

THE COLLECTED POEMS
OF HENRIK IBSEN

Translated by John Northam



SECTION THREE
POEMS FROM THE BERGEN PERIOD

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SONG AT THE WEDDING CELEBRATION OF
MERCHANT NIKOLAY L. SONTUM
AND MISS B. NIKOLAYSEN
31 October 1851

Mel: Aa kjøre Vatten aa kjøre Ved.

Amongst good friends and at revels gay
Both happiness can thrive and pleasure;
But most of all on a wedding day
It's jokes and banter that we treasure;
We happily give ear to pleasure's call,
With diligence we drain our glasses all,
But first we'll sup
This brimming cup
In honour of the bride and bridegroom!

Our best of wishes attend the pair
Where'er life's journeying may take them,
May all their days, like this evening, fare
As smooth as harmony can make them,
And if at times a touch of gloom comes on,
Why, Lord above, no sooner here than gone!
May this our strain
Echo again
Upon the couple's silver wedding!

The old recall their own wedding day
Reminded by this celebration,
We young are hoping as best we may
Our turn will come in due rotation;
A health then to each budding bride-to-be
That's chosen out of this our company;
But to brimming sound
Be this toast downed,
Our first, in the bridal couple's honour!

The bridegroom was the son of the house in which Ibsen lodged on arrival in Bergen. The poem is the first of many occasional pieces that Ibsen wrote to be sung to well-known tunes.

PROLOGUE

at the Norwegian Theatre's matinee performance in Bergen
in support of The Student Union's Building Fund.
(17 Nov. 1851)

We are all builders — in our different ways —
There's one builds temples in his Maker's praise,

Another toils for his own mess of pottage
 And builds a home that's comfortable for *him*,
 That's if he can; — but should his lot prove grim,
 And he must settle for a straw-thatch cottage,
 Then he will sit industriously designing
 Fine castles-in-the-air while day's declining.

Ah, here upon this very stage build we,
 As best we can with our yet-young resources,
 With noble wills and aspirations free
 Towards the distant goal our hope endorses.
 Though we've built nothing so far, we confess,
 That's visible to outward estimation, —
 Yet we must hope your practised observation
 Will note the work does quietly progress.

That aspiration, that same building-zest,
 Must stir the sympathy within our breast
 For all who would tear down the commonplace,
 For all who'd build in eld's vacated space;
 But we must feel most warmth for those competing
 To serve the spirit's cause with youthful fire,—
 And that is why this evening we aspire
 To tread these boards and offer you our greeting! —

PROLOGUE

on the Norwegian Theatre's Foundation Day,
 (2 Jan. 1852)

Two years have passed away since first were heard
 From this our stage the sound of native accents.
 A doubting hesitancy swept the people
 At the idea of Norway's fledgling art
 That needed to try out its feeble pinions,
 And few there were felt hope unmixed with fear.
 And that it should be so, how natural!
 We all of us trudge on in custom's fetters,
 Forever anxious not to strike them off;
 The old we know, its failings and its merits
 Engrave themselves so deep in our ideas
 That things are scarce conceivable without them.
 So when a notion newly-born pops up
 And sets off on a course that is uncharted
 And calls upon the folk to follow it,
 It bothers us, the common man ignores
 The call of the idea and shakes his head,
 In silence, sticking to the old he's used to.
 But now the people's doubting-time is past,
 We all acknowledge the idea's correctness;
 But greatly they mistake who think that now

The folk has done all it can ever do,
 That Art must now perforce fend for itself;
 For such a time *will* not and *can* not come;
 Art and the people must advance together,
 For otherwise it stays an alien seedling
 Whose properties none knows and comprehends.
 Besides, is not our art still young and new?
 A child in swaddling still it might be called,
 —Well, Alexander needed ten whole years
 To make a conquest of the world, and he
 A real-life hero, whereas we are merely
 Stage heroines and heroes now and then.
 And that, alas, does not achieve a lot!
 For us too there's a world we have to conquer,
 A world that is too distant and too vast
 To make a conquest of without exertion.
 Besides, what was our youthful art at first?
 A peasant lad who'd wandered from his home,
 The quiet hillscape where his forebears lived, —
 Was set down in the midst of life's embroil;
 The images that passed before him here
 He wanted to present so that the people
 Might see them as he visioned them himself;
 And who shall wonder if he sometimes erred
 And did not always grasp what he had seen?
 He was too inexperienced still and young
 And brought with him nought but a fine ambition;
 But that he will preserve right to the end,
 With that he'll work as best as he is able
 In sure reliance on the people's love.

Chorus

A spirit prevails where the mountains throng,
 Its powers both fresh and daring,
 Its loving voice was our cradle-song
 That the listening folk will be sharing;
 For sweet is the sound, mild, homely it seems
 As harp-strings that ripple from woodland streams,
 It wakes into life, it sets singing
 The folk's heart with echoes ringing.

And that is the great Nordic spirit whose might
 The years have not lulled with their tally,
 The great Nordic spirit that's bonded tight
 With elves of the wood and the valley.
 It stays with us too on fell and on wave,
 Presides at the hero's moss-covered grave,
 Addresses the wide world, construing
 The modest path we're pursuing.

It speaks to us clearly through myth and song,
 Through strains we have heard down the ages.
 It gently allays when our need is too strong,
 Our yearning it kindly assuages;
 Its tap-root is Memory, mighty in length,
 That ennobles our blood, enhances our strength.
 At home, as when distance divides us,
 That is the star sent to guide us.

A rare attempt at blank verse. Ibsen spent part of 1852 travelling to study theatrical practice abroad. One of the principal purposes of the Theatre was to encourage the performance of plays in Norwegian, as distinct from the Dano-Norwegian literary language.

PROLOGUE

at the performance of "Midsummer Night"
 (2 Jan. 1853)

Whatsoever course life plots,
 One word travels with us, weaving
 Many blue forget-me-nots
 Into Bygone's memory-sheaving.
 For our yearnings as we roam
 It supplies soft balm, rejoices
 Whispering in familiar voices; —
 What the word denotes is "home".

Saw you not the swallow wing
 Late in fall to southern summers?
 Yet return with next year's spring,
 First among the North's newcomers?
 For its mother's song, her nest,
 Can no longer be forgotten;
 It is driven, yearning-pressed,
 Homeward — where it was begotten.

Had you sought a foreign strand, —
 You would longingly be ferried
 To that old and cherished land
 Far beyond the billows buried.
 Thither where your cradle stood
 You would dreaming roam though waking,
 Gladly barter the grape's blood
 For the upland stream's cool slaking.

Should you, in dark winter's spell,
 To your lonely room repairing,
 Sit and draw from Memory's well,
 Gaze into the stove's bright flaring; —
 Would not thought take wing to seek

For the nursery it remembers,
 Where, a child, well-combed and meek,
 You would bask by glowing embers?

And your childhood fairy-tales,
 Old songs sung you by your mother,
 Which, when Life's commotion rails,
 In oblivion's cloaking smother, —
 Lo, they reassert their charm,
 Prompting you of days long vanished
 As your thoughts seek out the banished
 Mother-home's unbroken calm.

Home's allure that, to the grave,
 Still maintains its potent presence,
 Also, sun-like, warm and brave,
 Rules supreme in Art's fair pleasance.
 If a bloom's to flourish there,
 Home-soil's what must set it growing,
 Else it lacks the colours rare
 Which, in glory, should be glowing.

And wherein does home fall short?
 Like a hedge-row's blushing roses,
 Like a modest verse well-wrought,
 Our life's surging ne'er reposes.
 Are not ways the folk observe
 Where high pastures, dales restrict them,
 Images which well deserve
 That an artist-hand depict them?

Plane- and orange-tree may well
 Beautify the South's flat regions,
 But upon the North's proud fell
 Pine-trees flourish in their legions —
 Is their vaulting not benign,
 Does it lack for scent or shading?
 Why should Art then build its shrine
 Solely in a southern glading?

Sæter-wench's horn rings free
 O'er the grassy slopes resounding;
 Siren midst the mountain scree
 Strikes up strains of grief abounding.
 Wench's breast as blithe as Spring,
 Siren's, sick with aspiration —
 That same joy and suffering
 Marks the folk-mind's vacillation.

Should our bosom feel oppressed,
 Filled beyond its proper measure,

That through song can be redressed;
 Pain be given voice, and pleasure.
 Then we seek Art's home for aid;
 Since indeed it's there the nation
 Can demand interpretation
 Of its own life, well portrayed.

But not every bird's supplied
 With the lark-tongue's bardic ringing,
 Each attempts, though, from its hide
 To, as best it can, keep singing.
 So receive with clemency
 This our evening's proffered token;
 Only step by step, you see,
 Can a new Art-trail be broken!

Sæter, a mountain hut where girls tended animals on their summer pasturage. Ibsen completed this play while abroad; it failed miserably in performance and he never allowed it to be printed in his lifetime.

BUILDING PLANS

My memory's as fresh as on the day that it occurred
 The night I saw the paper, — my first rhyme, printed word.
 I sat there in my lodging, with smoke surrounding me,
 And puffed my pipe, indulging in blest complacency.

I hummed away there reading, some twenty times or more,
 The paper which that day I found an interesting chore;
 And my imagination was up to its old lark; —
 Ah God! my inspiration's still got some life and spark!

I built a castle in the air; the work went at a rate,
 I set myself two targets, a small wing and a great;
 The bigger one to harbour a man whose fame shan't wane,
 The small to serve a maiden, her very own domain. —

It seemed to me the plan composed a happy harmony;
 But later on confusion set in disastrously.
 As soon as I grew wiser, the scheme just fell apart;
 The big wing proved so little, the small engrossed my heart.

Besides several minor alterations, Ibsen omitted the second stanza from the version he published in the 1871 volume of Poems.

WILD FLOWERS AND POTTED PLANTS

“My God, but your taste is so odd, I find,
Your eyesight for sure can't be fussy!
She's never a beauty, she's just a kind
Of next-best-thing to a hussy.” —

O yes, I'd be more in tune, no doubt,
With style in our modern drama
If I as a specimen singled out
Some perfectly normal charmer.

They flaunt like a winter display of blooms,
So prim on the window-seating;
Like peat-potted plants in fusty rooms
They thrive in the oven-stoked heating.

It hibernates, does each flower-stem,
Revives by dates purely formal; —
Yes, if I'd more sense I would choose one of them,
A girl from the host of the normal.

What use is good sense and sagacity's snare!
How cloying and foul its voice is;
For she is a child of the open air
And sixteen bright summers, my choice is.

This and the following two poems were printed together in a periodical on the 14th March 1858, with a note that they belonged to 'an earlier period' of Ibsen's life, namely 1853, when Ibsen was in love with Rikke Holst.

OUTING TO ULRIKKEN

15th May 1853

1

Travel Sketches

(Mel: The Sinclair Song)

A lovely morning in “summer's gown”,
Birds sat in the trees and chattered, —
Then out streamed a party that left the town
And off across country scattered.

But Ulrikken lay like a giant's shield
Turned stone by the day's bright mocking;
A mermaid, foul troll, bade us heed concealed
Haphazards to boot-sole and stocking.

A full-o`-fun party, for such it soon grew,
We wandered for hours, three running, —
And finally Følgefonn hove into view, —
I'll not try to hide the punning!

Up top, away over beck and scree,
 The crowd of us set to wander;
 And here, to the dwarfs' dismay, must be
 Where giants swapped blows, a bit yonder.

Our gaze and our thoughts are like birds of prey,
 The world is the scene they quarter, —
 Their flight took them soaring where snow-fields lay,
 They swooped on the woods and the water.

Like swans when they yearn for the southern shore
 As high above cloud they go streaming,
 Thus joyful our yearning spread wing to explore,
 Thus sped for the Spring it was dreaming.

And when at long last we arrived back home,
 With pride we could state our conclusion:
 There's infantry-stuff amongst those that roam
 In Ulrikken-fell's seclusion.

2

PROSPECT OF BERGEN

O, ancient Bjørgvin! from this vantage-view
 You look your splendid best, for hence we see
 Germanely, from this ridge, the German Quay, —
 Yes, God forgive me! — the Triangle too, —
 Beyond, your Lead, renowned the whole world through,
 Rich mine wherein you seek prosperity, —
 And Lunggaard's lake, midst many a green-clad rise,
 As deep and lucid as your daughters' eyes! —
 And now, the background! Look, where skerries throw
 A dark yoke on the sea! The fjord's smooth sleekness!
 But even better is the foreground show;
 The fell there plunges in a bold obliqueness,
 And our blithe troop, lay figures, pose just so,
 Its ladies whiling in a fetching weakness
 Whenas the southern fruits, all golden-glowing,
 (From open knapsacks) make a lovely showing.

Henr. Ibsen

Ulrikken, the highest of the mountains overlooking Bergen — a favourite spot for walking; the giants, deadly foes to the gods, who were turned to stone if the sun shone upon them; Følgefonn, a glacier on the far-distant Hardanger range; dwarfs, the technicians, so to speak, to the gods — skilled miners and smiths, timorous yet capable of malice; Bjørgvin, the ancient form of Bergen; the German quay, one of the wharfs; southern fruits — a playful pomposity for oranges. Rikke Holst was one of the party.

TO MY PRIMROSE

Dearest of blooms with your fragrance of petal,
 Brief as a dream was your flowering's bright mirth, —
 Sad, — for the dew-drop can no longer settle
 Bathing the calyx bowed sere to the earth.

Deep in the heart, I am told, of a bloom,
 Elves there disport them on butterfly-winging, —
 Snap but the stem — then a tremor, a tinging
 Faint as a sigh sounds the elfin-folk's doom!

Yet in my beautiful bloom there's one elf,
 Like to a bird on its nest, still remaining;
 Elf of Remembrance — I'll pleasure myself
 With its sad reverie, dream-like complaining; —

Here in my silent, my solitary home
 Dreams and dear visions come visit me, fleeting,
 Voices that whisper a spring-zephyr greeting
 Oft from the silence I conjure to roam.

— Soon I'm forgotten, yet though winter's night
 Weigh like a tomb on my joy, there's renewal —
 Then I'll in Memory's treasure delight,
 Faithfully hoarding my bloom as its jewel!

Henr. Ibsen

Another poem inspired by Rikke Holst.

TO R.H!

Ah, I know a lovely land,
 Star-like, distant yonder, —
 Steering for its blossomed strand
 Blissfully I wander;
 There a song wafts slope and breeze,
 There, green groves past number,
 There the evening primrose frees
 Scent that sweetens slumber.

Everything is rich and rare,
 Infancy new-rendered, —
 Many a verse I whisper there
 To my goddess tendered.
 Every woe there finds its balm,
 Every pang its easing,
 Evening's breeze casts, soft and calm,
 Drowsiness well-pleasing.

Sun sinks in the glassy sea,
 I'm drawn thither, yearning —
 Mind's craft spreads its sail with glee,
 Airy billows churning,
 Sails, an eagle in the blue,
 For the strands far yonder,
 Many a moment lives anew,
 Grows, in *dream-land*, fonder.

Thither many a night I've steered,
 Blissful, passion-laden,
 Rapt in what I most revered,
 The picture of a maiden — — —
 O, how bold my mind, how warm,
 Heavenward directed —
 Till I woke amid life's swarm,
 Wretched and rejected.

Let one uttered word of thine
 Doom my future clearly; —
 Must joy's treasure then be mine
 But in *day-dream* merely?
 Shall I stay, devoid of hope,
 Rapt in Memory's pleasure —
 Or discover, in *life's* scope,
 My most precious treasure?
 d. 6/6 53.

Henr. Ibsen

This, and the following poem, may hint of the impending break with Rikke Holst.

WITH A ROSE

Forgive! Forgive me, little rose!
 I snap through your stem and your life must close
 Mid your sisterhood — six of you, seven?
 But grieve not, — for know that I send you away
 To awaken where all must awaken one day, —
 — *In Heaven!*

 So that my poor little flower shall not be disappointed,
 I beg you not to reject it!

H.I.

ROVING SONG

We rove with our spirits high,
 Our mind is light, our step is spry,
 Way up to the heights, — on the mountain,
 Deep down, by the foss's fountain —
 The way may lead where'er it will,
 With song and sport we'll roam our fill!

We're out in God's nature, free!
 Like a beck untamed in the fell-side scree
 We launch on our way in chorus;
 The wide-open world's before us.
 So like the bird that joyful flies
 We'll raise our anthem to the skies.

We're truly a cheerful throng,
 We've ample voice and we've ample song.
 Let storms make the fjord one fluster,
 Let thunder and lightning bluster,
 We'll wet our whistles, step out well
 And greet with song the fjord and fell.

BIRD-SONG

One fine spring day we ventured
 To stroll the avenue;
 Beguiling as a riddle
 It was forbidden too.

And west the wind that wafted,
 So blue the sky that hung;
 A mother-bird perched in the lime
 Sat singing to her young.

I painted poem-pictures
 With festive colour-play,
 Two eyes of brown responded,
 And laughed and beamed away.

And we heard whispered laughter
 Above our heads, quite plain; —
 But we, we took a fine farewell,
 And never met again. —

And when alone I happen
 To stroll the avenue,
 I find no peace or quiet
 For that same feathered crew.

Dame Sparrow, she had listened
 As we had walked, immune,
 And made a song about us
 And set it to a tune.

It's on each song-bird's tongue now,
 Hence, in its leafy spray,
 Each beakèd songster warbles on
 About that bright Spring day.

The "fine farewell" consisted of Ibsen running for dear life when he and Rikke bumped into her irate father.

IN THE PICTURE GALLERY

I

A hideous demon dwells within my breast
 Who sometimes plagues me with malicious timing,
 In private moods, or when life's full of zest,
 When I'm awake day-dreaming, maybe rhyming.

And when, however softly, I'm addressed,
 To me it seems a funeral knell is chiming, —
 As though I felt an ice-cold kiss impressed, —
 That's something demon-folk find the sublime in:

"Look, don't you see, yourself" — (full hiss employed) —
 "The whole affair's a pointless aberration;
 That you've lost faith in God and His creation?"

"And can't you understand your breast's a void,
 Your vision, Jack-o'-lantern's exhalation,
 Your mark a shooting-star, no constellation?"

II

"Your inner being's like the hill-side spring,
 Its channel strewn with gravel, dried completely,
 Because the last wave's gone that sped so fleetly
 And with it your capacity to sing.

"And when you think you lull the glade so sweetly,
 It's not your soft, rich flood you're lavishing,
 (The flowers would have found that ravishing,
 A mix of fear and yearning blended neatly).

"No, just the sere, the wind-felled boughs that shattered
 When autumn's blast whirled through them, flung them down
 Into the stream-bed where dry stones lie scattered, —

"And when that *fresh* and joyous stream comes bustling

And you believe you sing along, you clown, —
It's only brown, dry leafage that is rustling!"

III

"And don't think spring and autumn's ebullition
Will make a difference to your nature too;
You'll stay a stony waste, the same old you,
When you resume your normal inanition! —

"And should you wait on floods of inspiration
To boldly batter down your prison wall,
You'd better just resign to singing small,
And pocket up your fist in resignation.

"Mute swims the swan until it dies — but raises
A plangent voice as it breathes forth its last;
Ah yes! death's pangs, their power's unsurpassed!

"But would you call it "song-bird" on that basis?
You know, it took life's loss to fan that flame,
For you, a binge, remember, does the same!"

IV

I stood once in the gallery, elated,
Imbibing inspiration from the treasure
That Art's illustrious sires had dedicated
To incorruption in kind, generous measure.

How could the soul not soar, mind not feel pleasure!
It is as though all storms were here abated,
It is as though all billows were placated
Mid-course, to lap the shore-line at their leisure.

What is yon stillness in the church high places
Where congregations march in awed procession
As right and proper in the Lord's own dwelling,

Compared with stillness here, where silence graces
The mind like gentle dew, where soul's impression
Is stamped on every work, unaged, compelling?

V

Whence this enchantment, this intoxication
Amid the deathless works that here surround me?
Is it the mighty names I see around me, —
Or gentle colour-play's superb creation?

No, there's a thought grips my imagination:
That this my soul can function still so soundly,
Feel faith (despite the clergy), hope profoundly, —
Though I've had problems with that formulation.

Yes, here I feel God doth my heart pervade;
That I can be possessed, intoxicated
With the ideal of beauty here displayed.

I contemplate God's thought made clear, made plastic;
Lo, hence my soul swells too, expands, elastic,
And demon Doubt within me lies prostrated.

VI

Correggio's "Night"! Your radiant veneration
Has dewed my mind with its bright hallowed rays!
I have gazed deep as any mortal gaze
May dare into its shadowy creation.

I sense the strain that Mary's cheek displays,
Depicting both her grief and exultation, —
I share the Moor's prayer at his presentation
Of rich bowls to the Child in dazzled praise.

And, too, the star the humble shepherds sighted, —
Directing where the Saviour had descended
In mortal form to earth, inspired by ruth, —

Behold, my night-time too has been thus lighted,
My terror been subdued, my doubts all ended,
That lovely myth become a sober truth!

VII

And Raphael's work, the Sistine "Madonna",
The infant Saviour clasped in her safe keeping,
While under heaven's vault range faces, peeping —
A host of angels kindly gazing on her.

Then there's the sturdy Dutchman who, half-sleeping,
Relaxes in his booth and gazes on the
Dead ducks, fowl, geese in their prodigious heaping
With other worldly goods that vie for honour!

And neither painting overshades its brother,
The violet and tulip suit each other
Quite happily combined in one bouquet;

So can't I, in a sonnet too, display,
Like the anemone and golden iris,
Both Raphael and with him Jan van Mieris? —

VIII

For you must not forget: in realms aesthetic
 It is the *form* that counts and form alone;
 To gauge the bard's full range in terms poetic,
 Take note of *how*, not *what* he may intone.

The artist's *thought* means nothing, it's bathetic, —
 Leave the *ideal* to fend all on its own;
 Aspiring heavenward must prove pathetic
 Unless you soar on pinions sturdy-grown;

Yes, it is form, yes form in everything
 That elevates poetical creation
 And stamps it as sheer genius, plainly shown.

Yes, form I'll praise — hang cost and calculation!
 Of course! remember how it reimburses:
 It's form that has made poems of my verses.

IX

So why, then, should we poets, fervour pleading,
 Go lurching round the pyre to the Idea,
 And trot away on metric feet, proceeding
 Ahead of rational speech, a good length clear?

For Art's an ostrich when it comes to feeding,
 Can stomach steel and granite, any cheer, —
 And you can feed it hash and greens, I hear,
 As well as mellow fruit of Eden's breeding.

So why, then, all this high pitched agitation,
 This urge to swarm in regional migration,
 Where wings get broken, voices crack and quaver;

Instead of striking root in honest mud,
 And shaping images of flesh and blood,
 Like still-life artists, full of real life's savour?

X

The morning peace now comes to its conclusion,
 A rude awakening from my dream-trance follows, —
 For through each room a jumbled clamour wallows
 To seek me out, where'er I seek seclusion.

Confounded by the critical intrusion
 I feel I'm like the first of spring-time's swallows
 That, visiting its native dales and hollows,
 Can't recognise the nest in its confusion.

I'd looked at everything through magic hazing;
 Now, from all sides, pours critical appraising,
 Till I become distracted by what passes.

For any poet's heart it's sheer perdition!
 What torture for a lyric disposition
 When forced to focus through a critic's glasses!

XI

And art-enthusiasms, pros and antis,
 Are figured here in cliques of every fashion,
 One person semaphores aesthetic passion —
 He ranks himself amongst the dilettantes.

Another one's enthusiasm's scanty
 Because life-loathing's been his daily ration,
 So he needs tepid water, just to splash on,
 Dew's surrogate that suits the indoor plantie.

And here's a third, his ear cocked diligently, —
 An entrance and an exit, evidently,
 For each shrill comment that the crowd essays.

He listens quietly, with wary gaze,
 Agrees with everyone, without disclaiming,
 And ends with "What's the price, then, — on the framing?"

XII

But in this sanctum, where the daylight's falling
 With softened brightness through arched fenestration,
 Where Spain's great, swarthy works of inspiration
 Gaze down, the long-past centuries recalling, —

No racket here of critics loudly bawling,
 Just the artistic dream's illumination,
 Mute as the taper by the cross that's calling
 The catholic household to rapt adoration.

For here an artist's silent contemplation
 Before Murillo's noble "Heavenly Maiden"
 Reveals the memories wherewith she's laden;

Her soul soars dove-like in its exultation, —
 We'll flutter, verse-winged, in the path she's taken, —
 To fetch an olive-branch — or prove forsaken?

XIII

"My childhood Eden was barred once for all,
 And there I stood, denied entry;
 My confirmation-dress hung on the wall, —
 Ah, *that* was the sword-bearing sentry!

And all my fair flowers, they perished,
 Harrowed, ripped out by Time's cruel plough;
 The last of my dolls, the most cherished,
 Were passed to my siblings now.

I'd been expelled from the world I had known,
 Ahead of me stretched a cold one;
 It seemed so empty, so dead and lone,
 I longed for my home, for the old one.

As deep as my courage could take me
 I plunged like a swallow in dream's calm sea.
 Just leave me to slumber; don't wake me, —
 To rise would mean death for me!"

XIV

"When I was still in schooling
 My nerve was sound enough,
 That is, till the sun, fast-cooling,
 Descended behind the bluff,

But once the dark night had shaded
 The ridge and marshy dales,
 Then hideous spectres paraded
 From nanny's fairy-tales.

And such-like dreams weren't banished
 Although my eyes might close,
 And all my courage vanished —
 Where to, God only knows!

Now everything's converting
 Within this heart of mine;
 Now courage starts deserting
 When day's first traces shine.

Now it's the day-troll dismays me,
 Now it is life's unrest
 That chills me through when it sprays the
 Terrors in my breast.

But come the merest token
 Of night-time's cosy veil,
 My aspiration's woken,
 Once more I'm eagle-hale.

Then sea and flame I'll vanquish,
 I'll soar like a hawk on high,
 Forgetting care and anguish
 Till dawn next pales the sky."

XV

“Too stifling for me are the valley depths,
 Indoors is too cramped a cell;
 Ah, had I but wings it’s away I’d fly,
 How far even I can’t tell!

Ah, had I but wings it’s away I’d fly —
 There must be a shore that’s dressed
 In simples to sooth longing’s poisonous sting
 In this my unsatisfied breast.

The storm-petrel ranges far out o’er the sea,
 Yet finds in the course of its quest
 A cranny to which it weary claw
 Can cling for a meagre rest.

But whether I’d rather wing east or west
 Is something I cannot tell;
 I know that the Present crushes my breast
 And indoors is too cramped a cell!”

XVI

“I stood within the holy shrine of Art,
 Sight clarified by soul, not rendered fainter,
 A voice proclaimed from deep within my heart
 Correggio’s famous: “I too am a painter!”

That moment fixed my fate, soothed my ambition,
 And life stretched out before me rich and bright;
 My calling was to clothe soul’s every vision
 In poesy of colourful delight.

A spiritual peace pervades my being;
 I know what I shall do! In place of honour
 Stands, in the artist-dream that I’m forseeing,
 Murillo, his ideal work, the “Madonna”.

As he would capture, suddenly inspired,
 His poet-vision on the board he faces,
 So the creative hand that I’ve acquired
 Shall translate into paint soul’s lightning traces.”

XVII

“And there the days passed, and there the years; — ”
 I dreamt I was Art’s fanatic;
 My dream-illusion has left me now; —
 The easel stands in the attic.

And now I stand God-forsaken once more,
 My life’s thread is sheered asunder.
 And why so? I took up the chatelaine
 Instead of the palette — a blunder.

God knows there were pictures enough in my soul,
 I was artist at heart as such;
 I lacked just one single, solitary thing, —
 But that thing was the artist's touch. —

I sketch out in pencil a stormy wreck
 Amid billowing waves that drown it;
 If I were a poet, I'd sketch with a pen
 The draft of a lyric to crown it.

But midst my shortcomings there's granted one boon
 Wherewith my despair is abated;
 A boon that's a life-saving spar for me,
 And all geniuses dream-inflated.

The boon of remembrance, its lyrical charm,
 The right to poetic anguish;
 Sweetly I've dreamed and been cruelly waked,
 And so I've good cause to languish.

And so I settle, now here, now there,
 And paint, dream, paint in profusion,
 And languish, remembering, sadly gaze
 Upon my ideal's delusion."

XVIII

Just like the woman artist I saw ponder,
 I too have swooned in visions wild and bright,
 And plied poetic wings to reach the height,
 And dreamed of passage through heaven's portal yonder.

I too, alas, have dared flight's vale to wander;
 The final wing-beat drained my strength and might, —
 My spring-time story-book is now closed tight,
 It's time to moralise — I've time to squander.

I stroll around my private gallery,
 Where my works hang as did the heavenly Mary,
 Swarthy as gypsy folk as they pass by me.

And as from nectar the industrious bee
 Sucks honey for the winter commissary,
 So I sip my spring blossoms to supply me.

XIX

Why have I never felt my incompleteness
 When life's tame ducks flapped round me in a rabble?
 However dull I found their empty gabble,
 I only dimly sensed my own effeteness.

Once I had dreamed of eagle-pinioned fleetness,
 And yet amongst the ducks seemed glad to dabble,
 The gutter made me take a detour, scrabble,
 Till soon I matched life's geese-flock for unmeetness.

Have I perhaps some higher sphere or station
 For which I'm better suited in some way? —
 No, it's a bubble, is my inspiration.

And poetry's a stock of image-play,
 A clutch of counters, metaphors and clauses
 Whose cobbling doesn't rank amongst my causes.

XX

What in the world parades itself more comically
 Than lyric grief of elegiac tone,
 And poetry that's still-born, and the moan:
 "Life's rich in night and woe" — so histrionically?

Trust me, your Muse had proved far more canonically
 A daughter if, like Cimon's, she had shown
 Her bosom bared, life-sources of her own,
 And fed you author-wise, less economically.

For where's the profit in well-polished verse,
 With criss-cross rhymes and rhymes set in reverse,
 If they are wasted on mere lamentation?

Their death should coincide with their gestation!
 They are ephemera; the form aesthetic
 Just serves to hide the truth: the stuff's bathetic!

XXI

Sail carefully; the poet's barque capsizes
 At the least breath of life's keen irony,
 If you naively signal "Help, a crisis!"
 And stand there by the tiller, weak at knee.

Don't be afraid if anguish swells and prises
 Your bosom open if it's not let free;
 It's just the barrel's excess fervency,
 It needs an outlet as the pressure rises.

But when the noble liquor is extracted
 And all the barrel's left with of that glow
 Is mouldy dreg deposits, dry, compacted,

Then seal it up hermetically, just so, —
 Depend on it, that cask will hold its faeces;
 It won't explode, just fall, in staves, to pieces.

XXII

My demon visits me by day and night, —
 But I'm no longer scared by his intrusion;
 It's over, is the Spring's naïve effusion,
 And I can see how matters stand all right.

Staunch as the dragon in a cave's seclusion
 Broods o'er his treasure in the mountain height,
 My demon guards my flowering's conclusion,
 All that survives, a wild, forsaken sight.

That final flower is the apprehension
 That rocks the mood between now hope, now fear,
 And makes one doubt and trust one's calling here.

It winds itself about my barren soul
 As lovingly as Spring vines, all attention,
 In southern vineyards clasp a rootless pole.

XXIII

Outside my garden window stood a tree,
 An apple tree, its branches full in flower,
 And there a little bird would sit and shower
 Its song of life's abundance, just for me.

Now rotting blossom rings it mournfully,
 Amongst the dirt and stones dry leaves are rustling,
 Torn from life's scene by one day's stormy bustling,
 And Spring's blithe songster lacks its sheltered lee.

I've Autumn now, both in me and outside me;
 Pale frost-flowers etch the window pane beside me,
 I press my temple on the cold sensation.

And where's the gain to solace my dejection?
 A shrivelled leaf, a scrap of recollection;
 That's all there is, — life's total compensation!

Published in September 1859, with a note that the cycle belonged to an earlier period. Ibsen visited the famous galleries in Dresden during his trip abroad; sword-bearing sentry, the armed guardian at the gateway to Eden; confirmation dress, confirmation marked a child's transition into adulthood; Cimon, a Greek who was breast-fed by his daughter while imprisoned; one of Valerius Maximus's exemplary tales of devotion.

PROLOGUE

at the opening of the Norwegian Theatre's fifth season
 (5 Oct. 1853)

I

When green the forest waxed and birds sang free,
 When nodding flowers with the soft breeze flirted,

When it was summer over dale and lea,
 Inside here all was silent and deserted.

There was some impulse drove you all to flee,
 To visit God's own nature, be diverted
 Amid fresh limes, beside the beck's loud glee,
 And nothing served to keep you here, converted.

And you, whom for the first time we can greet
 Once more as patrons, after your desertion,
 Did you forget us on your life-excursion?

And while the house was dark, and every seat
 Stood empty, while the curtains weren't retracting —
 What did you do? *You* had a go at acting!

II

Yes you, from mere spectator, came to be
 An actor on the great stage of existence
 Who played an act composed by destiny
 With you cast in the lead role *de resistance*.

Though on Life's boards a novice, patently,
 You'll not have acted quite without assistance —
 For there's a godling from antiquity
 That's played his nooky role with great persistence.

It's said he's blind, and yet he's enterprising —
 There's nothing he can't manage, quite discreetly,
 So that the Act ends with a pairing, neatly.

And that is why he loathes soliloquising —
 He knows it's like the Prologue — paralysing;
 If not kept short it's bound to bore, completely.

III

Good luck to you if destiny meant filling
 A role in that two-actor sort of show,
 Then you'll have memories for Autumn's chilling —
 You'll have Spring flowering in Winter's snow.

Your summer life became a vaudevilling,
 A spray upon Life's tree that bloom weighed low.
 The thrush's song, the lark's pellucid trilling
 Could through the piece in pretty couplets flow.

All of the art's bad moments you could weather,
 Except perhaps a certain speech on cue,
 And then you fared as many others do,

Then you'll have felt your lips were clamped together,
 When the heart pounds, the tongue in knots keeps tying —
 In brief, it's what we here describe as "drying".

IV

But you perhaps reflect in serious mood
 On vanished Summer's flowery profusion,
 For though its fair plants rooted, many-hued,
 The grave of life's hope was its cruel conclusion,

And out of the abundance thus accrued,
 You're left with memory's sad disillusion,
 And now sit mountain-fast, bewitched, to brood,
 A dumb slave on the height's ridge, in seclusion.

Although bereavement may o'er-cloud the skies,
 Youth has one boon, one universal blessing
 That keeps on shining, though the flower dies.

It sprinkles memory with daylight's charm,
 It is a heavenly spirit, still professing
 That life for every grief provides a balm.

V

And that is why we stand, mute and depressed:
 The mind is clouded with a secret sorrow
 When sere leaves rattle, forest halls ring hollow
 And life recedes in mother Mother Nature's breast.

What man is he that would not deem it best
 That for the aged bloom a Spring he'd borrow
 When Autumn's wind had on its calyx pressed
 The kiss that summons: "Unto dust tomorrow!"

What man is he that would not halt, right gladly,
 The trilling current of Time's rapid streaming,
 The bier whereon Spring's progeny decay?

We're left with wreaths of memories, musing sadly,
 And gaze behind us silently, day-dreaming
 Of all the golden wealth that passed away.

VI

Preserve, then, in dire Winter's sleet and squall
 The same benevolence for all things growing,
 Since Art's a kind of seedling too, recall,
 That, starved for warmth, makes but a stunted showing.

It is a bud that won't unfold at all
 Unless it finds the love and care that's owing
 Here, where it burgeoned first at Nature's call
 And put down roots in all directions going.

The spring-time warmth that Art, too, sorely needs
Is not the heat that reddens cheeks of roses
And in March-violets makes Life's vigour run;

No it's the gentle warmth affection breeds!
Its vital spark gleams as the folk disposes,
The people's love, *that* is its summer sun!

SONG AT THE WEDDING OF THE ACTOR A.H. ISACHSEN
AND MISS JANNY GRIPS

10th November 1853

Mel: I Rosenlund under Sagas Hal.

Before God's altar a solemn vow
That hand and word have plighted,
Henceforward binds the young pair who now
Embark on life, united. —
In joy and grief it will extend
Till Death tolls termination,
Hence gravity must, too, attend
Upon this celebration.

The path that beckons may well provide
A choice of ways to unravel, —
Remember, though, standing side by side
Can ease the road that you travel:
It is the strength Love can derive
From Heaven's intercession,
It shall make strong your feet, contrive
To smooth your way's progression.

So carry with you along your way
Our wish that Spring be assigned you,
Then on a peacefully waning day
You'll gaze, re-inspired behind you.
You are, now, on the path you tread,
Twice linked to one another:
For you indeed are doubly wed:
To Art and to each other!

Isachsen was the first apprentice actor to join the Bergen company in 1852.

PROLOGUE

on the occasion of the Bergen company's appearance in Trondhjem.
(17 April 1854)

There was a time in heathen days
When swords clashed stroke for stroke,

When epic shield-to-shield forays
 Alone could satisfy the folk —
 But what bloomed bright and modest there
 Remained a closed book none could share,
 And none there were that could assess
 Its beauty and its copiousness.

Then Norsemen sallied forth in mail
 In vessels from the strand,
 Great enterprise, great deeds the grail
 They sought through blood and burning brand —
 But then the eagle toppled, maimed,
 Its courage broken, power tamed,
 The hero slept `neath barrow-moss
 In Hordaland and Nidaros.

But for a folk with breast supplied
 With Memory's golden hoard,
 No warrior's barrow is denied
 Its soul-life as reward.
 But not the rune-script of the blade,
 No, thought's more gentle strengths persuade
 That its skilled art can best invoke
 The zest that's in the younger folk.

And ancient Nidaros that housed
 The Bygone's might and strife,
 Will understand the same stock roused
 In Art, too, sap and life,
 Will understand Art seeks the lee
 Of shade beneath its homestead tree
 And that it blossoms, nourished by
 Its country folk's kind husbandry.

Hence this our visit of goodwill,
 For here's the home possessed
 Of every bloom that art and skill
 Grew in the people's breast;
 And memories of days of yore
 Are treasure shared, our common store — —
 We share the soul's baptismal grace,
One hoped-for future for the race!

Nidaros, the medieval city which later became Trondhjem; Hordaland, the surrounding district

To
 CAPT. EDVARD SONTUM
 and
 MISS SUSANNA BRUUN
 on their wedding day
 27th February
 1855

Mel: "Aa kjøre Vatten aa kjøre Veed."

The cup's a-seethe with the flame of wine,
 While high the bosom swells with pleasure,
 And thoughts turn, where good friends combine,
 To Future's journey, yours to measure.
 May joy and happiness reside and stay
 With this young couple to their dying day, —
 May both their breasts
 Heed joy's behests
 Whene'er the wedding day's remembered!

But while we in this happy group embrace
 The new-wed pair with acclamation,
 Out in the world — far yonder — there's a place
 Partaking in the jubilation;
 A group is meeting there, friends dear and true,
 Who send best wishes to these youngsters too, —
 And from those there
 We gladly bear
 On wings of melody a greeting!

And so, to end with, a rousing cheer
 From friends both near and yonder —
 May God watch o'er the vows pledged here,
 His loving kindness never wander!
 May kindly angels, wheresoe'er they roam,
 Lead them through life unto a better home,
 But till that day:
 Hurray! Hurray!
 Shall echo for the bridal couple!

Edvard Sontum, another son of the house in which Ibsen first lodged in Bergen.

PROLOGUE
 DELIVERED ON 17th MAY [1855]
 IN "THE NORWEGIAN THEATRE"
 by Mad. Brun.

There is a word sounds noisily today,
 Much noised abroad in many songs, at rallies,
 A thought that into Norway's dales now sallies,
 Hailed with respect and festive flag-display;

A thought that in a forty-year-long stay
 Has found a welcome in our rock-fast valleys; —
 In brief, the word that marks this day's transcendence
 Is life's prime treasure — it is "Independence".

But ah, how many grasp, in any quarter,
 What meaning in this "Independence" lies?
 Men please to call it "Angel", "Heaven's daughter"
 Come blessedly to earth from out the skies, —
 And we? — the pretty word well gratifies,
 It dulls the eye, turns thought as weak as water;
 We laud the word, all myriad-mouthed and sprightly,
 But — have we fathomed yet its meaning rightly?

What then is independence? The mere right
 To get, one year in three, some men elected
 To Parliament, then slump, like prey collected
 In the Past's net, inert and shorn of flight,
 And then, each May the Seventeenth, excite
 Enthusiastic clamour, as directed?
 If independence means mere trite *convention*
 Then we've but poorly grasped the Lord's intention!

The truly free man's bold of aspiration,
 Great actions, soul's great exploits are his need;
 One with, in Thought's vast realm, an eye to read
 Its golden script's mysterious notation.
 But he's a slave who flees soul's bannered station,
 And cowers in his cleft, a craven breed!
 This independence called a god, forsooth?
 God's worship calls for spirit and for truth!

Have you heard tell how Memnon's statue towered,
 A graven image, in an eastern land?
 When flushing dawn suffused the desert sand,
 A stream of noise came from the stone, full-powered,
 But he, like winter's icy peak, just glowered
 With soulless gaze towards the east's bright band.
 So year on year he stood there, dully dreaming, —
 For from his lips it was mere sound came streaming.

But is it more than noise and phrases trite,
 If we hail independence's flushed morning,
 And do not grasp its finest fruit gives warning
 It ripens soonest in the *spirit's light*?
 But if we've grasped that urgent need aright,
 Then we can meet to celebrate the dawning
 Of Independence Day with no debarments,
 In festive mood and in our wedding garments!

May 17th, Norway's Independence Day, celebrates the signing at Eidsvoll in 1814 of a new constitution establishing that free elections would be held every third year; wedding garments, see Mat XII.12.

KING HAAKON'S GUILDHALL

You hoary shell of an ancient hall
 Where owls build nests for their shelter, —
 The sight of you there makes my mind recall
 King Lear in the heath's wild welter.

He gave to his daughters his precious crown,
 He gave them each dearest possession;
 They hounded him out into night's black frown
 To wander wild ways of oppression.

You hall, sore-laden with Time's vast cares
 Have suffered in like harsh measure; —
 You gave to your own ungrateful heirs
 The highest-esteemed of your treasure.

You gave to us memory's crop of gold,
 A saga of priceless pages,
 But did you in any breast behold
 One grateful thought for wages?

You've stood there perforce, like Albion's King,
 A sport for the winds' rude buffets;
 For centuries storms disparaging
 Hissed round your hoary turrets.

Your people have "woken", so folk relate;
 Their wish to atone is quite steady:
 They're cobbling with scraps your robe of state, —
 A fool's cap you wear already.

And that's why, you hoary shell of a hall,
 Where owls build nests for their shelter, —
 The sight of you there makes my mind recall
 King Lear in the heath's wild welter!

Henr. Ibsen

The Norwegian Gildehall denotes a banquet hall rather than one connected with guilds; fool's cap, a pointed turret. King Haakon's hall stands by the harbour in Bergen.

FOR THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY
OF "THE 22ND OF DECEMBER SOCIETY"

Mel: Aa kjøre Vatten.

We meet once more at the festive board,
In honour of the day assembling;
While many a Power out there abroad
Has fallen from its high stilts, trembling,
While storms have caused to quake so many a land
Our little modest state contrived to stand,
 Grew just a bit,
 Kept itself fit,
And long, yes long, may it continue!

Here many an evening we've come to find
A respite from the daytime's bustling,
Here we've refreshed both the soul and mind,
Here we've ignored the world's crude hustling; —
Here seemly converse, pleasant and sincere
Made thought the lighter and the forehead clear,
 Maybe a seed,
 Deathless indeed,
Has also been at times here planted.

Each meeting past will here now arise
Before the eye of introspection, —
We now, as in a wreath, devise
The sum of our shared recollection.
And so, a toast for all, with loud acclaim:
To the Society, and to its aim;
 May it survive,
 Healthily thrive
Outlasting many, many, birthdays!

The Society, a literary one, flourished in Bergen 1845-61.

PROLOGUE

Christmas was, from days of yore,
Pledged to joking and to play-time,
Daily life's dull, tedious chore,
Time's gross burden, heat of daytime,
Are, at Yuletide, wholly spurned, —
Now the mind's to jesting turned;
Jesting's the preferred enjoyment,
Jesting then be my employment.

But that these same jests perchance
Happen to be all "jokes-martial"

Does hold some significance, —
 And if you're the least bit partial,
 I shall briefly document
 More or less how that was meant;
 Clear as day, my explanation: —
 So, to business, no evasion:

This, the age we occupy,
 Is a time of martial passion,
 Wherein lies the reason why
 Soldiers are so much in fashion;
 But, — not fortress shelling purely,
 Not manoeuvres by the score, —
 Strife within the mind as surely
 Merits too the name of war.

Every soul on earth existing
 Is a rookie or old sweat;
 One in Cupid's host enlisting,
 One to the Muses' banneret;
 Why, the dames of whom I prattle
 Proved in real life calls to battle, —
 Though their field's not teeming really
 With the dead, but — captives merely.

But the lesson to be found
 In the martial jests provided
 Is: the man of strife's not bound
 To the life that's sober-sided,
 Thoughts should turn, this time of year,
 Joyfully to Yule's bright cheer; —
 Only with high spirits' backing
 Are jokes-martial worth the cracking.

TO THE ONE AND ONLY

The ballroom's bedecked and resplendent,
 Dancing is under way.
 In colourful groups the young ladies
 Swirl in their bright array.
 Loud from the band beguiling
 Tunes in massed legions flow.
 Each man wears a festive expression,
 Each lamp wears a festive glow.

And listen to all the flirting,
 The whispers, discreet and kind,
 About the first thing one can think of,
 Whatever may cross one's mind.
 And slyly she smiles, does the lady,

At every sweet word received,
 Storing in memory's album
 The speeches that aren't believed.

And joy combines with the laughter
 To fill the entire hall.
 How tragic the world is, how rotten
 There's no-one conceives at all.
 There isn't a soul conceiving,
 There isn't a soul can see
 That under the merry-making
 Lurks emptiness, misery.

But yes, there is one amongst them,
 But one and one only, it's plain.
 The eye shows a private sorrow,
 I read there both grief and pain.
 I read there the dreams whose churning
 And wavering never cease,
 A heart that's a-throb with its yearning,
 A stranger in life to peace.

You young, mysterious being,
 Would I had ventured and pried,
 Ventured and boldly chosen
 You for my thoughts' own bride,
 Would I had ventured to plunge in
 The source whence your virtues roll,
 Would I had ventured to probe in
 Your burgeoning, childlike soul. —

For then would lovely poems
 Have soared from my breast on high,
 Then I'd have sailed as freely
 As birds in a clouded sky.
 And all of the scattered visions
 Have blended in one ere long;
 Then would life's loveliest visions
 Be mirrored in my song.

You young, mysterious being,
 Would I had ventured and pried,
 Ventured and boldly chosen
 You for my thought's own bride.

.....

A poem written in January 1856 to Susannah Thoresen; they married on 18th June 1858.

TO SUSANNAH THORESEN

I dreamt I'd been confined, committed
 To sink in the grave's embrace,
 Dust scattered my last permitted
 Earthly abiding place.

The parson consigned the departed,
 The hymns had been sung so sweet,
 Then off the sad gathering started
 And all was left nice and neat.

I happened to spy, then, discreetly,
 My one and my only love there,
 She, having heard all, returned sweetly
 My smile with a childlike air.

I felt, then, the gloom's regression,
 The flood of grand music roll
 From her, with that rare possession,
 A burgeoning childlike soul.

[TO MISS ESTANCE STEEN
 with a copy of "The Feast at Solhaug"]

Each person owning a little bloom,
 Held dear in the depths of their heart —
 Will send it away to where warming sun
 Might give it a friendly start.

But Art's a world with its seasons, too,
 Of blossoms both large and small,
 Dependent on light and the gleaming sun
 To burst from its calyx shawl.

For me, my little book's a bloom
 Held dear in the depths of my heart;
 I'm sending it off where the warming sun
 Might give it a friendly start! —

I'm sending it where I can dare to hope
 It will find a good home, it too;
 It's finest sun is a spring-like mind,
 It's sure, then, to thrive with you! —

Bergen 29.4.56

GREETINGS
to
HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE VICEROY
by
HENR. IBSEN

Delivered by Mad. Brun at the Theatre's Gala Performance
Thursday 22nd July 1856

Our memory-garland from days long departed
Contains a blossom of most lovely hue,
Though twenty years have passed since first it grew,
Still sweetly scented and still vernal-hearted.

That blossom is the time rich memories charted,
When Oscar stood amongst us here and drew
Norwegian hearts to him, stirred hope anew,
While the festivities seemed scarcely started.

And when he must turn home again, he towered
Like some triumphant hero parting hence
With all the people's love of him for booty.

That is a prize of weight and opulence,
And few there were like him so richly dowered
To come, to see, and win our loyal duty.

Nor did he, back at court, through vacillation,
Allow the bond to slip and fall apart;
It was a memory stored within his heart,
Both word and deed provided confirmation.

Confirmed his thoughts with keen anticipation
Turned often to our valleys set apart
For there the sad, care-burdened kingly heart
Found solace in the bosom of our nation.

And by his side the little prince would stand
And listen, silent, to the tale narrated
Of summer's voyage to that far-off land.

And many alluring pictures, bright and grand,
Would like a fairytale have decorated
The infant soul, his young breast's yearning fanned.

A man now, Prince, you stand before us here,
The people's joy rings out in jubilation;
Accept this greeting too, our salutation,
A welcome from our strand, our mountains sheer.

It is a homage, heart-felt and sincere, —
Not forced upon the lip by obligation,

But one that craves the word's strong-winged oration
To celebrate, full-voiced, the whole land's cheer.

It signifies our love, the hope that's ours,
Our faith in intellect's baptismal powers
That have inspired you to your lofty mission.

And how Time's dice that dictate our condition
May yet fall out — we sense, we know full surely:
On you North's brotherhood can rest securely!

Our greeting, Prince! For you have comprehended
The times' demands, the people's heartfelt needs,
In you a crop of gold may be portended,
A ripened harvest from your forebears' seeds.

Hence this our joy in you as one that leads,
To you a manly spirit has descended, —
Should duty summon you to martial deeds,
The sword you have will prove not vainly tended!

You clearly comprehend the North's prime vision,
The spirit wherein lies our noblest life,
The bloom whence we derive our future seeding!

And boldly, as a man protects his wife,
You will o'ersee the fair vine's supervision
And to triumphant ripeness tend its breeding.

Though as you scale your lofty destination
There's many a crisis that's to be expected,
Yet shall your strength of will not grow dejected, —
For one day you shall reap rich compensation;

Reward more apt than stone's cold ostentation, —
The tree of Memory, that thrives protected
Within the folk's breast, freshly recollected,
Its golden crop stamped with your reputation.

Accept, then Prince, as the whole people's greeting
The welcome here expounded at this meeting,
Which we make bold to lay before you here.

Our best of thoughts go with you, ever-loyal,
Heir to a king's estate right truly royal,
The North's united thrones, its love sincere!

The Viceroy was, in 1856, the Crown Prince Charles, son of the then ailing King Oscar, ruler of the joint kingdom of Sweden-Norway. Oscar himself had visited Norway as Viceroy. Prince Charles succeeded him as Charles XV.

SONG
preluding
SHIP'S MASTER JAN ANDERSEN'S
and
MISS M.B. CAMPBELL'S
Wedding Celebration
25th September 1856
(Mel: Vift Stolt paa Codans Bølger)

When gales and billows chiding
Seethe on the vessel's prow,
When storm-cloud murk is hiding
The haven, distant now —
The shipman bold will tower
Undaunted at the helm:
He has on board a power
That nought can overwhelm!

It is the needle showing
Where North is to be found, —
The magic steel for showing
His way home, safe and sound!
And that is why he's ready
To mock the angry sea, —
He knows his course is steady
For landfall and for lee!

But in man's heart profoundly, —
And woman's, in like ways, —
The God-lit torch as roundly
Deserves an equal praise; —
When life's wild waves would seize you
And crush you in their rage, —
It brings you through and sees you
To Joy's safe harbourage!

It's like a star that's shining,
Assumes a compass role,
Points far ahead defining
The passage to your goal —
Good luck to all those wedded
Who've that on board to show —
You'll find Joy's home, you're headed,
It's steady as you go!

And so we'll drink together
To this young couple here
Who through Life's tides and weather
One common course will steer!
A health, then, we importune!

Drink up, and shout Hurray!
 To *him*, to *her*, good fortune
 Until Life's final day!

Henr. Ibsen

SONG
 at
 (ACTOR) H. NIELSEN
 and
 (ACTRESS) MISS. F. JENSEN'S
 Wedding
 27th November 1856
 Mel: Aa Kjøre Vatten etc.

Upon the stage — it's by ancient lore —
 The play can properly be ended
 When the conquering hero's come home from war
 And won his "She", his intended!
 One could believe life's poetry had ceased
 Quite absolutely with the wedding feast.
 The pair could well
 Have ceased to dwell
 From that day forth in Art's fair regions!

But look, in life that is never true,
 The ideal there's continuation,
 The bright, the beckoning heavenly blue
 That claims all our concentration;
 When church has blessed the vow two hearts have made
 Then on their union there's a splendour laid;
 Spring-like and rare,
 Poesy-fair
 Life lies ahead for the couple.

You twain, whom fire within your hearts
 And churchly vow have just married,
 Go, boldly tackle the real-life parts,
 The variable scenes to be carried, —
 But if at times the problems prove severe —
 Keep up the spirit that inspires you here,
 Then without trace
 Of fear you'll face
 The time for bringing down the curtain!

Henrik Ibsen

AT THE ANNIVERSARY
of
THE 22ND OF DECEMBER SOCIETY
(Mel: Vift stolt paa Codans Bølger)

The seething time's disquiet
Hides yearning deep and strong
That asks for spirit's diet
Amid life's toiling throng;
A lust for the supernal,
The shrine wherein Truth dwells, —
To sort the true nut-kernel
From hollow, empty shells.

And every bosom numbers
A soul-life of its own,
It seethes away or slumbers
Behind breast's vault, alone; —
But were the thought sent winging,
Arrayed in words well-found,
It would much seed be bringing
To growth in fertile ground!

Not just the tree that's wholly
In golden bloom be-decked
Can claim protection solely,
The right to high respect;
It's out of date, the notion
That show is all that pays; —
So, to our club, a potion: —
Here's to its modest ways!

SONG AT THE CELEBRATION OF
OUR FOREFATHERS' MEMORY.

Bergen 13 Jan. 1857

Time was when from the North would stride
Great heroes, cause for wonder,
And draw the bright sword from their side,
Sheer lightning mid war's thunder.
Steel's clang on steel in anger rung
Was then the Norseman's mother-tongue;
By pillage, fire, the sword he swung
He made the world his plunder.

And in the dim-lit royal hall
Famed bards sat, well-reputed,
Who sang the warrior's rise and fall:
Thereto all listened, muted.
But then the saga-man took hold

His pen and in fine script enrolled
 On Memory's page each exploit bold
 Of bard and warrior bruited.

But warrior-life set in the sky,
 The days of might were numbered;
 The past became mere song whereby
 The race's offspring slumbered.
 They dozed off, wafted by the wave
 Of memories from the hero's grave,
 From voyages of forebears brave
 On seas, lands, firths haze-cumbered.

Yet — hazard haunts the cradle-song
 From Memory's troll-like stringing;
 Sleep not within its spell o'er long —
 There's weirdness in its ringing!
 Remember well, our northern shore
 Still has its giants as of yore,
 There still, on Vigrid's field, stands Thor,
 Who may need swords a-swinging.

Since heroes now on billows blue
 No longer bid defiance, —
 In Spirit's corselet armed now you
 Stand for the Light's alliance!
 If blow on blow for Truth you smite
 Then in a sacred cause you fight,
 Then comes the day when you'll outright
 Have slain indeed the giants!

If Memory's cup stands emptied here,
 The pledge-cup's full for drinking:
 A pledge that, armed with zeal's keen spear
 We'll smite on without shrinking!
 For it's through strife we honour best
 Yon dauntless age, whose rich bequest
 Has drawn men here, guest after guest,
 To our North's triple linking.

Vigrid's field, the site in Valhalla of the last great battle between the gods and the giants.

TO SOPHIE THORESEN

What is a poem? It's made of air,
 A castle built by man's inner being,
 A church where everything's bright and fair,
 A heaven with glittering stars overseeing.

But life itself is a poem as well,
 It is rich, to start with, in fairy-tale spell;
 Rich in burgeoning poesy,
 In yearning, longing to soar away free,
 Soar to the day when you grow and mature —
 It comes — and what has one left to secure?

That grievance, believe me, is null and void,
 The usual grievance that's always employed,
 That childhood's world alone can hold
 The gleam of poetry, bright as gold.
 When once the butterfly's flown its cocooning
 A richer life opens to its communing
 Than that which the larva's fond dreams could conceive
 When it lay fast asleep in its darkened weave.

Your childhood poem has played out its part,
 Fairy-tale books have been closed, relinquished,
 But the candle lit in the private heart
 Is not in consequence quite extinguished.
 A bridge still exists from the Then to the Now,
 Bring *with* you, across it, your care-free brow,
 Bring *with* you your openness, free of all rancour,
 Bring *with* you the confidence filling your breast,
 And then you've a weapon for life's stern test,
 You have, then, in peril, the life-saving anchor.

TO MY ROSE

Sleep now, to Night's peace surrender,
 Sleep whoever will and may,
 I shall lull myself in tender
 Reverie's rich-coloured play.

On the wings of verse I'll send you
 Thoughts of mine in soaring flocks,
 While hushed sprites of sleep attend you,
 Wafting o'er your dark brown locks.

Sleep on, dreamer, soft and gently.
 Were I made a child anew,
 I would send a prayer to heaven —
 Ah, but that's a task for you.

And if you are gently drowsing,
 Don't forget me as you doze,
 Don't forget the one who's only
 Dream is of his lovely rose.

Ibsen left Bergen in that year to join the Norwegian Theatre in Christiania.

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