

THE COLLECTED POEMS
OF HENRIK IBSEN

Translated by John Northam



SECTION TWO
POEMS OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANIA PERIOD

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SIX POEMS SENT IN DRAFT "TO MISS CLARA EBBELL" 1850

YOUTH'S DREAM

Which season's fairest? Is it Springtime's day
 When dew-drops sparkle in the still of morning,
 When first the lark pours forth its roundelay
 And senses all the joy that Future's awning
 Keeps hidden yet in silence, uncommuned,
 When too the western wind its harp has tuned
 While Nature listens, hushed, amid her bowers
 To catch the word no ear lists save the flower's?

Its ear! No, with its heart it comprehends,
 The flower's bud has energies untiring,
 And therefore free and blithely it contends
 To reach the goal to which it is aspiring,
 And therefore bursts the bond that's wrapped around
 Its secret, hidden soul and keeps it bound;
 Not to display itself mid common flowers
 But to be free to gaze where heaven towers.

And that contending is its finest dream,
 The flower's golden age, yon eager striving;
 Then in its bosom swells a mighty stream
 Of future hopes and visions fairly thriving,
 Then it contains a world within its breast,
 Then it strives upward in its youthful zest,
 And, poised on slender stem, it listens smiling
 To songs from Hope's calm angel, soft-beguiling.

How happy if the eye of that same flower
 Should close and drowse forever upward turning,
 And if it faded on the very hour
 When it attained the goal of all its yearning,
 For then indeed its springtide day is done,
 Then is its freedom from the fetter won,
 And then soul's yearning after liberation
 Straightway becomes a real-life dedication!

What gain, if you for some brief while contrived
 To vegetate when once the striving ended?
 You chose your goal and there you have arrived,
 Can see now Heaven as your home intended;
 What more is needed? Would you then prolong

At length your humming of that well-worn song?
 Why should you wish to drain once more Joy's beaker
 When only the first draught can slake the seeker?

You think perhaps that Winter's calm may be
 The time to reap reward for your contending?
 Have you, then, planted Happiness's tree
 To dwell beneath the shadow it's extending?
 O, were you not by calm joy oft possessed,
 And did your heart not throb within your breast
 When, crouched above the soil, you stood beholding
 The seedling's earliest, tender shoot unfolding?

When high the eagle soars the upper air
 And far below, blue-hazed, lie earth's dominions
 While overhead the heavens arch so fair,
 Then trusting proudly to his widespread pinions
 He strives on upwards in the blue's clear span
 Towards "the star's" abode, as near he can;
 But still the goal seems, in his estimation,
 Less glorious than his lofty aspiration.

Yes, if the eagle felt the same as you,
 And if he had your youth, your brave ambition,
 Then he would curse the self-same Present too
 That sets a limit to his lofty mission;
 Then downward he would gaze from clouded space
 With wistful memories upon the place
 Where first he spread his wings, in expectation
 That from remembrance might come consolation.

And well for you if you such solace draw,
 If you can calmly turn your gaze down yonder,
 And, for the Present, with its every flaw,
 Can be repaid with memories to ponder,
 If you with calm delight can freshly hear
 The Past's far-distant harp-strain sounding clear,
 Can conjure once again Life's glowing power
 To re-inspire the Past's death-destined flower.

But woe, if from your dream's beclouded skies
 You see Life's grave below you there extending,
 The world turned autumn sea before your eyes,
 Wherein you watch the dream's bright sun descending.
 Gloom will descend on you, then, should there shine
 A twinkle from the past, a friendly sign,
That you must follow, or Life's perturbation
 Will leave you prey to doubt and desolation.

Your heart is wealthy at life's dawn of day,
 Then you possess a garden full of flowers,

Hope whispers as it were a friendly lay
 And pledges you a summer's beaming hours,
 Indeed your every dream's a budding rose
 And well for you should even one uncloze
 And open forth and smile the smiles you've cherished —
 You will be solaced for all those that perished!

SONNETS

(An introduction to a lecture at the Literary Society)

1

On life's lagoon twinned vessels go a-gliding,
 But each sets sail for its own destination;
 The one presents no problems for deciding,
 The other helps you find their explanation.

The one observes the old saw's exhortation
 That prudence, not just fun should do the guiding,
 The other chooses for its occupation
 To romp with schools of dolphin, all-confiding.

It's heavy sweeps the one of them is using,
 It toils so close to shore it seems to skim it,
 The other chooses sail to wing its cruising.

The one fares in the cause of profiteering
 And so it's laden to the very limit,
 It's for the realms of light the other's steering.

2

If you by inclination are pragmatic,
 Then board the stolid craft for your transporting,
 And don't, for God's sake, sail with the erratic
 Who choose deep, distant waters to cavort in!

West winds may well waft there a coolth climatic,
 While verdant isles o'erhang the waves disporting,
 Upon their shores fleet birds alight, ecstatic,
 But, as you know, a storm's what they're reporting!

No, keep to straits and narrows for your setting,
 There you can navigate the reeds securely,
 The bottom scraping over mud and gravel.

At least you'll get your monthly wages surely,
 And I imagine that if things unravel
 You'll not take harm from just a little wetting.

3

But you are young, not just by calculating

Your years but in your mind, your mental powers,
 So you may give the other scene best rating
 Whereby the vessel glides past serried flowers.

You glimpse there your Ideal roam in her bower's
 Close-woven branches, troops of elves in waiting.
 Don't let her out of sight — her navigating
 Can save you from the prose-life shoal that lowers.

This your Ideal's no shadowy creation, —
 She is a being, soul and spirit blended,
 She is the goal of all your aspiration.

She's pledged to be your inner self's intended, —
 Once rip her from your soul and you'll meet yonder
 With endless waste-land whereso'er you wander!

4

Each man has "something" that he idolises,
 That seems the best of all things, quite sincerely;
 One, slave to table-pleasures, gourmandises,
 Another fancies horse-flesh, very clearly.

With many a one it's smart new clothes he prizes,
 Loves balls and scintillating parties merely,
 One for a saint's renown monasticises
 And loves himself — though not his neighbour — dearly.

We, brothers! We've willed something more improving,
 And so must fight well, offer brave resistance,
 That other's only fit for prose-existence.

For see, it lacks soul's stamp of elevation,
 Hence, like a graven image, stands unmoving,
 A lifeless block for heathen adoration.

5

Pygmalion carved his marble-bride creation
 That she might listen to his sad effusion,
 And doomed himself to fruitless contemplation; —
 That ancient myth holds a profound conclusion.

For legend tells embraces in profusion,
 The gems he brought won no consideration;
 He fell, indeed, a prey to self-delusion
 Till Heaven instilled his bride with animation.

It was his fervent prayers, it was his crying
 That made his goddess warm towards the lover
 And let him in his soul-bride soul discover.

Here's something we can bring our youthful fire to!
 For we shall never find what we aspire to
 Till we've ideals that are soul-satisfying.

It's not though, on a road that's paved and metalled
 That clustered blooms waft fragrance where one paces;
 No, you must leave the highway, bravely fettle,
 For tracks that lead through Nature's desert spaces.

There you must choose a spot, remote, unsettled,
 With ripe fruit all about with glowing faces,
 There, screened from life, can bathe the soul in petalled
 Dew-lavings and in dawn's first blushing traces.

And when you must rejoin life's restlessness,
 Though it involve commitment that imposes
 Tasks far below your sphere of aspiration, —

Yet there's a balm for all its pointlessness,
 For you can feast on Memory's collation;
 A solace sweet as scent from lips of roses.

I'm thinking of the legend of the swan;
 It was life's end first set its music ringing,
 Before, quite mute; — so let's mark the *beginning*
 Of our own journey with a cheerful song.

Ah, once we lose the habit, when that's gone,
 We too will soon have lost the knack of singing,
 We'll join the caravan that lumbers on
 Across life's deserts where the heat is stinging.

And therefore from the Spring's most joyous passion,
 We, like the lark, our tranquil nests shall fashion
 And there brood steadfastly on Memory's treasure.

And dreaming there in winter-night's long leisure,
 We shall recall full many a friendly flower
 That's sere of petal, fresh with Memory's power.

THE MINER

Rock-face, crack and boom and go
 Crashing to my hammer-blow;
 I must clear a way down yonder
 To the goal I dare but ponder.

Deep within the fell's still night

Treasures rich and rare invite,
 Precious stones and diamonds blazing
 Midst the gold's resplendent mazing.

In the depths here all is peace,
 Peace and night that never cease; —
 Soon earth's very heart shall clamour
 To the smiting of my hammer.

As a child I loved to lie
 Out beneath the star-decked sky,
 Lie on springtime's beds of flowers,
 Blessed with heaven's soothing powers.

I forgot Spring's show of bloom
 In the mine-shaft's midnight gloom,
 And forgot the birds' blithe revels
 In the mountain's stifling levels.

When this region I first sought
 In my childish way I thought:
 Spirits of the deep would lead me
 Through the dark maze Life decreed me.

They would teach me, too, to know
 How the flower-bud can grow,
 Why the mead's fair blossoms wither
 At the Autumn's coming hither.

But the ever-lasting night
 Dimmed and rendered weak my sight;
 Treasures of the deep now seeming
 But a lifeless, stony gleaming.

And no spirit yet has taught
 What it was perplexed my thought,
 Underground no clear-defining
 Sun has risen brightly shining.

A mistake, then? Can this be
 No true path to clarity?
 If I seek it in the height
 Then I'm dazzled by the light.

No, I must deep down explore,
 Where there's night for evermore, —
 Heavy hammer, help me enter
 Into Nature's hidden centre!

On it goes then, blow on blow
 Till he drops from toiling so, —

There's no gleam of radiant morning,
No bright clarity, no dawning!

Brynjolf Bjarme

The version printed in the volume of poems that Ibsen published in 1871 omits stanzas 7 and 8 and avoids the abrupt reference to the miner in the last stanza. There are other minor changes.

BIRD AND BIRD-CATCHER

Once, while still a little fellow,
Out into Dad's yard I scurried,
Birds trilled — for the morn was mellow —
Perched on branch and fence, unflurried.

And from pine-twigs I created
Truly an ingenious bird-snare;
Ere I could count ten, a bird's there
In the cage I'd fabricated.

And I rushed the trap I'd fashioned
Back indoors with cruel relish,
Scared the bird with my impassioned
Scowls that shouts and threats embellish.

When I'd had my fun, been able
To indulge my spite completely,
Setting cage upon the table
I then raised the flap discreetly.

Life and freedom both invite it;
O, but how it makes its wings go!
Watch it soar towards the light it
Sees, but — crash against the window. — —

You're avenged, avenged most cruelly!
I've been trapped, too, by some power
In a snare where I, unsurely
Fluttering, in confusion cower.

At me too an eye is staring
Cold and scornful through the grating,
It confounds my soul, the glaring,
Terror shakes me unabating.

And when freedom's luring pathway
Beckons my imagination,
Broken-winged I fall but half-way
On dream's flight to liberation!

AMID THE RUINS

Settle, my tremulous
 Soul from your emulous
 Flight in the towering
 Blue of the sky!
 Sink on the soft-bedewed
 Shore where in oft-renewed
 Dreams over-powering
 Lulled you would lie!

I, near the hurrying
 Waves, mid the flurrying
 Smiles of bloom-multitudes
 Paused in my path,
 Cleansed my most innocent,
 Fondest, magnificent
 Yearnings in Solitude's
 Reverie-bath.

Time changed maliciously,
 Wafted seditiously
 Doubts that effectively
 Spread night abroad,
 Lowered its darkling
 Veil on the sparkling
 Blooms that protectively
 Covered my hoard.

Then the fierce-clamouring
 Storm swept the hammering
 Billows and vandalised
 All in a trice.
 Meanwhile atrociously,
 Cruel, ferocious the
 Violence gripped scandalised
 Soul in dread's vice.

Then I soared willingly,
 Set me to winging the
 Upward path dizzily
 Cleaving the sky;
 Memory gnawed at me,
 Ghostly shapes clawed at me,
 Scornfully, busily
 Passing me by.

Settle, my tremulous
 Soul from your emulous
 Flight in the towering
 Blue of the sky.

Sink on the soft-bedewed
 Shore where in oft-renewed
 Dreams over-powering
 Lulled you would lie!

Here shall my shivering
 Breast bowed o'er withering
 Blooms await eagerly
 Solace's feast;
 Bide there, my crucified
 Soul, for the prophesied
 Dawn to flood regally
 Out of the East!

Henr. Ibsen

'In The Night' (see Grimstad section) constitutes the sixth of the poems sent to Clara Ebbell.

THE SWAN

When the mist autumns bring
 And white winters embalm
 The whole North in their bleak, chilling sway,
 On a shore bathed in Spring
 'Neath the sheltering palm
 There the swan builds a nest for its stay.

Nature's rich there and breeds
 A live freshness withal,
 There's no wintery shrouding of snow;
 Behind billowing reeds
 Like a sheltering wall
 There's a haven from winds that may blow.

In a delicate sheet
 Water-lilies o'er-spread
 The light ripples with scent wafted forth;
 There its slumber is sweet,
 There it waits to be sped
 By the summons of Spring to the North.

O, but can't you believe
 That its longing might stray,
 In a solacing dream now fly hence?
 Can you not, then, conceive
 That its lightning-swift way
 O'er the cloud seeks the home it can sense?

Then Spring's sun played its role
 And it took its farewell

Of its winter-home's springlike array,
 To salute its own fell
 Near the ice-covered Pole
 With its cold and familiar display.

Many flower-clad shores
 On its dizzying flight
 It saw smilingly beckon below;
 There the sea never roars,
 Yet, disdainingly the sight,
 It flew North like a shaft from the bow.

From the blue hazy band
 Lofty ridges appear;
 O, its longing for home is so strong!
 That familiar strand
 And the home it holds dear,
 It will greet with a passionate song.

Though a death-knell it toll
 Yet the song's without pain,
 For there's wistful delight one can wrest
 From one's swathing the soul
 In a passionate strain
 As one dies on the motherland's breast!

Brynjolf Bjarme

ON AKERSHUS

Summer night has spread its kindly
 Veil upon a world that's sleeping;
 Silver-pale the stars behind the
 Eerie mist are dimly peeping.

Now the wave within the narrows
 Soothes its bosom, moaning gently;
 Hark, 'tis childhood songs it hallows,
 Songs remembered reverently!

Cloaked in sleep the city drowns
 Peacefully, serenely sprawling;
 Far away the churchyard rouses
 To a sound — the night-watch calling.

Akershus's old eye ranges
 Calmly seaward through the vapour;
 Sometimes he, methinks, exchanges
 Nods with Hovedøy, his neighbour.

Akershus, that ancient giant,

Stands in thrall to introspection,
Glides, perchance, with oar compliant
On the stream of recollection.

See, they visit him — the vanished
Forms from ages far receded,
To the grave no longer banished
Through the hall glide unimpeded.

High behind the fan-lights quivering
Beams of livid light assemble,
Yes, I see it plain and shivering,
Gripped by silent terror, tremble.

Look, who is yon knightly figure
In whose eye dark fire smoulders,
He who without sound or vigour
Sits his throne with drooping shoulders?

Yes, indeed! King Christian's lordship!
Lank of cheek, his dark brow wrinkled,
Fumbles feebly with his sword-grip,
Blade rust-red where blood was sprinkled.

In the window-bay a lady
Stands, her bearing tall and stately;
Ha, my memory comes to aid me, —
Aye, Knut Alfsen's consort lately!

And there's many another yonder, —
Gentle ladies, men of violence,
Who about the chamber wander
In the depth of midnight's silence.

Just see there, — — ah, it has faded;
“Guard, dismiss” relieved the sentry;
Akershus's pageant traded
For drab everyday's re-entry.

It is only when life pauses
In its wonted, busy shrillness
That the midnight darkness causes
Soul to dream within its stillness.

Brynjolf Bjarme

Akershus, the ancient citadel-palace of Oslo overlooking the fjord; Hovedøy, a small inshore island. Christian, the Danish viceroy, later King Christian II, who, in 1502 killed Knud Alfsønn, a Norwegian hero in the fight against Danish supremacy.

THE VOICE OF NATURE

A poet once strolled in the forest to ponder,
Alone, how the pine-tops were sighing up yonder.

He sat himself down amid clusters of flowers,
Then fancied the stream starts to sing as it scours.

And soft through the leafage a throstle was trilling,
In short, the whole setting was, musically, thrilling.

The whole of it merged in so dulcet a fashion
His inner self blazed with creative passion.

His Pegasus took quite a deal of firm holding,
Then a whisper, a voice like a dream that's unfolding!

A sound like a muffled lament, death-begotten,
A quavering echo from days half forgotten!

A sound like a voice from Dame Nature's own being,
(And that's what it was, too, exactly agreeing!)

It said: "Go away, son of Man there, thou sitter
In forests to listen to birds as they twitter!"

You just want to spy on your own dreaming mother,
(Then later write odes, elegiac or other!)

Go, say to your brethren they'd stop, that's for sure,
If they knew what their mother must thereby endure!"

There once was a mother — you've heard of her maybe —
Who always sang songs as she cradled her baby.

And later she taught the young infant to prattle
Those songs till first one then the lot it could rattle.

The youngster still sang in that infantile cheeping
With mother asleep in her sepulchre's keeping.

And each time it hummed the familiar measure,
She blissfully dreamed of most heavenly pleasure.

But, as he grew up, so his memory faltered,
He still sang, of course, but the sound was much altered.

And each time he hummed in that alien measure,
His mother expressed, from the grave, her displeasure.

By the poet's couch, too, Nature sat in like session,

And kindly bequeathed him her dearest possession.

She sat there and sang till he learnt how to prattle
Those songs till first one then the lot he could rattle.

At times when he hums in that infantile measure,
Dame Nature's all smiles from her motherly pleasure.

But when he strikes chords that the world taught him borrow,
She heaves a deep sigh of unutterable sorrow!

H.I.

THE LAD IN THE BILBERRY PATCH

Under the ridge, in hiding,
Lies a damp bilberry patch;
There lives the squirrel, residing
High in the fir-tree's thatch.

From there it sarcastically glowers
On life at the fir-tree's foot,
And grins at the budding flowers
That waft their scent round its root.

It laughs with its cheeky expression,
(It's canny enough in its way);
A lad with a box takes possession,
The bilberry patch his prey.

The clumps swell blue-black with their treasure,
Inviting him far and near;
He gazes about him with pleasure,
Then picks where ripe berries appear.

Then enter a sport, quite a dolly,
"What an idyll" he thinks "in all sooth!"
Neglecting the chase and the quarry
He stops on account of the youth.

A hunter, of course from the city,
For that's where the poets all dwell, —
He turns up his eyes it's so pretty
And pulls out his notebook as well.

He burns now with inspiration,
A masterpiece lies in his clutch!
It flows from his hand, his creation;
He paints with a feeling touch:

"Mid-patch, where the hummocks are growing,

A lad stands, all smiles, not a care,
 His cheeks with rude health are glowing,
 Hung round with his golden hair.”

“He nods to the hillside twin-flowers,
 They, modestly, greetings extend,
 (Within the pines’ darkling bowers
 Each blossom’s his bosom friend.)”

“He’s blithe as the forest songster,
 That flits bough to bough in the sun;
 His path teems with blooms, which the youngster
 Is gathering one by one!”

The squirrel makes mock – it’s inviting —
 A hint of a smile on its face;
 It sees what the poet is writing, —
 But knows the true facts of the case.

It knows that the lad isn’t really
 Enthralled by the blooms’ bright hue,
 It sees him pick fruit, — but it’s merely
 Sheer need that compels him to.

It has often enough seen him starting
 His search there at break of day;
 But never observed him departing
 Blue-lipped on his homeward way.

It knows what he’s picked he’ll unfailing
 Take back to the town below,
 And bring his poor sister, who’s ailing,
 A cookie to solace her woe!

Brynjolf Bjarme

TO A TROUBADOUR

Troubadour, with power divine
 Though the strings play softly!
 Garb in song that soul of thine,
 Let it soar prolonged and lofty; —
 Sing, my noble troubadour,
 Like the bird in God’s outdoor, —
 Thy tones shall ne’er fade or alter
 Like the spring-tide winds that falter!

Whisper but to Nature’ breast
 What thy heart is hoarding, —
 I, thine echo, shall attest

Silently applauding,
 Shall thy soul's still-vibrant spell
 Bear with me from fell to fell,
 In thy silence fantasising
 Over thy sweet melodising!

Henr. Ibsen

Ibsen sent a copy of the poem to Clara Ebbell in Grimstad. She had appeared in troubadour costume at two parties held in February 1851.

THE TEAR

Denied its tears life came to be,
 For all its moisture, nonetheless
 Too dry to be endured;
 The wound from bitter memory
 Can by the tear's fresh dew be cured,
 And in its diamond-lucid round
 Full many a grieving soul has found
 The heart's lost peacefulness.

I still recall so very clear
 My streaming flood of tear on tear
 The time that I was led,
 A little lad, to school, first day;
 No doubt it was the self-same lay
 I sang as when, a babe, I'd been
 Too early put to bed.

A gang of schoolboys, boisterous, rough,
 Mill in the street, content enough, —
 The sled runs smooth again;
 I press against the window-pane
 And watch them, sorrowful at heart,
 And then the hot tears run.
 Because it's Christmas Eve, and bright
 With moonbeams and with snow so white,
 But, o! my boots have come apart,
 I can't join in the fun.

Thus have I often since that day
 From heart's sheer fullness grieved;
 I've soothed its deep-felt pangs away
 And felt thereby relieved.
 But till the soul was roused in me
 The tear contained mere misery,
 I had not grasped what potency
 Was hidden in the tear.

Then came the time when I would read

A poet's lofty strain,
 In tear's warm bath I cleansed my pain
 And purified my inner need
 And soothed its urgency, —
 And then I felt the undertow
 That deep in Beauty's depths can flow,
 And then at last I learnt to read
 A tear-drop's poesy!

H.I.

A SATURDAY EVENING
 IN HARDANGER
 (By Brynjolf Bjarme)

It is a Saturday, the evening's fine
 With cowbells hushed, long shadows slowly creeping,
 With hazy mists that on the ridge recline
 Where cuckoo, thrush build cosy nests for sleeping,
 While there's a magpie that persists in cheeping
 Contentedly its song of ancient line,
 And where a squirrel on its busy mission
 Cuts capers, treats the whole world with derision.

It is Hardanger at its loveliest, haunting,
 All smiles amid the splendour of the scene,
 The fjord in robe of silver bravely flaunting!
 It laps now where the shaded banks o'erlean,
 Now hides itself, coquettishly goes jaunting
 Amid plump islets, spits of land all green,
 Just like some Miss who, her tenth birthday flatters,
 Begins to feel she's got the hang of matters.

Below we glimpsed a farmstead with its yard,
 A fishing-net hung out along the coping,
 A puss-cat on the gable lusting hard
 After the magpie's hedge-nest, ever-hoping,
 But still the old'un stands her ground, even so,
 However sore-perplexed and near to moping, —
 Because she'd chased her young ones without warning
 Out of the nest onto the roof that morning.

Inside the yard, high spirits — life is sweet,
 Beneath the jokes and laughter sounds the fiddle;
 The dancer clasps around her shapely middle
 The pretty girl there with the nimble feet,
 He lets her go, gives her another twiddle,
 And now advances, gravity complete,
 Retires again — now tries the leap, the Halling, —
 Ow! Messed it up! — He rushed it — o, how galling!

What colourful profusion's lacking here?
 It is, in miniature, a ballroom setting;
 At least it's here that rose-red cheeks appear
 And lassies' eyes judiciously coquetting,
 Here handclasps granted to relieve love's fretting,
 Provided its demands aren't too severe,
 Yes, alcoves even, for exchange of glances
 And of much more — nought's wanting at these dances!

Because the forest arches dense and still,
 It's nice to rest upon the moss there lurking;
 One seeks its shelter when one's danced one's fill,
 The old observe it with a foxy smirking;
 But their keen barbs and banter won't be working,
 Won't pierce the plaited leafage, come what will.
 Outside's for pleasure in a general fashion,
 Inside is specially reserved for passion.

The fiddle stops and to their groups tight-clinging
 Folk sit together on the fresh, green grass.
 Hark! It's the travelling tailor now who's singing,
 A man who's seen two score and ten nigh pass,
 His gaze is calm, smile friendly, though, alas,
 It's said he has a private grief that's stinging;
 But few know if some current plague's the reason,
 Or rather memories from a bygone season.

He walks the parish, going farm to farm
 With shears in pocket, goose in hand for heating,
 And everywhere he gets the fondest greeting,
 He generates good humour like a charm,
 Though first he needs a drop of welcome's balm
 And then he'll stand, a pagan bard, repeating
 Dark, legendary tales all mixed together
 With jokes and gossip, parish news and weather.

For local lads he's often butt for laughter,
 He must put up with many a scornful jest,
 But he just smiles, good natured, never stressed,
 And where he's stopped, picks up again thereafter,
 He'll sing and tell a story with the best,
 Though sometimes one can't fathom what he's after;
 Because his story's like a sea, whereunder
 There dimly lurks a mystery-world of wonder.

So in the yard he sits, at ease, well rested,
 The girls flock round him with their pretty airs;
 He looks them in the eye, a friend attested,
 But then the schoolmaster, whose learned wares
 Folk have forgotten before half-digested,
 Accosts the fiddler, cross and sly — he glares

And whispers: "Thore, shut him up, he's boring!
And then the rest of us might get an oar in."

The fiddler rises to his feet in haste,
The blood mounts to his cheeks, all flush and fluster,
His grin is spiteful and he glares distaste
Upon the silent throng of girls that cluster, —
He sends the tailor such a look, hard faced
With jealous rage, and then says, full of bluster:
"You mind that tailor and his song — just ponder,
He heard it from the river bed down yonder!"

The song, the fun, both silenced at a stroke, —
The girls' fresh lips resign the smiles they flirted,
And fiddler Thore, who'd so rashly blurted,
Stands silent, pale at what his words provoke;
For tall the tailor rears, a forest oak,
(Though he had seemed at first quite disconcerted;)
With eyes ablaze, breast laboured in its breathing,
He presses with cold hands a brow that's seething.

"I heard it from the river bed down yonder!"
He whispers out the words scarce audibly,
His hair meanwhile is streaming wild and free,
And on his cheeks hot, hectic flushes wander.
"O yes, I mind the deep strains I would ponder,
Whose hollow echoes filled the heart of me!"
— On all his listeners a sadness seizes;
His words come wafting faint as springtime breezes.

"In days long past I'd linger
Where alders barred the light,
When moonbeams shone and flooded
The balmy summer night.

I sat in silence, musing
And heard the nixie's song;
But nothing that he'd played me
Could cheer my heart for long.

For hence beyond the forest
A wondrous maid did dwell,
Her eyes as blue and secret
As still tarns on the fell.

My thoughts reached out towards her
With Summer's night o'erhead,
Thus was it I sat lonely
And eyed the river bed.

Thus sat I there in sorrow

And heard the nixie sing,
My bursting heart responded
To the full-sounded string.

I'd heard tell in the parish
The sprite's dark song conveys
An eerie, sombre power
As do the strings he plays.

For he can snare a maiden,
Whoever learns the art;
And so I longed to play me
Into my maiden's heart.

From out the depths I called him
To play and he complied;
But when I'd learnt his secret
She was another's bride.

In wondrous dreaming visions
I too began to play,
The sprite's mysterious singing
Stays with me to this day!"

Such was his tale; — his voice fades at the last,
And still he stands there, ashen of complexion,
He whispers at the mournful recollection
Come back to haunt him from the distant past,
While fiddler Thore, boyhood friend, aghast
Slips off, the teacher too, with circumspection;
The rest sit silently, each one reflecting
On that old tale of song that's so affecting.

Down shone the moonbeams, through the forest wended
And bathed the farm-yard in their pallid light,
A muted sigh that whispered through a night
Now half-obsured upon the scene descended;
Each brisk young escort picks a girl who might
Not care to walk alone and unattended;
One pair heads west, and eastward heads another, —
One does the best one can to help a brother.

The tailor, too, departs now from the throng,
His eerie singing silenced now forever,
As usual, year by year he jogs along,
Grows old with time, like all things whatsoever, —
But many a lad from childhood will endeavour
To hum a kind of echo of his song.
And still his fame as singer lives, ne'er haler,
That aged man, Hardanger's travelling tailor!

Ibsen chose an abbreviated version of the tailor's song to open his 1871 volume of poems, under the title Fiddlers.

THE EIDER DUCK

The eider-duck dwells in the northern land,
Is reared off the fjord's black, gloomy strand,
It plucks the fine, delicate down from its breast
And fashions a warm and a cosy nest.

There it will hatch out the young it's to rear,
The shore full of smiles in its summer gear.
But the local fisherman, mischief bound,
Steals up to the reef without a sound.

For him the bird is a valued guest;
He plunders the very last scrap from the nest,
Before he abandons the reef he's stripped
He sees the last feather is safely shipped.

But deep in its bosom the bird can find
A spark of sheer love that is warm and kind,
It plucks the fine, delicate down from its breast
And fashions once more a cosy nest.

And though that is plundered, yet it will look
To build a new nest in some hidden nook, —
It plucks from its breast the last feather — in vain,
Not knowing the fisherman's near again.

But should he steal the last treasure left,
The eider despairs, of all hope bereft,
With nought but a bleeding breast to boast,
It pines away on that barren coast. —

It's not so wealthy, the human breast!
It too will fashion a cosy nest,
Will line it with care and make pretty its floor
With blooms from the soul's most intimate store.

Yet plundered but once in its secretive site,
Its soul is enshrouded in endless night,
Its energies fail and its confident zest,
It's left with no more than a bleeding breast.

Brynjolf Bjarme

FOR DENMARK

A sombre message quivered
 Its warning through our times,
 The hum of war delivered
 Its threat to Northern climes;
 Each sleep-dulled Power, lack-lustre,
 Found sap and enterprise,
 The cause, a Vigrid-muster
 Where Denmark's bastions rise.

And Denmark's old defences
 In time of strife held out,
 The ancient North now senses
 Its strong-walled church is stout,
 With solemn aisles and apses,
 Bold vaulting that soars forth;
 It, till the North collapses,
 Personifies the North.

Yes we, a watch eternal,
 Shall loving hands enrol
 To guard the North's true kernel,
 Its trinity of soul:
 Too long it went un-nourished,
 Long lacked the succour due,
 Yet put out shoots that flourished
 In conflict's derring-do.

Though Gefjon's plough has sited
 A furrow deep and broad,
 Yet all is re-united
 By brotherly accord; —
 Hence, Denmark, we salute thee
 With brotherly acclaim, —
 Hail, Danes, who resolutely
 Fight in our common name.

Another poem inspired by German's threat to Denmark and the North at large. Vigrid, the battlefield on which the final battle between gods and giants was fought. Gefjon, a giantess who turned her four sons into oxen to plough a channel that divides the Danish island of Sjælland from the Swedish mainland.

ON LADERGAARDSJØEN
 the 10th June [1851]

A breeze is stirring, the sound subdued
 Among the forest spruces,
 Profound and sad is the inward mood
 The woodland scene induces;
 It whispers of its yearning needs,

Each fondest recollection,
 And there the voice that feeling breeds
 Is echoed to perfection.

Once on a time a proud queen held sway
 Within these woods that whisper,
 There ladies strolled in their silk array
 Beside the fjord's bright glister,
 The minstrel sang of love's sweet flames
 Unto the harp's gold stringing,
 While courtly jest and knightly games
 Set flowered meads a-ringing.

But times changed, and the hallowed glade
 Slept in its old seclusion,
 It saw its sprightly vigour fade
 With whirlwind strife's intrusion;
 But Nature's spirit can withstand,
 It dreams away the hours
 Upon the couch a friendly hand
 Has strewn with Memory's flowers.

From centuries passed in those torpid dreams
 The ancient grove now rallies,
 An elf-sprite now, in our time, redeems
 The fragrant-scented valleys,
 It swells the forest's infant sprays,
 The strand's bright-flowered legion,
 Now breathes an anthem forth to praise
 The best thoughts of our region!

Henr. Ibsen

Ladegaardsjøen, the modern Bygdø peninsular that juts into the Oslofjord. A royal festival was held there for Danish and Norwegian students on 10th June 1851.

TO MY SUBSCRIBERS!
 (On the occasion of the naming of "Andhrimner")

In a christian land it's quite hard, you know,
 to get to the port of one's aim,
 if one, like a heathen, is made to go
 out in public without a name.

One's scorned for an unbaptisèd cur,
 there's many a gibe been thrown,—
 it has often stabbed deep in my heart, that slur —
 I'm not, you see, made out of stone!

The hour of salvation quite soon will chime;
 just one week and then I'll be free,

and I'll assume without wasting time
the new man, a christian I'll be.

A christian? Ah yes, God help me just there,
that is easier said than done;
for even a name such as "Vanity Fair"
could bear little fruit for one.

For we are all Adam's progeny,
all subject to Nature's norm,
one soars like the royal eagle, free,
one crawls in the dust like a worm.

I cannot abandon my wonted way,
I'll follow it through like a *Man*,
though often o'er forested heights it stray
and savage terrain it span.

I offer you thanks with a grateful mind
for your backing so far and goodwill,—
when I come out, I trust you're inclined
to back me a little while still! —

Ibsen and his friends ran a student paper called 'The Man' until they decided to change its name to 'Andhrimner', after the cook who provided food for the gods in Valhalla..

HELGE HUNDINGSBANE
(by Brynjolf Bjarme)

1 HELGE'S EARLY DAYS

Why have the ravens settled
Upon the castle's height?
Why sang the fowl of Odin
So lustily by night?

"Tis meet in sooth our singing,
This kingly roof our stay,
For there's been born a warrior
Of kingly blood today.

"From kingly blood descended
He'll wish some day to wield
And slake the sword-tongue thirsting
For blood of kings a-field.

"From kingly blood descended
Right soon he will provide
A dish for hungry ravens
That greet this eventide."

The Norns have met in Braalund
 High conference to hold,
 And in the midnight silence
 They spin their web of gold.

To east and west they shuttle
 And each knot firmly takes,
 For if that web is broken
 Young Helge's life-thread breaks.

King Sigmund's proud young offspring
 Sleeps in the royal hall,
 A stone bench for his cradle
 A bear-skin for his shawl.

And there the king stands gazing,
 His pleasure unconfined,
 Paternal joy disporting
 Within the monarch's mind.

"The wet-nurse for his nurture
 Must be both bold and hale,
 At very least a shield-maid
 With ring and shift of mail."

The infant proved no laggard,
 He gained in strength so fast,
 Stood on his legs unaided
 Before two days had passed.

One winter scarcely over,
 Young Helge leapt as free
 As any colt unbroken
 About the flowered lea.

Beside the castle entry
 A young lad sat one day,
 A kitten joining gently
 The youngster at his play.

"Now tell me", Helge asked him,
 (He smiled too, I'll be bound)
 "What kind of creature's that, then,
 That's playing on the ground?"

The other lad responded:
 "You surely must know that —
 This creature is a daughter
 Of Auntie's black pet cat."

"Right then", thought little Helge

And off he fairly flew,
 He wanted to acquire
 A puss like that one too.

He spotted on the hillside
 Fresh tracks of something wee;
 He thought they matched the kitten's
 Exactly, to a T.

He knew it had its dwelling
 In scree below the fell,
 Where there's a secret hideout
 To shelter in quite well.

Meanwhile the king was seated
 Within his kingly hall,
 And round him ranged his warriors,
 Full clangorous withal.

Poured from a horn of silver
 Fine mead flowed for the horde;
 Quips sounded, merry jesting
 Around the festive board.

Then Helge made his entry:
 "Dear Father! Sure enough
 I've found a playmate yonder
 Up by the wooded bluff."

Up leapt both king and warriors:
 "Help, Asathor and Tyr!
 Why, it's the bear's young offspring,
 A cub whelped this last year!"

"Be this the bear's young offspring,
 This creature I hold here,
 Then all my pains are wasted,
 'Twas never my idea.

"I never dreamt its mother
 Could be a bear, I own,
 Though for a cat, I grant you
 She did seem overgrown.

"She grumbled and she grunted
 Yes, tried to use her claw,
 A cuff behind the ear though
 Soon calmed her down once more."

"Now hear me" Sigmund answered,
 Half angry, half with pride,

“If you’ve fetched single-handed
A bear cub from its hide,

“You could as well have minded
To topple from his throne
Your liege-lord, thereby making
His sovereignty your own.

“So for your better guidance
You, Helge, I assign
To Hagal, who’s my kinsman,
Born of a warrior line.

“Take as a gift my weapon,
My old and trusty sword,
It often flashed in battle, —
You merit the award.”

So off young Helge travels,
His curving brow helm-dight;
The sword upon his shoulder
Reached just beyond his height.

It did not take much longer
Ere he grew tall and tough;
He tried all sorts of contest
With Hagal times enough.

If Hagal rocked an oak-tree
That stood a century tall, —
Young Helge, he would lift it
Like bracken, roots and all.

If Hagal drank right bravely
Till Helge’s tongue went slack,
Then Helge went on drinking
When Hagal’s on his back.

Then comes a call to muster:
King Hunding is abroad
With Braalund’s doughty monarch
To measure spear and sword.

Then did young Helge saddle
Post-haste his courser grey
To reach King Hunding’s quarters
Before the end of day.

King Sigmund had advised him
“Now keep sharp watch and ward!”
There drunken men were sprawling

Around the oaken board.

But no-one spots the youngster
Whom not a soul there knows,
Hard drinkers don't distinguish
Between their friends and foes.

He's up betimes and leaving
At very break of day,
But recklessly first pauses
Within the entrance-way.

"You ought to know this, Hunding!
Young Helge was your guest.
I'll save my thanks for later, —
When next we meet were best."

Then must the speedy charger
Show well its turn of pace;
For Hunding's men right swiftly
Take up the hero's chase.

As wolf-packs howl pursuing
The nimble reindeer's trail,
Even so the band of heroes
Press on up hill down dale.

"Away!" the cry goes sounding,
"We'll have him in a while!"
But to the last it's Helge
Who heads the chasing file.

He enters Hagal's presence
And tells what he has done;
"Your life", replies the elder,
"Deserves more heed my son!"

"But you can still be rescued,
Waste no time talking here,
Get dressed for their arrival
In skirt and women's gear!"

"And if young Helge's swaddled
In bondmaid skirts this way,
His sword shall do the thanking
For this fine game some day!"

And then in strides a warrior,
Soon more and more in turn;
There in the cool a woman
Stands grinding at the quern.

But none of the retainers
Saw Helge pass that day; —
His steed would have been nimble,
Too fleet of foot they say.

Bright sparklets flashed and glittered
From round the quern-stone's span;
“That wench has fore-arms on her,
She should have been a man!

“Now tell me, what's your breeding,
A strapping lass like you?”
“Till Hagal took me captive
I was a shield-maid true.”

A grey-beard joined in, smirking,
“I'd risk all, never blench,
Yes, though my life were forfeit,
To get me such a wench!”

Then home the warriors hastened
For Hunding's court pell-mell. —
Young Helge tries his sword-blade,
“The edge bites keen, 'tis well!”

2. HELGE AND SIGRUN

'Twas Brunavaag's encounter
That saw King Hunding slain, —
And Helge, for he slew him,
Was known as Hundingsbane.

The billows glitter redly
Far o'er the briny sea;
But peaceful lies the vessel
In yonder island's lee.

The clash of shields is over,
The watery field lies calm,
Up in the bow sits Helge
Cooled by the evening's balm.

Young Helge watches shadows
As o'er the moon they glide:
“They are the fallen warriors
That speed to Odin's side.

“They are the fallen warriors
That were by breast-wounds slain;
On Idavold tomorrow

They'll join the fray again!

“They gallop through the darkness —
Each putting forth his best,
Each yearning to be seated
Soon as Valhalla's guest.”

And then, a breeze-borne thunder
Such as the whirlwinds spread:
“It is for sure no slain man
Who walks with such a tread!”

Down on the strand a shield-maid
Came striding proud and tall
With sword and shield accoutred,
In plated garb withal.

She was no second Freia,
All bright and elfin-glad;
Young Helge thought he witnessed
A Balder, woman-clad.

“And who may you be, standing
In shadow on the strand?”
“Since that is what you ask me
I answer out of hand.

“For you should know this Helge!
Bold champion in the field! —
A princess stands before you,
One bearing sword and shield!

“King Høgne is my father
And I have brothers five,
And all of them Berserkers, —
Beware, if you'd survive.

“They muster now, intending
To meet you face to face;
Be on your guard, then Helge,
There's little time of grace.

“But I've seen you do battle
On dragon-prows stained red,
Your praise soared to high heaven,
By hawk and raven spread.

“And I have seen you braving
The fierce Berserker spear,
‘Twas then you vanquished Sigrun,
‘Twas then she loved you dear!”

“And if, my lovely maiden,
It be as you now say,
Come climb aboard my vessel
And come with me straightway.

“And Helge shall prove loyal,
And ere the autumn fall,
You shall be proudly seated
As queen within my hall!”

The warriors set to hoisting
The white sail on the mast,
For Svaringshaug they headed,
Their war-lust urging fast.

And ere the cock was crowing,
— Swift had the dragon flown —
They rock inshore at anchor
Not far from Frekastone.

“Stay with the vessel, Sigrun!
You must wait here for me!
I shall ride home, come evening,
To Odin or to thee!”

“And if you ride to Odin
My fate will prove right fell!
Young Helge is departing,
His warriors as well.”

Then Sigrun with her maidens
Stands silent on the deck,
Till Odin has descended
The deeps of Søkvaþæk.

“What thunder stirs the silence
Of trees that flank the sound,
And what bright thing resembles
The moon’s resplendent round?”

“What makes the thunder yonder?
The brave band from the field, —
The bright thing there that glitters
Is Helge’s copper shield!”

Then forth he strides, young Helge,
To Sigrun standing near:
“Thor help thee, fairest Sigrun!
What tidings you must hear!

“For your dear kin now slumber
Like corpses, lips all pale, —
They are this instant riding
O’er Bifrost without fail!”

“I reckon not of my kinsmen,
Though they’re no more alive,
But there are some surviving,
I still have brothers five!”

“Indeed you had this morning!
You’ve now but one alone, —
The rest lie pale and bloodless
A-field at Frekastone!”

“But though my brothers perished,
My father lives, look you!” —
“No, I must tell you, Sigrun!
My good sword smote him too!”

“Let father fall and kinsmen,
Let brothers, friends be gone, —
No tears shall fall from Sigrun
While Helge still lives on!” —

Then homeward fares young Helge
And with him his fair bride,
Soon to be throned in Braalund
As queen in lofty pride.

3. HELGE’S DEATH

And it was Sigrun’s brother
Dag Høgneson, who flew
Unscathed the fierce encounter;
The others Helge slew.

He haunts the hall right glumly,
Sworn man of Helge’s band;
But Helge now rules over
King Høgne’s very land.

He haunts the hall right glumly,
Then Sigrun whispers low:
“Why art thou, my dear brother,
So silent, brooding so?”

“My lip needs must be silent,
My mind be pensive too,
My father and my brothers
I’ll not forget, like you!”

“I sat once with the highest,
Girt with the royal sword,
Now I amongst his henchmen
Sit lowest at the board!”

Then forth the warriors trample
Across the floor to fare
Into the woods, where Helge
Would hunt the wolf and bear.

And then his lord, King Helge,
Addressed him, thus to say:
“Dag Høgneson, go saddle
Forthwith your courser grey.

“Do you keep close beside me,
The others ride behind;
Today I’d test your prowess
In skills of sporting kind!”

“Why then I promise, Helge!
Before the dusk shall fall,
My goodly sword shall slaughter
The fellest wolf of all.”

So off the warriors hastened
To hunt the pinewood glade,
The hooves aroused a thunder
Where rode the cavalcade.

But in the van rides Helge,
Dag only keeping near,
And both of them are weaponed
With battle-sword and spear.

“Mark how the wolf is howling;
Why keep your blade sheathed so?” —
“No, Helge, leave it howling,
That one’s not worth the blow.”

King Helge then responded:
“Who wrought that sword for you
That is too good for wielding
In noble derring-do?”

“I sacrificed to Odin,
He wrought my blade just so;
You are the wolf, King Helge,
That is well worth the blow!”

The forest rolls with thunder
 As life and death contest,
 Already Helge's heart-blood
 Flowed streaming from his breast.

He, like a crippled eagle
 Smote fierce and mettlesome, —
 But keen was Odin's weapon,
 He must at length succumb.

And Dag sets out for Braalund,
 Alone he homeward rides,
 Into Queen Sigrun's presence
 Within the hall he strides.

“Why from the woods dear brother,
 Return, thus lonely, too?” —
 “I bring you news of Helge,
 My keen sword ran him through!”

“Assist me, gods, I beg thee,
 If it be as you say!
 If you have slain my Helge
 My joy is lost for aye.”

“I offer as blood-money
 Gold rings for him, full nine,
 And jewellery most precious
 Set with rare gems of mine.”

“Nay, keep your rings I charge you,
 Keep every one you own,
 Of far more worth was Helge
 Than gold or precious stone.”

“I offer as blood-money
 Full half my kingdom here!” —
 “No, Dag, in your whole kingdom
 No warrior is his peer!

“And that same sword you buried
 In Helge's manly breast,
 That you shall never brandish
 Where noble arms contest.

“From shore to shore go flutter,
 A lost bird, without plan;
 You're dastardy consigned you
 To hell, vile, perjured man!” —

But nobly tombed was Helge,

Mail-clad, with shield and sword,
 Above the warrior's barrow
 A rough-hewn boulder soared.

And thither Sigrun wanders,
 Sad in the summer night,
 Her eye, it is so tearful,
 Her cheek, it is so white.

She sinks down on the barrow, —
 Her sorrows overflow,
 The heavy teardrops sprinkle
 The petalled blooms below.

Then from the mound a clanging,
 A ghost strode forth in mail,
 With shield and helm accoutred,
 But silent, deathly pale.

“And is it you, King Helge,
 Who visit me again?
 Who bade you leave the dwelling
 Of heroes who were slain?”

“You, Sigrun, bade my leaving
 The dwelling of the slain,
 Your tears it was that conjured
 My coming forth again.

“For when your tears fall heavy
 And warm my place of rest,
 The wound once more starts bleeding
 Within my frozen breast.”

“Ne’ermore then shall my weeping
 Rain warm upon this place.
 Come, sit you here beside me
 And rest in my embrace.”

And so they sat together
 In dark of night, that pair;
 Since Helge's death had Sigrun
 Ne'er worn so blithe an air.

And then the dead man started
 Just as the first cock crowed:
 “I must straightway go riding
 to Odin's high abode!”

The next night Sigrun visits
 The burial mound — in vain;

The summer night is silent,
He does not come again.

And then her blood stops flowing
And then her eyelids close, —
She stood in Odin's stronghold
Before the sun arose.

On Idavold King Helge
Strives well amongst the bold;
At dusk his shield-maid, Sigrun,
Fills up his horn of gold. —

Ravens kept Odin informed of what was going on in the world; Norns, Fate-like creatures controlling human destinies; shield-maid, a Valkyrie, a hand-maid of Odin who attended the field of battle on earth and in Valhalla, represented here in this poem as a kind of female squire to a warrior; according to legend Sigrun was the reincarnation of such a figure who tended the hero Sigri; a ring was a mark of distinction given for martial prowess; Asathor and Tyr, Thor and the god of war; Idavold, the field of battle in Valhalla in which slain heroes engage in endless combat, recovering overnight from their wounds; Freia, goddess of beauty, love and pleasure; Balder, a favourite son of Odin; Berserkers, warriors who fought with a mad disregard for their own safety; Søkvaebæk, a crystal hall beneath a cool river to which Odin retired with one of his several wives; Bifrost, the rainbow bridge over which slain warriors galloped to Valhalla.

PROLOGUE

at the Student Union matinee
for the Norwegian Theatre in Bergen
(Wed. 15th October 1851)

There was a time once, days we now call "olden",
Which we might well name primitive, it's true,
Were we to look behind us now, beholden
To scrutinise and pierce the distant blue;
And yet a bold time, rock-hard, richly seamed,
Nor did it lack its golden decoration, —
For bardship then was honourably esteemed,
Both prince and folk affirmed the bard's vocation.

For things developed here as everywhere:
When life's abundance surges, blithely thriving,
And when the nation's soul is fiercely striving,
Strength must be tempered or will stifle there.
For true, the warrior scribed in figured verse
A stark, heroic work on foemen's faces,
A song of doughty deeds, of strengths diverse,
When forth he fared for distant southern places,
In Hafursfjord, on Dublin's scarp he sang,
On Svolder's shores, at Stiklestad's dire meeting, —
A poem of well-marshalled lines that rang!

But see, the pen he wrote with pressed too hard,
 And thus the tune he set it to so featly
 The folk could not assimilate completely
 And turned then for assistance to the bard.
 He grips the harp, — and o, what hush descended
 As he strikes chords majestically blended
 To call the hero forth in panoply;
 The bard turned major, though, to minor key
 So that they rang with milder intonation
 Wherein the folk's need found conciliation.

Thereby the valiant bard, benched high in hall,
 Sat by the prince's side where feasters rally,
 Then rang his harp's tone like the waterfall
 In summer's night-time stillness through the valley,
 And though life was, at that time, like the scree
 Where Thor had loosed his thunderbolt's vast power
 And fringed the fell with stones haphazardly,
 Yet was the bardic song the smiling flower
 That decks the moss and mould where, crevice-clipped,
 It wreathes with love the rocky waste's confusion
 And hides within its petals' spring-profusion
 A lofty meaning limned in picture-script.

But the heroic age sank into sloth,
 And with the same the bard's voice ceased its singing;
 He fell, as does the creeper tightly clinging
 By tendrils to the tree-trunk's weakened growth.
 A fateful winter fell upon the North,
 The noble bard sat silent, doomed and tragic,
 Like one bewitched who cannot summon forth
 The word to free him from the spell of magic.
 Then too the nation's soul was cowed at length,
 Recoiled aghast from any restoration
 Of freedom's vision, bygone epic strength,
 It lacked the oak-wreath for the coronation
 Accorded bards once by a grateful nation,
 Then all was hushed, like some deserted strand
 Where splintered wreckage bobs on listless seas
 That ripple soundless on the whitened sand.
 No bird-call twittered through the forest trees;
 Therein the folk-soul slumbered, winter-jaded,
 There it all lay, a memory that had faded.

But other times brought on a new condition,
 The folk cast off its outward-fettered role,
 But even then showed little recognition
 Of aspiration's harp-strings in the soul;
 The tune it could but half identify,
 But change it must, that torpor, and profoundly,
 Soul's questioning needs must be answered roundly

Or else it sickens and ere long it dies;
 It seeks solution to the picture-riddle
 That's painted in the runes before its eyes, —
 But who is it can those same runes unriddle?
 It is the latent power Art supplies!

For Art is like a harp's strong sounding-board,
 Lends power to the soul-strings of the nation,
 So that its rich, exuberant accord
 Can ring out strongly, with sustained vibration.
 And thus it was that Art's soul, too, awoke,
 So soon as in the nation's soul strings quivered,
 The tight constriction of its bondage broke
 As it soared blithely into light, delivered.
 It offered to the people's happy gaze
 Fair images of fells and dales begotten,
 We heard, as when familiar music plays,
 Our childhood days recounted, long-forgotten —
 The glorious imagery of times long past
 Emerged once more, fresh-coloured, life-attuning.

The folk's purged consciousness emerged at last,
 A butterfly that burst from its cocooning, —
 And melodies from woods and meadows ringing,
 The Hulder's fastness on the pine-clad height,
 Rejoice the folk's ear in their murmured flight
 Like echoes of our inner soul's tuned stringing.

But even now Art's shrine is not secured
 Of its full glory and majestic power:
 One art stands homeless in our mountain bower,
 Though there its brethren have a home assured;
 The art at home in any place it stays,
 That thrusts is heart-root deep into the nation;
 Life became real through its interpretation
 Presented sharply, clearly to our gaze.

Now, in our persons and in modest mode
 It begs the people grant it an abode,
 A kindly refuge in its mother's heart
 That both her joy and pain it may impart.

And then, with harp in hand it will sit down
 As did the Jewish maid by Babel's water,
 And for its mother's comfort, like a daughter
 Sing songs of vanished splendour, high renown.
 But not sing of the past all else forgetting,
 Not tie itself to Memory's house alone;
 It will, besides, depict the ample setting
 That folk-life can supply, its ways, its tone:
 For Art is like a harp's strong sounding-board,

Lends power to the soul-strings of the nation,
 So that its rich, exuberant accord
 Can ring out strongly, with sustained vibration!

The place-names refer to crucial battles, all of them involving in defeat or victory historical figures who had contributed to Norway's unity, greatness and enlightenment; Hafursfjord (872 AD), the great sea-battle in which Harald Haarfagre defeated a coalition of petty chieftains to become king of a united Norway; Dublin, founded by the Viking Torgil, who became, until his death in 945, king of all the Norsemen in Ireland; Svolder, the island in the Baltic where the christian, Olav Tryggvason, was killed (1000); Stiklestad where Saint Olaf, another christianising king was killed (1030), by reactionaries; a fateful winter — the protracted winter that followed the defeat of the gods — it was followed in turn by the birth of a new world.

The theme of the poem is suited to the occasion: the founding of the Norwegian Theatre in Bergen by Ole Bull in 1851 constituted in Ibsen's mind a modern contribution to Norway's cultural revival. Ibsen was offered and accepted the post of "dramatic author" and arrived in Bergen to take up his new career in late October 1851.

A LEG-PULL

I walked in the pines, just straying
 As day neared its smiling close;
 Wanton breezes were playing
 With the blushing lips of the rose.

And there in the twilight I drifted
 Quite lost to the world, far gone, —
 You'll well understand that, uplifted,
 My lyrical mood came on.

I sat, at a tuft's suggestion,
 Where bright little blooms displayed, —
 The twin-flower was mistress, no question,
 The bluebell was lady's-maid.

"My sweet little thing, what's the matter,
 What makes you so full of woe?
 Why suffer your tears to spatter
 The gravel and soil below?"

The sweet little thing (a peeping
 Smile on her lips methought)
 Said: "You're aware that weeping
 Eases a soul distraught!"

My heart swelled with warm emotion;
 I sat on the ground, close nigh,
 And wrote of the deep commotion
 The flower must be burdened by.

But suddenly roused soon after,

I listened and traced at length
The sound to the brook, hearty laughter
From birds that were chattering full-strength:

“Well, that was a joke, no mistaking!
He thought that you wept in dismay,
When really it’s pleasure that’s making
You bob up and down in this way.

“He thought that your tears were really
Signs of a heart choked up;
O, couldn’t the ass see they’re merely
The drips from a brimming cup?

“Your wooer comes soon, he’ll be draining
The chalice come even-tide,
And then, without fail or feigning,
He’ll kiss his delightful bride!”

CONTENTS

Poems from the First Christiania Period

Youth's Dream	2
Sonnets	4
The Miner	6
Bird and Bird-Catcher	8
Amid the Ruins	9
The Swan	10
On Akershus	11
The Voice of Nature	13
The Lad in the Bilberry Patch	14
To a Troubadour	15
The Tear	16
A Saturday Evening in Hardanger	17
The Eider Duck	21
For Denmark	22
On Ladergaardsjøen	22
To my Subscribers!	23
Helge Hundinsbane	24
Prologue for the Norwegian Theatre in Bergen	36
A Leg-Pull	39