Women_. To the generation of 1880, Ibsen was
not so much the author of the realistic social dramas as of those old
but now rediscovered miracles of poetry and wit, _The Pretenders_,
_Brand_ and _Peer Gynt_.


In 1889 Ibsen had been made very pleasantly conscious of this strong personal feeling in his favor among young men and women. Nor did he find it confined to Scandinavia. He had travelled about in Germany, and everywhere his plays were being acted. Berlin was wild about him; at Weimar he was feted like a conqueror. He did not settle down at Munich until May, and here, as we have seen, he stayed all the summer, hard at work. After the success of _Hedda Gabler_, which overpowered all adverse comment, Ibsen began to long to be in Norway again, and this feeling was combined, in a curious way, with a very powerful emotion which now entered into his life. He had lived a retired and peaceful existence, mainly a spectator at the feast, as little occupied in helping himself to the dishes which he saw others enjoy as is an eremite in the desert in plucking the grape-clusters of his dreams. No adventure, of any prominent kind, had ever been seen to diversify Ibsen's perfectly decorous and domestic career. And now he was more than sixty, and the gray tones were gathering round him more thickly than ever, when a real ray of vermilion descended out of the sky and filled his horizon with color.

In the season of 1889, among the summer boarders at Gossensass, there appeared a young Viennese lady of eighteen, Miss Emilie Bardach. She used to sit on a certain bench in the Pferchthal, and when the poet, whom she adored from afar, passed by, she had the courage to smile at him. Strange to say, her smile was returned, and soon Ibsen was on the bench at her side. He readily discovered where she lived; no less readily he gained an introduction to the family with whom she boarded. There was a window-seat in the _salle a manger_: it was deep and shaded
by odorous flowering shrubs; it lent itself to endless conversation. The episode was strange, the passion improbable, incomprehensible, profoundly natural and true. Perhaps, until they parted in the last days of September, neither the old man nor the young girl realized what their relations had meant to each. Youth secured its revenge, however; Miss Bardach soon wrote from Vienna that she was now more tranquil, more independent, happy at last. Ibsen, on the other hand, was heart-broken, quivering with ecstasy, overwhelmed with joy and despair.

It was the enigma in his "princess," as he called her; that completed Miss Bardach's sorcery over the old poet. She seems to have been no coquette; she flung her dangerous fascinations at his feet; she broke the thread which bound the charms of her spirit and poured them over him. He, for his part, remaining discreet and respectful, was shattered with happiness. To a friend of mine, a young Norwegian man of letters, Ibsen said about this time: "Oh, you can always love, but I am happier than the happiest, for I am beloved." Long afterwards, on his seventieth birthday, when his own natural force was failing, he wrote to Miss Bardach, "That summer at Gossensass was the most beautiful and the most harmonious portion of my whole existence. I scarcely venture to think of it, and yet I think of nothing else. Ah! forever!" He did not dare to send her _The Master-Builder_, since her presence interpenetrated every line of it like a perfume, and when, we are told, she sent him her photograph, signed "Princess of Orangia," her too-bold identification of herself with Hilda Wangel hurt him as a rough touch, that finer tact would have avoided. There can be no doubt at all that while she was now largely absorbed by the compliment to her own vanity, he was still
absolutely enthralled and bewitched, and that what was fun to her made life and death to him.

This very curious episode [Note: It was quite unknown until the correspondence—which has not been translated into English—was published by Georg Brandes at the desire of the lady herself (September, 1906).], which modifies in several important respects our conception of the dramatist's character, is analogous with the apparent change of disposition which made Renan surprise his unthinking admirers so suddenly at the epoch of _L'Eau de Jouvence_ and _L'Abbesse de Jouarre_.

It was founded, of course, on that dangerous susceptibility to which an elderly man of genius, whose life had been spent in labor and reflection, may be inclined to resign himself, as he sees the sands running out of the hour-glass, and realizes that in analyzing and dissecting emotion he has never had time to enjoy it. Time is so short, the nerves so fragile and so finite, the dreadful illusion, the _maia_, so irresistible, that the old man gives way to it, and would sooner die at once than not make one grasp at happiness.

It will have been remarked that Ibsen's habit was to store up an impression, but not to use it immediately on creative work. We need, therefore, feel no surprise that there is not a trace of the Bardach episode in _Hedda Gabler_, although the composition of that play immediately followed the _hohes, schmerzliches Glueck_ at Gossensass. He was, too, no moonlight serenader, and his intense emotion is perfectly compatible with the outline of some of the gossip which was repeated at the time of his death; Ibsen being reported to have said of the Viennese
girl: "She did not get hold of me, but I got hold of her--for my play."

These things are very complex, and not to be hastily dismissed, especially on the rough and ready English system. There would be give and take in such a complicated situation, when the object was, as Ibsen himself says, out of reach _unversichtbar_. There is no question that for every pang which Hilda made her ancient lover suffer, he would enrich his imagination with a dozen points of experience. There is no paradox in saying that the poet was overwhelmed with a passion and yet consciously made it serve as material for his plays. From this time onwards every dramatic work of his bears the stamp of those hours among the roses at Gossensass.

To the spring of 1891 belongs Ibsen's somewhat momentous visit to Vienna, where he was invited by Dr. Max Burckhard, the director of the Burg Theatre, to superintend the performance of his _Pretenders_. Ibsen had already, in strict privacy, visited Vienna, where his plays enjoyed an increasing success, but this was his first public entrance into a city which he admired on the whole more than any other city of Europe. "Mein schoener Wien!" he used to murmur, with quite a clan of affection. In April, 1891, after the triumph of his tragedy on the stage, Ibsen was the guest at a public banquet at Vienna, when the ovations were overwhelming and were extended until four o'clock next morning. A performance of _The Wild Duck_ produced, what was almost as dear to Ibsen as praise, a violent polemic, and he passed on out of a world of storm and passion to Buda-Pesth, where he saw _A Doll's House_ acted in Hungarian, amid thunders of applause, and where he was the guest of Count Albert Apponyi. These were the happy and fruitful years which
consoled the heart of the poet for the bitter time when

"Hate's decree Dwelt in his thoughts intolerable."

In the ensuing summer, in July, 1891, Ibsen left Munich with every
intention of returning to it, but with the plan of a long summer trip in
Norway, where the triumphant success of _Hedda Gabler_ had been very
agreeable to his feelings. Once more he pushed up through the country to
Trondhjem, a city which had always attracted him and pleased him. Here
he presently embarked on one of the summer coasting-steamers, and saw
the shores of Nordland and Finmark for the first time, visiting the
North Cape itself. He came back to Christiania for the rest of the
season, with no prospect of staying. But he enjoyed a most flattering
reception; he was begged to resume his practical citizenship, and he was
assured that life in Norway would be made very pleasant to him. In the
autumn, therefore, in his abrupt way, he took an apartment in Viktoria
Terrasse, and sent to Munich for his furniture. He said to a friend who
expressed surprise at this settlement: "I may just as well make
Christiania my headquarters as Munich. The railway takes me in a very
short time wherever I want to go; and when I am bored with Norway I can
travel elsewhere." But he never felt the fatigue he anticipated, and,
but for brief visits to Copenhagen or Stockholm, he left his native
country no more after 1891, although he changed his abode in Christiania
itself.

For the first twelve months Ibsen enjoyed the pleasures of the prodigal
returned, and fed with gusto on the fatted calf. Then, when three years
separated him from the illuminating soul-adventures of Gossensass, he
began to turn them into a play. It proved to be _The Master-Builder_,
and was published before the close of December, 1892, with the date 1893
on the title-page. This play was running for some time in Germany and
England before it was played in Scandinavia. But on the evening of March
8, 1893, it was simultaneously given at the National Theatre in
Christiania and at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. It was a work which
greatly puzzled the critics, and its meaning was scarcely apparent until
it had been seen on the stage, for which the oddity of its arrangements
are singularly well adapted. It was, however, almost immediately noticed
that it marked a new departure in Ibsen's writings. Here was an end of
the purely realistic and prosaic social dramas, which had reigned from
_The League of Youth_ to _Hedda Gabler_, and here was a return to the
strange and haunting beauty of the old imaginative pieces. Mr. Archer
was happily inspired when he spoke of "the pure melody" of the piece,
and the best scenes of _The Master-Builder_ were heroically and almost
recklessly poetical.

This remarkable composition is full of what, for want of a better word,
we must call "symbolism." In the conversations between Solness and Hilda
much is introduced which is really almost unintelligible unless we take
it to be autobiographical. The Master-Builder is one who constructs, not
houses, but poems and plays. It is the poet himself who gives
expression, in the pathetic and erratic confessions of Solness, to his
doubts, his craven timidities, his selfish secrets, and his terror at
the uniformity of his "luck." It is less easy to see exactly what Ibsen
believed himself to be presenting to us in the enigmatical figure of
Hilda, so attractive and genial, so exquisitely refreshing, and yet
radically so cruel and superficial. She is perhaps conceived as a symbol
of Youth, arriving too late within the circle which Age has trodden for
its steps to walk in, and luring it too rashly, by the mirage of
happiness, into paths no longer within its physical and moral capacity.
"Hypnotism," Mr. Archer tells us, "is the first and last word of the
dramatic action"; perhaps thought-transference more exactly expresses
the idea, but I should not have stated even this quite so strongly. The
ground of the dramatic action seems to me to be the balance of Nemesis,
the fatal necessity that those who enjoy exceptional advantages in life
shall pay for them by not less exceptional, but perhaps less obvious,
disadvantages. The motto of the piece--at least of the first two of its
acts--might be the couplet of the French tragedian:--

C'est un ordre des dieux qui jamais ne se rompt De nous vendre bien cher
les grands biens qu'ils nous font.

Beneath this, which we may call the transcendental aspect of the play,
we find a solid and objective study of the self-made man, the headstrong
amateur, who has never submitted to the wholesome discipline of
professional training, but who has trusted to the help of those trolls
or mascots, his native talent and his unfailing "luck." Upon such a man
descends Hilda, the disorganizer, who pierces the armor of his conceit
by a direct appeal to his passions. Solness has been the irresistible
sorcerer, through his good fortune, but he is not protected in his
climacteric against this unexpected attack upon the senses. Samson
philanders with Delila, and discovers that his strength is shorn from
him. There is no doubt that Ibsen intended in _The Master-Builder_ a
searching examination of "luck" and the tyranny of it, the terrible
effects of it on the Broviks and the Kajas whom nobody remembers, but
whose bodies lie under the wheels of its car. The dramatic situation is
here extremely interesting; it consists in the fact that Solness, who
breaks every one else, is broken by Hilda. The inherent hardness of
youth, which makes no allowances, which demands its kingdom here and now
upon the table, was never more powerfully depicted. Solness is smashed
by his impact with Hilda, as china is against a stone. In all this it
would be a mistake to see anything directly autobiographical, although
so much in the character and position of Solness may remind us,
legitimately enough, of Ibsen himself, and his adventures.

The personal record of Ibsen in these years is almost silent. He was
growing old and set in his habits. He was growing rich, too, and he
surrounded himself with sedentary comforts. His wealth, it may here be
said, was founded entirely upon the success of his works, but was
fostered by his extreme adroitness as a man of business. Those who are
so fond of saying that any man of genius might have excelled in some
other capacity are fully justified if they like to imagine Ibsen as the
model financier. He certainly possessed a remarkable aptitude for
affairs, and we learn that his speculations were at once daring and
crafty. People who are weary of commiserating the poverty of poets may
be pleased to learn that when Ibsen died he was one of the wealthiest
private citizens of Christiania, and this was wholly in consequence of
the care he had taken in protecting his copyrights and administering his
receipts. If the melancholy couplet is correct which tells us that

Aux petits des oiseaux Dieu donne la pature,
Mais sa bonne s'arrête à la litterature,

we must believe, with Ibsen's enemies, that his fortunes were not under the divine protection.

The actual numbers of each of his works printed since he first published with Hegel in Copenhagen—a connection which he preserved without a breach until the end—have been stated since his death. They contain some points of interest. After 1876 Hegel ventured on large editions of each new play, but they went off at first slowly. _The Lady from the Sea_ was the earliest to appear, at once, in an issue of 10,000 copies, which was soon exhausted. So great, however, had the public interest in Ibsen become in 1894 that the edition of 10,000 copies of _Little Eyolf_ was found quite inadequate to meet the first order, and it was enlarged to 15,000, all of which were gone in a fortnight. This circulation in so small a reading public as that of Denmark and Norway was unprecedented, and it must be remembered that the simultaneous translations into most of the languages of Europe are not included.

_Little Eyolf_, which was written in Christiania during the spring and summer of 1894, was issued, according to Ibsen's cometary custom, as the second week of December rolled round. The reception of it was stormy, even in Scandinavia, and led to violent outbursts of controversy. No
work from the master's pen had roused more difference of opinion among
the critics since the bluster over _Ghosts_ fourteen years before. Those
who prefer to absolute success in the creation of a work of art the
personal flavor or perfume of the artist himself were predisposed to
place _Little Eyolf_ very high among his writings. Nowhere is he more
independent of all other influences, nowhere more intensely, it may even
be said more distressingly, himself. From many points of view this play
may fairly be considered in the light of a _tour de force_. Ibsen--one
would conjecture--is trying to see to what extremities of agile
independence he can force his genius. The word "force" has escaped me;
but it may be retained as reproducing that sense of a difficulty not
quite easily or completely overcome which _Little Eyolf_ produces. To
mention but one technical matter; there are but four characters,
properly speaking, in the play--since Eyolf himself and the Rat-Wife are
but illustrations or symbolic properties--and of these four, one
(Borgheim) is wholly subsidiary. Ibsen, then, may be said to have
challenged imitation by composing a drama of passion with only three
characters in it. By a process of elimination this has been done by
Aeschylus (in the _Agamemnon_), by Racine (in _Phe*dre_ and
_Andromaque_), and in our own day by Maeterlinck (in _Pelle*as et
Me*lisande_). But Ibsen was accustomed to a wider field, and his
experiment seems not wholly successful. _Little Eyolf_, at least, is,
from all points of view, an exercise on the tight-rope. We may hazard
the conjecture that no drama gave Ibsen more satisfaction to write, but
for enjoyment the reader may prefer less prodigious agility on the
trapeze.
If we turn from the technical virtuosity of _Little Eyolf_' to its moral aspects, we find it a very dreadful play, set in darkness which nothing illuminates but the twinkling sweetness of Asta. The mysterious symbol of the Rat-Wife breaks in upon the pair whose love is turning to hate, the man waxing cold as the wife grows hot. The Angel of God, in the guise of an old beggar-woman, descends into their garden, and she drags away, by an invisible chain, "the little gnawing thing," the pathetic lame child. The effect on the pair of Eyolf's death by drowning is the subject of the subsequent acts. In Rita jealousy is incarnate, and she seems the most vigorous, and, it must be added, the most repulsive, of Ibsen's feminine creations. The reckless violence of Rita's energy, indeed, interpreted by a competent actress--played, for instance, as it was in London most admirably by Miss Achurch--is almost too painful for a public exhibition, and to the old criticism, "nec pueros coram populo Medea trucidet," if a pedant chooses to press it, there teems no reply. The sex question, as treated in _Little Eyolf_, recalls _The Kreutzer Sonata_ (1889) of Tolstoi. When, however, I ventured to ask Ibsen whether there was anything in this, he was displeased, and stoutly denied it. What, an author denies, however, is not always evidence.

Nothing further of general interest happened to Ibsen until 1896, when he sat down to compose another drama, _John Gabriel Borkman_. This was a study of the mental adventures of a man of high commercial imagination, who is artificially parted from all that contact with real affairs which keeps such energy on the track, and who goes mad with dreams of incalculable power, a study, in fact, of financial megalomania. It was said, at the time, that Ibsen was originally led to make this analysis
of character from reading in the Christiania newspapers a report of the
failure and trial of a notorious speculator convicted of fraud in 1895,
and sentenced to a long period of penal servitude.

Whether this be so or not, we have in the person of John Gabriel Borkman
a prominent example of the nineteenth century type of criminous
speculator, in whom the vastness of view and the splendidly altruistic
audacity present themselves as elements which render it exceedingly
difficult to say how far the malefactor is morally responsible for his
crime. He has imagined, and to a certain point has carried out, a
monster metal "trust," for the success of which he lacks neither courage
nor knowledge nor practical administrative capacity, but only that
trifling concomitant, sufficiency of capital. To keep the fires blazing
until his vast model is molten into the mould, he helps himself to money
here, there, and everywhere, scarcely giving a thought to his
responsibilities, so certain is he of ultimate and beneficent triumph.
He will make rich beyond the dreams of avarice all these his involuntary
supporters. Unhappily, just before his scheme is ready and the metal
runs, he is stopped by the stupidity of the law, and finds himself in
prison.

Side by side with this study of commercial madness runs a thread of that
new sense of the preciousness of vital joy which had occupied Ibsen so
much ever since the last of the summers at Gossensass. The figure of
Erhart Borkman is a very interesting one to the theatrical student. In
the ruin of the family, all hopes concentrate in him. Every one claims
him, and in the bosoms of each of his shattered parents a secret hope is
born, Mrs. Borkman believing that by a brilliant career of commercial
rectitude her son will wipe out the memory of his father's crime;

Borkman, who has never given up the ambition of returning to business,
reposing his own hopes on the co-operation of his son.

But Erhart Borkman disappoints them all. He will be himself, he will
enjoy his life, he will throw off all the burdens both of responsibility
and of restitution. He has no ambition and little natural feeling; he
simply must be happy, and he suddenly elopes, leaving all their
anticipations bankrupt, with a certain joyous Mrs. Wilton, who has
nothing but her beauty to recommend her. Deserted thus by the _ignis
fatuus_ of youth, the collapse of the three old people is complete.

Under the shock the brain of Borkman gives way, and he wanders out into
the winter's night, full of vague dreams of what he can still do in the
world, if he can only break from his bondage and shatter his dream. He
dies there in the snow, and the two old sisters, who have followed him
in an anxiety which overcomes their mutual hatred, arrive in time to see
him pass away. We leave them in the wood, "a dead man and two shadows"--
so Ella Rentheim puts it--"for _that_ is what the cold has made of us";
the central moral of the piece being that all the errors of humanity
spring from cold-heartedness and neglect of the natural heat of love.

That Borkman embezzled money, and reduced hundreds of innocent people to
beggary, might be condoned; but there is no pardon for his cruel
bargaining for wealth with the soul of Ella Rentheim, since that is the
unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit. There are points of obscurity,
and one or two of positive and even regrettable whimsicality, about
_John Gabriel Borkman_, but on the whole it is a work of lofty
originality and of poignant human interest.

The veteran was now beginning to be conscious of the approaches of old age, but they were made agreeable to him by many tokens of national homage.

On his seventieth birthday, March 20, 1898, Ibsen received the felicitations of the world. It is pleasing to relate that a group of admirers in England, a group which included Mr. Asquith, Mr. J. M. Barrie, Mr. Thomas Hardy, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, Mr. Pinero and Mr. Bernard Shaw took part in these congratulations and sent Ibsen a handsome set of silver plate, this being an act which, it had been discovered, he particularly appreciated. The bearer of this gift was the earliest of the long stream of visitors to arrive on the morning of the poet's birthday, and he found Ibsen in company with his wife, his son, his son's wife (Bjoernson's daughter), and his little grandson, Tankred. The poet's surprise and pleasure were emphatic. A deputation from the Storthing, headed by the Leader of the House, deputations representing the University, the various Christiania Theatres, and other official or academic bodies arrived at intervals during the course of the day; and all the afternoon Ibsen was occupied in taking these hundreds of visitors, in parties, up to the case containing the English tribute, in showing the objects and in explaining their origin. There could be no question that the gift gave genuine pleasure to the recipient; it was the first, as it was to be the last, occasion on which any public testimony to English appreciation of his genius found its way to Ibsen's door.
Immediately after the birthday festivities, which it was observed had
fatigued him, Ibsen started on a visit to Copenhagen, where he was
received by the aged King of Denmark, and to Stockholm, where he was
overpowered with ovations from all classes. There can be no doubt that
this triumphal progress, though deeply grateful to the aged poet's
susceptibilities, made a heavy drain upon his nervous resources. When he
returned to Norway, indeed, he was concealed from all visitors at his
physician's orders, and it is understood that he had some kind of
seizure. It was whispered that he would write no more, and the biennial
drama, due in December, 1898, did not make its appearance. His stores of
health, however, were not easily exhausted; he rested for several
months, and then he was seen once more in Carl Johans Gade, smiling; in
his usual way, and entirely recovered. It was announced that winter that
he was writing his reminiscences, but nothing more was heard of any such
book.

He was able to take a vivid interest in the preparations for the
National Norwegian Theatre in Christiania, which was finally opened by
the King of Sweden and Norway on September 1, 1899. Early in the
morning, colossal bronze statues of Ibsen and Bjoernson were unveiled in
front of the theatre, and the poets, now, unfortunately, again not on
the best of terms, were seen making vast de'tours for the purpose of
satisfying their curiosity, and yet not meeting one another in flesh or
in metal. The first night, to prevent rivalry, was devoted to
antiquarianism, and to the performance of extracts from the plays of
Holberg. Ibsen and Bjoernson occupied the centre of the dress circle,
sitting uplifted in two gilded fauteuils and segregated by a vast
garland of red and white roses. They were the objects of universal
attention, and the King seemed never to have done smiling and bowing to
the two most famous of his Norwegian subjects.

The next night was Ibsen’s fête, and he occupied, alone, the manager’s
the manager’s box. A poem in his honor, by Niels Collet Vogt, was recited by the
leading actor, who retired, and then rushed down the empty stage, with
his arms extended, shouting “Long live Henrik Ibsen.” The immense
audience started to its feet and repeated the words over and over again
with deafening fervor. The poet appeared to be almost overwhelmed with
emotion and pleasure; at length, with a gesture which was quite
pathetic, smiling through his tears, he seemed to beg his friends to
spare him, and the plaudits slowly ceased. _An Enemy of the People_ was
then admirably performed. At the close of every act Ibsen was called to
the front of his box, and when the performance was over, and the actors
had been thanked, the audience turned to him again with a sort of
affectionate ferocity. Ibsen was found to have stolen from his box, but
he was waylaid and forcibly carried back to it. On his reappearance, the
whole theatre rose in a roar of welcome, and it was with difficulty that
the aged poet, now painfully exhausted from the strain of an evening of
such prolonged excitement, could persuade the public to allow him to
withdraw. At length he left the theatre, walking slowly, bowing and
smiling, down a lane cleared for him, far into the street, through the
dense crowd of his admirers. This astonishing night, September 2, 1899,
was the climax of Ibsen’s career.
During all this time Ibsen was secretly at work on another drama, which he intended as the epilogue to his earlier dramatic work, or at least to all that he had written since _The Pillars of Society_. This play, which was his latest, appeared, under the title of _When We Dead Awaken_, in December, 1899 (with 1900 on the title-page). It was simultaneously published, in very large editions, in all the principal languages of Europe, and it was acted also, but it is impossible to deny that, whether in the study or on the boards, it proved a disappointment. It displayed, especially in its later acts, many obvious signs of the weakness incident on old age.

When it is said that _When We Dead Awaken_ was not worthy of its predecessors, it should be explained that no falling off was visible in the technical cleverness with which the dialogue was built up, nor in the wording of particular sentences. Nothing more natural or amusing, nothing showing greater, command of the resources of the theatre, had ever been published by Ibsen himself than the opening act of _When We Dead Awaken_. But there was certainly in the whole conception a cloudiness, an ineffectualty, which was very little like anything that Ibsen had displayed before. The moral of the piece was vague, the evolution of it incoherent, and indeed in many places it seemed a parody of his earlier manner. Not Mr. Anstey Guthrie’s inimitable scenes in _Mr. Punch’s Ibsen_ were more preposterous than almost all the appearances of Irene after the first act of _When We Dead Awaken_.

It is Irene who describes herself as dead, but awakening in the society
of Rubek, whilst Maia, the little gay soulless creature whom the great sculptor has married, and has got heartily tired of, goes up to the mountains with Ulpheim the hunter, in pursuit of the free joy of life.

At the close, the assorted couples are caught on the summit of an exceeding high mountain by a snowstorm, which opens to show Rubek and Irene "whirled along with the masses of snow, and buried in them," while Maia and her bear-hunter escape in safety to the plains. Interminable, and often very sage and penetrating, but always essentially rather maniacal, conversation fills up the texture of the play, which is certainly the least successful of Ibsen's mature compositions. The boredom of Rubek in the midst of his eminence and wealth, and his conviction that by working in such concentration for the purity of art he merely wasted his physical life, inspire the portions of the play which bring most conviction and can be read with fullest satisfaction. It is obvious that such thoughts, such faint and unavailing regrets, pursued the old age of Ibsen; and the profound wound that his heart had received so long before at Gossensass was unhealed to his last moments of consciousness. An excellent French critic, M. P. G. La Chesnais, has ingeniously considered the finale of this play as a confession that Ibsen, at this end of his career, was convinced of the error of his earlier rigor, and, having ceased to believe in his mission, regretted the complete sacrifice of his life to his work. But perhaps it is not necessary to go into such subtleties. _When We Dead Awaken_ is the production of a very tired old man, whose physical powers were declining.

In the year 1900, during our South African War, sentiment in the
Scandinavian countries was very generally ranged on the side of the
Boers. Ibsen, however, expressed himself strongly and publicly in favor
of the English position. In an interview (November 24, 1900), which
produced a considerable sensation, he remarked that the Boers were but
half-cultivated, and had neither the will nor the power to advance the
cause of civilization. Their sole object had come to be a jealous
exclusion of all the higher forms of culture. The English were merely
taking what the Boers themselves had stolen from an earlier race; the
Boers had pitelessly hunted their precursors out of house and home, and
now they were tasting the same cup themselves. These were considerations
which had not occurred to generous sentimentalists in Norway, and
Ibsen's defence of England, which he supported in further communications
with irony and courage, made a great sensation, and threw cold water on
the pro-Boer sentimentalists. In Holland, where Ibsen had a wide public,
this want of sympathy for Dutch prejudice raised a good deal of
resentment, and Ibsen's statements were replied to by the fiery young
journalist, Cornelius Karel Elout, who even published a book on the
subject. Ibsen took dignified notice of Elout's attacks (December 9,
1900), repeating his defence of English policy, and this was the latest
of his public appearances.

He took an interest, however, in the preparation of the great edition of
his _Collected Works_, which appeared in Copenhagen in 1901 and 1902, in
ten volumes. Before the publication of the latest of these, however,
Ibsen had suffered from an apoplectic stroke, from which he never wholly
recovered. It was believed that any form of mental fatigue might now be
fatal to him, and his life was prolonged by extreme medical care. He was
contented in spirit and even cheerful, but from this time forth he was more and more completely withdrawn from consecutive interest in what was going on in the world without. The publication, in succession, of his juvenile works (_Kaempehoejen_, _Olaf Liljekrans_, both edited by Halvdan Koht, in 1902), of his _Correspondence_, edited by Koht and Julius Elias, in 1904, of the bibliographical edition of his collected works by Carl Naerup, in 1902, left him indifferent and scarcely conscious. The gathering darkness was broken, it is said, by a gleam of light in 1905; when the freedom of Norway and the accession of King Hakon were explained to him, he was able to express his joyful approval before the cloud finally sank upon his intelligence.

During his long illness Ibsen was troubled by aphasia, and he expressed himself painfully, now in broken Norwegian, now in still more broken German. His unhappy hero, Oswald Alving, in _Ghosts_, had thrilled the world by his cry, "Give me the sun, Mother!" and now Ibsen, with glassy eyes, gazed at the dim windows, murmuring "Keine Sonne, keine Sonne, keine Sonne!" At the table where all the works of his maturity had been written the old man sat, persistently learning and forgetting the alphabet. "Look!" he said to Julius Elias, pointing to his mournful pothooks, "See what I am doing! I am sitting here and learning my letters --my _letters_! I who was once a Writer!" Over this shattered image of what Ibsen had been, over this dying lion, who could not die, Mrs. Ibsen watched with the devotion of wife, mother and nurse in one, through six pathetic years. She was rewarded, in his happier moments, by the affection and tender gratitude of her invalid, whose latest articulate words were addressed to her--"_min soede, kjaere, snille frue_" (my
sweet, dear, good wife); and she taught to adore their grandfather the
three children of a new generation, Tankred, Irene, Eleonora.

Ibsen preserved the habit of walking about his room, or standing for
hours staring out of window, until the beginning of May, 1906. Then a
more complete decay confined him to his bed. After several days of
unconsciousness, he died very peacefully in his house on Drammensvej,
opposite the Royal Gardens of Christiania, at half-past two in the
afternoon of May 23, 1906, being in his seventy-ninth year. By a
unanimous vote of the he was awarded a public funeral, which the King of
Norway attended in person, while King Edward VII was represented there
by the British Minister. The event was regarded through out Norway as a
national ceremony of the highest solemnity and importance, and the poet
who had suffered such bitter humiliation and neglect in his youth was
carried to his grave in solemn splendor, to the sound of a people's
lamentation.

CHAPTER IX

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

During the latest years of his life, which were spent as a wealthy and
prosperous citizen of Christiania, the figure of Ibsen took forms of
legendary celebrity which were equalled by no other living man of
letters, not even by Tolstoi, and which had scarcely been surpassed,
among the dead, by Victor Hugo. When we think of the obscurity of his
youth and middle age, and of his consistent refusal to advertise himself
by any of the little vulgar arts of self-exhibition, this extreme
publicity is at first sight curious, but it can be explained. Norway is
a small and a new country, inordinately, perhaps, but justly and
gracefully proud of those--an Ole Bull, a Frithjof Nansen, an Edvard
Grieg--who spread through the world evidences of its spiritual life. But
the one who was more original, more powerful, more interesting than any
other of her sons, had persistently kept aloof from the soil of Norway,
and was at length recaptured and shut up in a golden cage with more
expenditure of delicate labor than any perverse canary or escaped macaw
had ever needed. Ibsen safely housed in Christiania!--it was the
recovery of an important national asset, the resumption, after years of
vexation and loss, of the intellectual regalia of Norway.

Ibsen, then--recaptured, though still in a frame of mind which left the
captors nervous--was naturally an object of pride. For the benefit of
the hundreds of tourists who annually pass through Christiania, it was
more than tempting, it was irresistible to point out, in slow advance
along Carl Johans Gade, in permanent silence at a table in the Grand
Cafe, "our greatest citizen." To this species of demonstration Ibsen
unconsciously lent himself by his immobility, his regularity of habits,
his solemn taciturnity. He had become more like a strange physical
object than like a man among men. He was visible broadly and quietly,
not conversing, rarely moving, quite isolated and self-contained, a
recognized public spectacle, delivered up, as though bound hand and
foot, to the kodak-hunter and the maker of "spicy" paragraphs. That
Ibsen was never seen to do anything, or heard to say anything, that
those who boasted of being intimate with him obviously lied in their teeth--all this prepared him for sacrifice. Christiania is a hot-bed of gossip, and its press one of the most "chatty" in the world. Our "greatest living author" was offered up as a wave-offering, and he smoked daily on the altar of the newspapers.

It will be extremely rash of the biographers of the future to try to follow Ibsen's life day by day in the Christiania press from, let us say, 1891 to 1901. During that decade he occupied the reporters immensely, and he was particularly useful to the active young men who telegraph "chat" to Copenhagen, Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Berlin. Snapshots of Ibsen, dangerous illness of the playwright, quaint habits of the Norwegian dramatist, a poet's double life, anecdotes of Ibsen and Mrs.----, rumors of the King's attitude to Ibsen--this polenta, dressed a dozen ways, was the standing dish at every journalist's table. If a space needed filling, a very rude reply to some fatuous question might be fitted in and called "Instance of Ibsen's Wit." The crop of fable was enormous, and always seemed to find a gratified public, for whom nothing was too absurd if it was supposed to illustrate "our great national poet." Ibsen, meanwhile, did nothing at all. He never refuted a calumny, never corrected a story, but he threw an ironic glance through his gold-rimmed spectacles as he strolled down Carl Johan with his hands behind his back.

His personal appearance, it must be admitted, formed a tempting basis upon which to build a legend. His force of will had gradually transfigured his bodily forms until he thoroughly looked the part which
he was expected to fill. At the age of thirty, to judge by the early
photographs, he had been a commonplace-looking little man, with a shock
of coal-black hair and a full beard, one of those hirsute types common
in the Teutonic races, which may prove, on inquiry, to be painter,
musician, or engraver, or possibly engineer, but less probably poet.
Then came the exile from Norway, and the residence in Rome, marked by a
little bust which stands before me now, where the beard is cut away into
two round whiskers so as to release the firm round chin, and the long
upper lip is clean-shaved. Here there is more liveliness, but still no
distinction. Then comes a further advance—a photograph (in which I feel
a tender pride, for it was made to please me) taken in Dresden (October
15, 1873), where the brow, perfectly smooth and white, has widened out,
the whiskers have become less chubby, and the small, scrutinizing eyes
absolutely sparkle with malice. Here, you say at last, is no poet,
indeed, but an unusually cultivated banker or surprisingly adroit
solicitor. Here the hair, retreating from the great forehead, begins to
curl and roll with a distinguished wildness; here the long mouth, like a
slit in the face, losing itself at each end in whisker, is a symbol of
concentrated will power, a drawer in some bureau, containing treasures,
firmly locked up.

Then came Munich, where Ibsen's character underwent very considerable
changes, or rather where its natural features became fixed and
emphasized. We are not left without precious indication of his gestures
and his looks at this time, when he was a little past the age of fifty.
Where so much has been extravagantly written, or described in a
journalistic key of false emphasis, great is the value of a quiet
portrait by one of those who has studied Ibsen most intelligently. It is perhaps the most careful pen-sketch of him in any language.

Mr. William Archer, then, has given the following account of his first meeting with Ibsen. It was in the Scandinavia Club, in Rome, at the close of 1881:--

I had been about a quarter of an hour in the room, and was standing close to the door, when it opened, and in glided an undersized man with very broad shoulders and a large, leonine head, wearing a long black frock-coat with very broad lapels, on one of which a knot of red ribbon was conspicuous. I knew him at once, but was a little taken aback by his low stature. In spite of all the famous instances to the contrary, one instinctively associates greatness with size. His natural height was even somewhat diminished by a habit of bending forward slightly from the waist, begotten, no doubt, of short-sightedness, and the need to peer into things. He moved very slowly and noiselessly, with his hands behind his back--an unobtrusive personality, which would have been insignificant had the head been strictly proportionate to the rest of the frame. But there was nothing insignificant about the high and massive forehead, crowned with a mane of (then) iron-gray hair, the small and pale but piercing eyes behind the gold-rimmed spectacles, or the thin lipped mouth, depressed at the corners into a curve indicative of iron will, and set between bushy whiskers of the same dark gray as the hair. The most cursory observer could not but recognize power and character in the head; yet one would scarcely have guessed it to be the power of a poet, the character of a prophet. Misled, perhaps, by the
ribbon at the buttonhole, and by an expression of reserve, almost of
secretiveness, in the lines of the tight-shut mouth, one would rather
have supposed one's self face to face with an eminent statesman or
diplomatist.

With the further advance of years all that was singular in Ibsen's
appearance became accentuated. The hair and beard turned snowy white;
the former rose in a fierce sort of Oberland, the latter was kept square
and full, crossing underneath the truculent chin that escaped from it.
As Ibsen walked to a banquet in Christiania, he looked quite small under
the blaze of crosses, stars and belts which he displayed when he
unbuttoned the long black overcoat which enclosed him tightly. Never was
he seen without his hands behind him, and the poet Holger Drachmann
started a theory that as Ibsen could do nothing in the world but write,
the Muse tied his wrists together at the small of his back whenever they
were not actually engaged in composition. His regularity in all habits,
his mechanical ways, were the subject of much amusement. He must sit day
after day in the same chair, at the same table, in the same corner of
the cafe, and woe to the ignorant intruder who was accidentally
beforehand with him. No word was spoken, but the indignant poet stood at
a distance, glaring, until the stranger should be pierced with
embarrassment, and should rise and flee away.

Ibsen had the reputation of being dangerous and difficult of access. But
the evidence of those who knew him best point to his having been
phlegmatic rather than morose. He was "umbrageous," ready to be
discomposed by the action of others, but, if not vexed or startled, he
was elaborately courteous. He had a great dislike of any abrupt
movement, and if he was startled, he had the instinct of a wild animal,
to bite. It was a pain to him to have the chain of his thoughts suddenly
broken, and he could not bear to be addressed by chance acquaintances in
street or cafe*. When he was resident in Munich and Dresden, the
difficulty of obtaining an interview with Ibsen was notorious. His wife
protected him from strangers, and if her defences broke down, and the
stranger contrived to penetrate the inner fastness, Ibsen might suddenly
appear in the doorway, half in a rage, half quivering with distress, and
say, in heartrending tones, "Bitte um Arbeitsruhe"—"Please let me work
in peace!" They used to tell how in Munich a rich baron, who was the
local Maecenas of letters, once bored Ibsen with a long recital of his
love affairs, and ended by saying, with a wonderful air of fatuity, "To
you, Master, I come, because of your unparalleled knowledge of the
female heart. In your hands I place my fate. Advise me, and I will
follow your advice." Ibsen snapped his mouth and glared through his
spectacles; then in a low voice of concentrated fury he said: "Get home,
and--go to bed!" whereat his noble visitor withdrew, clothed with
indignation as with a garment.

His voice was uniform, soft and quiet. The bitter things he said seemed
the bitterer for his gentle way of saying them. As his shape grew burly
and his head of hair enormous, the smallness of his extremities became
accentuated. His little hands were always folded away as he tripped upon
his tiny feet. His movements were slow and distraint. He wasted few words
on the current incidents of life, and I was myself the witness, in 1899,
of his _sang-froid_ under distressing circumstances. Ibsen was
descending a polished marble staircase when his feet slipped and he fell swiftly, precipitately, downward. He must have injured himself severely, he might have been killed, if two young gentlemen had not darted forward below and caught him in their arms. Once more set the right way up, Ibsen softly thanked his saviours with much frugality of phrase—"Tak, mine Herrer!"—tenderly touched an abraded surface of his top-hat, and marched forth homeward, unperturbed.

His silence had a curious effect on those in whose company he feasted; it seemed to hypnotise them. The great Danish actress, Mrs. Heiberg, herself the wittiest of talkers, said that to sit beside Ibsen was to peer into a gold-mine and not catch a glitter from the hidden treasure. But his dumbness was not so bitterly ironical as it was popularly supposed to be. It came largely from a very strange passivity which made definite action unwelcome to him. He could never be induced to pay visits, yet he would urge his wife and his son to accept invitations, and when they returned he would insist on being told every particular—who was there, what was said, even what everybody wore. He never went to a theatre or concert-room, except on the very rare occasions when he could be induced to be present at the performance of his own plays. But he was extremely fond of hearing about the stage. He had a memory for little things and an observation of trifles which was extraordinary. He thought it amazing that people could go into a room and not notice the pattern of the carpet, the color of the curtains, the objects on the walls; these being details which he could not help observing and retaining. This trait comes out in his copious and minute stage directions.
Ibsen was simplicity itself; no man was ever less affected. But his character was closed; he was perpetually on the defensive. He was seldom confidential, he never "gave way"; his emotions and his affections were genuine, but his heart was a fenced city. He had little sense of domestic comfort; his rooms were bare and neat, with no personal objects save those which belonged to his wife. Even in the days of his wealth, in the fine house on Drammensvej, there was a singular absence of individuality about his dwelling rooms. They might have been prepared for a rich American traveller in some hotel. Through a large portion of his career in Germany he lived in furnished rooms, not because he did not possess furniture of his own, which was stored up, but because he paid no sort of homage to his own penates. He had friends, but he did not cultivate them; he rather permitted them, at intervals, to cultivate him. To Georg Brandes (March 6, 1870) he wrote: "Friends are a costly luxury; and when one has devoted one's self wholly to a profession and a mission here in life, there is no place left for friends." The very charming story of Ibsen's throwing his arms round old Hans Christian Andersen's neck, and forcing him to be genial and amiable, [Note: _Samliv med Ibsen._] is not inconsistent with the general rule of passivity and shyness which he preserved in matters of friendship.

Ibsen's reading was singularly limited. In his fine rooms on Drammensvej I remember being struck by seeing no books at all, except the large Bible which always lay at his side, and formed his constant study. He disliked having his partiality for the Bible commented on, and if, as would sometimes be the case, religious people expressed pleasure at
finding him deep in the sacred volume, Ibsen would roughly reply: "It is only for the sake of the language." He was the enemy of anything which seemed to approach cant and pretension, and he concealed his own views as closely as he desired to understand the views of others. He possessed very little knowledge of literature. The French he despised and repudiated, although he certainly had studied Voltaire with advantage; of the Italians he knew only Dante and of the English only Shakespeare, both of whom he had studied in translations. In Danish he read and reread Holberg, who throughout his life unquestionably remained Ibsen's favorite author; he preserved a certain admiration for the Danish classics of his youth: Heiberg, Hertz, Schack-Steffelt. In German, the foreign language which he read most currently, he was strangely ignorant of Schiller and Heine, and hostile to Goethe, although _Brand_ and _Peer Gynt_ must owe something of their form to _Faust_. But the German poets whom he really enjoyed were two dramatists of the age preceding his own, Otto Ludwig (1813-65) and Friedrich Hebbel (1813-63). Each of these playwrights had been occupied in making certain reforms, of a realistic tendency, in the existing tradition of the stage, and each of them dealt, before any one else in Europe did so, with "problems" on the stage. These two German poets, but Hebbel particularly, passed from romanticism to realism, and so on to mysticism, in a manner fascinating to Ibsen, whom it is possible that they influenced. [Note: It would be interesting to compare _Die Niebelungen_, the trilogy which Hebbel published in 1862, in which the struggle between pagan and Christian ideals of conduct is analyzed, with Ibsen's _Emperor and Galilean_.] He remained, in later years, persistently ignorant of Zola, and of Tolstoi he had read, with contemptuous disapproval, only some of the polemical pamphlets. He said to me, in 1899, of the great Russian: "Tolstoi?--he
is mad!" with a screwing up of the features such as a child makes at the thought of a black draught.

If he read at all, it was poetry. His indifference to music was complete; he had, in fact, no ear whatever, and could not distinguish one tune from another. His efforts to appreciate the music which Grieg made for _Peer Gynt_ were pathetic. But for verse his sense was exceedingly delicate, and the sound of poetry gave him acute pleasure. At times, when his nerves were overstrained, he was fatigued by the riot of rhymes which pursued him through his dreams, and which his memory vainly strove to recapture. For academic philosophy and systems of philosophic thought he had a great impatience. The vexed question of what he owed to the eminent Danish philosopher, Soeren Kierkegaard, has never been solved. Brandes has insisted, again and again, on the close relation between _Brand_ and other works of Ibsen and the famous _Either-Or_ of Kierkegaard; "it actually seems," he says, "as though Ibsen had aspired to the honor of being called Kierkegaard's poet."

Ibsen, however, aspired to no such honor, and, while he never actually denied the influence, the relation between him and the philosopher seems to be much rather one of parallelism than of imitation. Ibsen was a poetical psychologist of the first order, but he could not bring himself to read the prose of the professional thinkers.

In his attitude both to philosophical and poetical literature Ibsen is with such apparently remote figures as Guy de Maupassant and Shelley; in his realism and his mysticism he is unrelated to immediate predecessors, and has no wish to be a disciple of the dead. His extreme interest in
the observation of ethical problems is not identified with any curiosity about what philosophical writers have said on similar subjects.

Weininger has pointed out that Ibsen's philosophy is radically the same as that of Kant, yet there is no evidence that Ibsen had ever studied or had even turned over the pages of the _Criticism of Pure Reason_. It is not necessary to suppose that he had done so. The peculiar aspect of the Ego as the principal and ultimately sole guide to truth was revealed anew to the Norwegian poet, and references to Kant, or to Fichte, or to Kierkegaard, seem, therefore, to be beside the mark. The watchword of _Bränd_, with his cry of "All or Nothing," his absolute repudiation of compromise, was not a literary conception, but was founded, without the help of books, on a profound contemplation of human nature, mainly, no doubt, as Ibsen found it in himself. But in these days of the tyranny of literature it is curious to meet with an author of the first rank who worked without a library.

Ibsen's study of women was evidently so close, and what he writes about them is usually so penetrating, that many legends have naturally sprung up about the manner in which he gained his experience. Of these, most are pure fiction. As a matter of fact, Ibsen was shy with women, and unless they took the initiative, he contented himself with watching them from a distance: and noting their ways in silence. The early flirtation with Miss Rikke Hoist at Bergen, which takes so prominent a place in Ibsen's story mainly because such incidents were extremely rare in it, is a typical instance. If this young girl of sixteen had not taken the matter into her own hands, running up the steps of the hotel and flinging her posy of flowers into the face of the young poet, the
incident would have closed in his watching her down the street, while
the fire smouldered in his eyes. It was not until her fresh field-
blossoms had struck him on the cheek that he was emboldened to follow
her and to send her the lyrical roses and auriculas which live forever
in his poems. If we wish to note the difference of temperament, we have
but to contrast Ibsen's affair with Rikke Holst with Goethe's attitude
to Christiana Vulpius; in doing so, we bring the passive and the active
lover face to face.

Ibsen would gladly have married his flower of the field, a vision of
whose bright, untrammelled adolescence reappears again and again in his
works, and plainly in _The Master-Builder_. But he escaped a great
danger in failing to secure her as his wife, for Rikke Holst, when she
had lost her girlish freshness, would probably have had little character
and no culture to fall back upon. He waited, fortunately for his
happiness, until he secured Susannah Thoresen. Mrs. Ibsen, his faithful
guide, guardian and companion for half a century, will live among the
entirely successful wives of difficult men of genius. In the midst of
the spiteful gossip of Christiania she had to traverse her _via
dolorosa_, for it was part of the fun of the journalists to represent
this husband and wife as permanently alienated. That Ibsen was easy to
live with is not probable, but his wife not merely contrived to do it,
but by her watchfulness, her adroitness, and, when necessary, by her
firmness of decision, she smoothed the path for the great man whom she
adored, and who was to her a great wilful child to be cajoled and
circumvented. He was absolutely dependent on her, although he affected
amusing airs of independence; and if she absented herself, there were
soon cries in the house of "My Cat, My Cat!" the pet name by which he
called his wife. Of their domestic ways little is yet known in detail,
but everything can be imagined.

To the enigma of Ibsen's character it was believed that his private
correspondence might supply a key. His letters were collected and
arranged while he was still alive, but he was not any longer in a mental
condition which permitted him to offer any help in comment to his
editors. His son, Mr. Sigurd Ibsen, superintended the work, and two
careful bibliographers, Mr. Halvdan Koht and Mr. Julius Elias, carried
out the scheme in two volumes [Note: _Breve fra Henrik Ibsen_,
Gyldendalske Boghadel, 1904.], with the execution of which no fault can
be suggested. But the enigma remained unsolved; the sphinx spoke much,
but failed to answer the questions we had been asking. These letters, in
the first place, suffer from the fact that Ibsen was a relentless
destroyer of documents; they are all written by him; not one single
example had been preserved of the correspondence to which this is the
reply. Then Ibsen's letters, as revealers of the unseen mood, are
particularly unsatisfactory. With rare exceptions, he remains throughout
them tightly buttoned up in his long and legendary frock-coat. There is
no laughter and no tears in his letters; he is occasionally extremely
angry, and exudes drops of poison, like the captive scorpion which he
c caught when he was in Italy, and loved to watch and tease. But there is
no self-abandonment, and very little emotion; the letters are
principally historical and critical, "finger-posts for commentators."
They give valuable information about the genius of his works, but they
tell almost less about his inner moral nature than do his imaginative
In his youth the scorpion in Ibsen's heart seems to have stung him occasionally to acts which afterwards filled him with embarrassment. We hear that in his Bergen days he sent to Lading, his fellow-teacher at the theatre, a challenge of which, when the mood was over, he was greatly ashamed. It is said that on another occasion, under the pressure of annoyance, maddened with fear and insomnia, he sprang out of bed in his shirt and tried to throw himself into the sea off one of the quays in the harbor. Such performances were futile and ridiculous, and they belong only to his youth. It seems certain that he schooled himself to the suppression of such evidences of his anger, and that he did so largely by shutting up within his breast all the fire that rose there.

The _Correspondence_--dark lantern as it is--seems to illuminate this condition of things; we see before us Ibsen with his hands clenched, his mouth tightly shut, rigid with determination not to "let himself go," the eyes alone blazing behind the gleaming spectacles.

An instance of his suppression of personal feeling may be offered. The lengthiest of all Ibsen's published letters describes to Brandes (April 25, 1866) the suicide, at Rome, of a young Danish lawyer, Ludvig David, of whom Ibsen had seen a good deal. The lad threw himself head foremost out of window, in a crisis of fever. Ibsen writes down all the minutest details with feeling and refinement, but with as little sympathetic emotion as if he was drawing up a report for the police. With this trait may be compared his extreme interest in the detailed accounts of public trials; he liked to read exactly what the prisoner said, and all the
evidence of the witnesses. In this Ibsen resembled Robert Browning, whose curiosity about the small incidents surrounding a large event was boundless. When Ibsen, in the course of such an investigation, found the real purpose of some strange act dawn upon him, he exhibited an almost childish pleasure; and this was doubled when the interpretation was one which had not presented itself to the conventional legal authorities.

In everything connected with the execution of his own work there was no limit to the pains which he was willing to take. His handwriting had always been neat, but it was commonplace in his early years. The exquisite calligraphy which he ultimately used on every occasion, and the beauty of which was famous far and wide, he adopted deliberately when he was in Rome in 1862. To the end of his life, although in the latest years the letters lost, from the shakiness of his hand, some of their almost Chinese perfection, he wrote his smallest notes in this character. His zeal for elaboration as an artist led him to collect a mass of consistent imaginary information about the personages in his plays, who became to him absolutely real. It is related how, some one happening to say that Nora, in _A Doll's House_, had a curious name, Ibsen immediately replied, "Oh! her full name was Leonora; but that was shortened to Nora when she was quite a little girl. Of course, you know, she was terribly spoilt by her parents." Nothing of this is revealed in the play itself, but Ibsen was familiar with the past history of all the characters he created. All through his career he seems to have been long haunted by the central notion of his pieces, and to have laid it aside, sometimes for many years, until a set of incidents spontaneously crystallized around it. When the medium in which he was going to work
became certain he would put himself through a long course of study in
the technical phraseology appropriate to the subject. No pains were too
great to prepare him for the final task.

When Mr. Archer visited Ibsen in the Harmonien Hotel at Sæby in 1887 he
extracted some valuable evidence from him as to his methods of
composition:--

It seems that the _idea_ of a piece generally presents itself before the
characters and incidents, though, when I put this to him flatly, he
denied it. It seems to follow, however, from his saying that there is a
certain stage in the incubation of a play when it might as easily turn
into all essay as into a drama. He has to incarnate the ideas, as it
were, in character and incident, before the actual work of creation can
be said to have fairly begun. Different plans and ideas, he admits,
often flow together, and the play he ultimately produces is sometimes
very unlike the intention with which he set out. He writes and rewrites,
scribbles and destroys, an enormous amount before he makes the
exquisite fair copy he sends to Copenhagen.

He altered, as we have said, the printed text of his earlier works, in
order to bring them into harmony with his finished style, but he did not
do this, so far as I remember, after the publication of _Brand_. In the
case of all the dramas of his maturity he modified nothing when the work
had once been given to the world.
CHAPTER X

INTELLECTUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Having accustomed ourselves to regard Ibsen as a disturbing and revolutionizing force, which met with the utmost resistance at the outset, and was gradually accepted before the close of his career, we may try to define what the nature of his revolt was, and what it was, precisely, that he attacked. It may be roughly said that what peculiarly roused the animosity of Ibsen was the character which has become stereotyped in one order of ideas, good in themselves but gradually outworn by use, and which cannot admit ideas of a new kind. Ibsen meditated upon the obscurantism of the old regime until he created figures like Rosmer, in whom the characteristics of that school are crystallized. From the point of view which would enter sympathetically into the soul of Ibsen and look out on the world from his eyes, there is no one of his plays more valuable in its purely theoretic way than _Rosmersholm_. It dissects the decrepitude of ancient formulas, it surveys the ruin of ancient faiths. The curse of heredity lies upon Rosmer, who is highly intelligent up to a certain point, but who can go no further. Even if he is persuaded that a new course of action would be salutary, he cannot move--he is bound in invisible chains. It is useless to argue with Rosmer; his reason accepts the line of logic, but he simply cannot, when it comes to action, cross the bridge where Beate threw herself into the torrent.
But Ibsen had not the ardor of the fighting optimist. He was one who "doubted clouds would break," who dreamed, since "right was worsted, wrong would triumph." With Robert Browning he had but this one thing in common, that both were fighters, both "held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better," but the dark fatalism of the Norwegian poet was in other things in entire opposition to the sunshiny hopefulness of the English one. Browning and Ibsen alike considered that the race must be reformed periodically or it would die. The former anticipated reform as cheerily as the sower expects harvest. Ibsen had no such happy certainty. He was convinced of the necessity of breaking up the old illusions, the imaginative call for revolt, but his faith wavered as to the success of the new movements. The old order, in its resistance to all change, is very strong. It may be shaken, but it is the work of a blind Sampson, and no less, to bring it rattling to the ground. In _Rosmersholm_, all the modern thought, all the vitality, all the lucidity belong to Rebecca, but the decrepit formulas are stoutly intrenched. In the end it is not the new idea who conquers; it is the antique house, with its traditions, its avenging vision of white horses, which breaks the too-clairvoyant Rebecca.

This doubt of the final success of intelligence, this obstinate question whether, after all, as we so glibly intimate, the old order changeth at all, whether, on the contrary, it has not become a Juggernaut car that crushes all originality and independence out of action, this breathes more and more plainly out of the progressing work of Ibsen. Hedda Gabler condemns the old order, in its dulness, its stifling mediocrity, but she is unable to adapt her energy to any wholesome system of new ideas, and
she sinks into deeper moral dissolution. She hates all that has been
done, yet can herself do nothing, and she represents, in symbol, that
detestable condition of spirit which cannot create, though it sees the
need of creation, and can only show the irritation which its own
sterility awakens within it by destruction. All Hedda can actually do,
to assert her energy, is to burn the MS. of Loevborg, and to kill herself
with General Gabler's pistol. The race must be reformed or die; the
Hedda Gablers which adorn its latest phase do best to die.

We have seen that Ibsen's theory was that love of self is the
fundamental principle of all activity. It is the instinct of self-
preservation and self-amelioration which leads to every manifestation of
revolt against stereotyped formulas of conduct. Between the excessive
ideality of Rebecca and the decadent sterility of Hedda Gabler comes
another type, perhaps more sympathetic than either, the master-builder
Solness. He, too, is led to condemn the old order, but in the act of
improving it he is overwhelmed upon his pinnacle, and swoons to death,
"dizzy, lost, yet unupbraiding." Ibsen's exact meaning in the detail of
these symbolic plays will long be discussed, but they repay the closest
and most reiterated study. Perhaps the most curious of all is _The Lady
from the Sea_, which has been examined from the technically
psychological view by a learned French philosopher, M. Jules de
Gaultier. For M. de Gaultier the interest which attaches to Ibsen's
conception of human life, with its conflicting instincts and
responsibilities, is more fully centred in _The Lady from the Sea_ than
in any other of his productions.
The theory of the French writer is that Ibsen's constant aim is to reconcile and to conciliate the two biological hypotheses which have divided opinion in the nineteenth century, and which are known respectively by the names of Cuvier and Lamarck; namely, that of the invariability of species and that of the mutability of organic forms. In the reconciliation of these hypotheses Ibsen finds the only process which is truly encouraging to life. According to this theory, all the trouble, all the weariness, all the waste of moral existences around us comes from the neglect of one or other of these principles, and true health, social or individual, is impossible without the harmonious application of them both. According to this view, the apotheosis of Ibsen's genius, or at least the most successful elucidation of his scheme of ideological drama, is reached in the scene in _The Lady from the Sea_ where Wangel succeeds in winning the heart of Ellida back from the fascination of the Stranger. It is certainly in this mysterious and strangely attractive play that Ibsen has insisted, more than anywhere else, on the necessity of taking physiology into consideration in every discussion of morals. He refers, like a zoologist, to the laws which regulate the formation and the evolution of species, and the decision of Ellida, on which so much depends, is an amazing example of the limitation of the power of change produced by heredity. The extraordinary ingenuity of M. de Gaultier's analysis of this play deserves recognition; whether it can quite be accepted, as embraced by Ibsen's intention, may be doubtful. At the same time, let us recollect that, however subtle our refinements become, the instinct of Ibsen was probably subtler still.
In 1850, when Ibsen first crept forward, with the glimmering taper of his Catilina, there was but one person in the world who fancied that the light might pass from lamp to lamp and in half a century form an important part of the intellectual illumination of Europe. The one person who did suspect it was, of course, Ibsen himself. Against all probability and common-sense, this apothecary’s assistant, this ill-educated youth who had just been plucked in his preliminary examination, who positively was, and remained, unable to pass the first tests and become a student at the University, maintained in his inmost soul the belief that he was born to be "a king of thought." The impression is perhaps not uncommon among ill-educated lads; what makes the case unique, and defeats our educational formulas, is that it happened to be true. But the impact of Ibsen with the social order of his age was unlucky, we see, from the first; it was perhaps more unlucky than that of any other great man of the same class with whose biography we have been made acquainted. He was at daggers drawn with all that was successful and respectable and "nice" from the outset of his career until near the end of it.

Hence we need not be surprised if in the tone of his message to the world there is something acrimonious, something that tastes in the mouth like aloes. He prepared a dose for a sick world, and he made it as nauseous and astringent as he could, for he was not inclined to be one of those physicians who mix jam with their julep. There was no other writer of genius in the nineteenth century who was so bitter in dealing with human frailty as Ibsen was. By the side of his cruel clearness the satire of Carlyle is bluster, the diatribes of Leopardi shrill and thin.
All other reformers seem angry and benevolent by turns, Ibsen is uniformly and impartially stern. That he probed deeper into the problems of life than any other modern dramatist is acknowledged, but it was his surgical calmness which enabled him to do it. The problem-plays of Alexandre Dumas _fils_ flutter with emotion, with prejudice and pardon. But Ibsen, without impatience, examines under his microscope all the protean forms of organic social life and coldly draws up his diagnosis like a report. We have to think of him as thus ceaselessly occupied. We have seen that, long before a sentence was written, he had invented and studied, in its remotest branches, the life-history of the characters who were to move in his play. Nothing was unknown to him of their experience, and for nearly two years, like a coral-insect, he was building up the scheme of them in silence. Odd little objects, fetiches which represented people to him, stood arranged on his writing table, and were never to be touched. He gazed at them until, as if by some feat of black magic, he turned them into living persons, typical and yet individual.

We have recorded that the actual writing down of the dialogue was often swift and easy, when the period of incubation was complete. Each of Ibsen's plays presupposes a long history behind it; each starts like an ancient Greek tragedy, in the full process of catastrophe. This method of composition was extraordinary, was perhaps, in modern times, unparalleled. It accounted in measure for the coherency, the inevitability, of all the detail, but it also accounted for some of the difficulties which meet us in the task of interpretation. Ibsen calls for an expositor, and will doubtless give occupation to an endless
series of scholiasts. They will not easily exhaust their theme, and to
the last something will escape, something will defy their most careful
examination. It is not disrespectful to his memory to claim that Ibsen
sometimes packed his stuff too closely. Criticism, when it marvels most
at the wonder of his genius, is constrained to believe that he sometimes
threw too much of his soul into his composition, that he did not stand
far enough away from it always to command its general effect. The
result, especially in the later symbolical plays, is too vibratory, and
excites the spectator too much.

One very curious example of Ibsen's minute care is found in the
copiousness of his stage directions. Later playwrights have imitated him
in this, and we have grown used to it; but thirty years ago such
minuteness seemed extravagant and needless. As a fact, it was essential
to the absolutely complete image which Ibsen desired to produce. The
stage directions in his plays cannot be "skipped" by any reader who
desires to follow the dramatist's thought step by step without losing
the least link. These notes of his intention will be of ever-increasing
value as the recollection of his personal wishes is lost. In 1899 Ibsen
remarked to me that it was almost useless for actors nowadays to try to
perform the comedies of Holberg, because there were no stage directions
and the tradition was lost. Of his own work, fortunately, that can never
be said. Dr. Verrall, in his brilliant and penetrating studies of the
Greek Tragedies, has pointed out more than once the "undesigned and
unforeseen defect with which, in studying ancient drama, we must
perpetually reckon," namely, the loss of the action and of the
equivalent stage directions. It is easy to imagine "what problems
Shakespeare would present if he were printed like the _Poetae Scenici Graeci_,” and not more difficult to realize how many things there would be to puzzle us in _Ghosts_ and _The Wild Duck_ if we possessed nothing but the bare text.

The body of work so carefully conceived, so long maintained, so passionately executed, was far too disturbing in its character to be welcome at first. In the early eighties the name of Ibsen was loathed in Norway, and the attacks on him which filled the press were often of an extravagant character. At the present moment any one conversant with Norwegian society who will ask a priest or a schoolmaster, an officer or a doctor, what has been the effect of Ibsen's influence, will be surprised at the unanimity of the reply. Opinions may differ as to the attractiveness of the poet's art or of its skill, but there is an almost universal admission of its beneficial tendency. Scarcely will a voice be found to demur to the statement that Ibsen let fresh air and light into the national life, that he roughly but thoroughly awakened the national conscience, that even works like _Ghosts_, which shocked, and works like _Rosmersholm_, which insulted the prejudices of his countrymen, were excellent in their result. The conquest of Norway by this dramatist, who reviled and attacked and abandoned his native land, who railed at every national habit and showed a worm at the root of every national tradition, is amazing. The fierce old man lived long enough to be accompanied to his grave "to the noise of the mourning of a nation," and he who had almost starved in exile to be conducted to the last resting place by a Parliament and a King.
It must always be borne in mind that, although Ibsen's appeal is to the whole world--his determination to use prose aiding him vastly in this dissemination--yet it is to Norway that he belongs, and it is at home that he is best understood. No matter how acrid his tone, no matter how hard and savage the voice with which he prophesied, the accord between his country and himself was complete long before the prophet died. As he walked about, the strange, picturesque little old man, in the streets of Christiania, his fellow-citizens gazed at him with a little fear, but with some affection and with unbounded reverence. They understood at last what the meaning of his message had been, and how closely it applied to themselves, and how much the richer and healthier for it their civic atmosphere had become. They would say, as the soul of Dante said in the _New Life_:--

e costui Che viene a consolar la nostra mente, Ed e la sua tanto possente, Ch'altro pensier non lascia star con nui.

No words, surely, could better express the intensity with which Ibsen had pressed his moral quality, his _virtu_, upon the Norwegian conscience, not halting in his pursuit till he had captured it and had banished from it all other ideals of conduct. No one who knows will doubt that the recent events in which Norway has taken so chivalric, and at the same time so winning and gracious, an attitude in the eyes of the world, owe not a little to their being the work of a generation nurtured in that new temper of mind, that _spiritel nuovo d'amore_ which was inculcated by the whole work of Ibsen.