

THE COLLECTED POEMS
OF HENRIK IBSEN

Translated by John Northam



PREFACE

With the exception of a relatively small number of pieces, Ibsen's copious output as a poet has been little regarded, even in Norway. The English-reading public has been denied access to the whole corpus. That is regrettable, because in it can be traced interesting developments, in style, material and ideas related to the later prose works, and there are several poems, witty, moving, thought provoking, that are attractive in their own right.

The earliest poems, written in Grimstad, where Ibsen worked as an assistant to the local apothecary, are what one would expect of a novice. Resignation, Doubt and Hope, Moonlight Voyage on the Sea are, as their titles suggest, exercises in the conventional, introverted melancholy of the unrecognised young poet. Moonlight Mood, To the Star express a yearning for the typically ethereal, unattainable beloved. In The Giant Oak and To Hungary Ibsen exhorts Norway and Hungary to resist the actual and immediate threat of Prussian aggression, but does so in the entirely conventional imagery of the heroic Viking past.

From early on, however, signs begin to appear of a more personal and immediate engagement with real life. There is, for instance, a telling juxtaposition of two poems, each of them inspired by a female visitation. It is Over is undeviatingly an exercise in romantic glamour: the poet, wandering by moonlight mid the ruins of a great palace, is visited by the wraith of the noble lady once its occupant; whereupon the ruins are restored to their old splendour. The next poem, Room to Let, draws, as its title implies, on a wholly different source of inspiration: Ibsen's own desperate need, as a sex-starved youngster, to persuade a girl, any girl, to move into his untidy lodgings and help transform their squalor into a treasure house. Ibsen is beginning to tackle real life.

Another piece, Memories of a Ball, provides a more complex and explicit indication of Ibsen's impulse to reject convention for realism. Part poem, part prose, the piece is a long one because Ibsen needs not merely to express a subjective mood but to argue a case. It begins conventionally enough with a prologue, a tribute to the ethereal beloved, Stella, whom Ibsen borrows, as it were, from the famous poet Wergeland. But the poem quickly modulates, after a hint or two of parody, into a refutation of such posturing and a robust counter-assertion that the true facts of the sexual game are to be found closer to home, at a dance. "That may ring a little flat / and moreover unpoetic" Ibsen writes, but he proceeds to an amusing and acutely observed account of the goings-on at such an event. The prose ending, the last page of a disappointed lover's diary, may revert to the old-style suicidal gloom, but the gloom is so extreme and Ibsen's use of emotive dashes so excessive as to invite ridicule for an outworn romantic attitudinising.

Ibsen entered a new world when he moved to the capital, Christiania, as a would-be student in the Medical Faculty. The University, a recent foundation, was an exciting assertion of Norway's cultural independence from Denmark. Although he failed, in Greek, to gain admission, he was accorded the status of "student" and was thus able to play some part in undergraduate life. The change is reflected in the general tone of the poems written during this period. The frustrated gloom manifests itself still in, for instance, The Miner and Bird and Bird-Catcher, but even there Ibsen begins to draw inspiration from a real-life occupation and from his own boyhood

recollections. In *The Lad in the Bilberry Patch* he punctures the facile sentimentality of a city poet by revealing the real facts, of poverty and sickness, that motivate the lad's industry; *The Tear* stems from vivid memories of his own boyhood grief when he could not join his tobogganing friends because his boots had come apart. *A Saturday Evening in Hardanger* offers the routinely folk-loreish account of the source of poetic inspiration but the poet is the local travelling tailor and the setting an amusingly observed dance in a farmyard, with young couples slipping off into the woods under the sardonic gaze of their elders.

There are reversions to self-pity — in *The Eider Duck* for instance — and to the old nostalgia for the heroic past in *To Denmark*; but *On Ladergaardsøen* ends on the hopeful note of a spiritual regeneration as does the long Prologue written for the new, specifically Norwegian Theatre that had been founded in Bergen. There is a major reversion, also, to the stock heroic mode in Ibsen's first attempt at epic form, *Helge Hundingsbane*. It is a well-told tale of derring-do, but it displays Ibsen's unreflecting acceptance at this time of its essentially brutal values — Helge is a hero because he slays many men including the father and brothers of his beloved, Sigrun. She, undaunted, remains true to him and joins him in death as his shield-maid in Valhalla. Ibsen was to write other epics and quasi-epics but they were to define heroism in a more adult and perceptive way. It is perhaps significant that the poem following *Helge Hundingsbane*, the last written during this period, is *A Leg-Pull*, a satirical barb aimed at stock poetical sentimentality.

Ibsen's move to Bergen as resident dramatist at the Norwegian Theatre there involved him in an exciting and challenging undertaking, but it threatened to impose new restrictions on his budding freedom from conventions. Almost as soon as he arrived he was cast in the role of occasional poet — for weddings, club meetings, official visits and other celebrations. The occasions themselves demanded a certain appropriateness of tone and sentiment; Ibsen often played safe by choosing, and sometimes somewhat laboriously developing, an all-too-obvious imagery: a sea-captain's married life will be a sea-voyage, a theatrical couple will play their parts in life and the theatre until the final curtain. But more limiting were the constraints imposed on meter and stanzaic form by the fact that such occasional poems were meant to be sung to a well-known melody. Ibsen's individuality as a poet is, in consequence, largely obliterated.

There are, however, other indications. The Prologue to a matinee performance at the Norwegian Theatre is an engagingly direct assessment of its modest achievements to date and it convinces one of Ibsen's sense of commitment to the enterprise. Occasional poems such as *Greetings to the Viceroy* and *Song at the Celebration of our Forebear's Memory* may draw on traditional heroics but in them Ibsen begins to translate heroism into terms of moral courage or largeness of vision in the face of the actual dangers and perplexities of contemporary life. Even amongst the seemingly routine love poems — *To my Primrose*, *To R.H. With a Rose*, — there are others, *To Susannah Thorensen*, *To the One and Only*, *Wild Flowers* and *Potted Plants*, that convince one that Ibsen is writing not to an incorporeal idea but to a real girl valued for her inner resources of character; and *A Bird Song* is a vivid, humorously un pompous record of an embarrassing moment in Ibsen's real life courtship of Rikke Holst.

One further development deserves attention. In the *Picture Gallery* demonstrates Ibsen's desire to engage seriously with the complexities of being a poet in real life, a desire that generates a need for an expansiveness in a form far removed from the jejune narrative of *Helge Hundingsbane*. The piece is not in epic form but of epic length — a sequence of thirty-three sonnets; it is both a lively account of Ibsen's visit to one of Dresden's galleries during his tour abroad and an extended exploration into the painful frustrations of the creative artist.

Most of the poems that Ibsen wrote after his return to Christiania to work in the Norwegian Theatre there were occasional — but occasional with a difference. In piece after piece his purpose is no longer, as so often in his early poems, to urge a king or a nation to take up the sword against oppression. Instead he exhorts a nation to establish its independence through the integrity of its language and culture, not just of its frontiers. His new heroes are King Oskar, a patron of the arts and literature in Norway, Ole Vig, a leader of educational reform, Professor Schweigaard and J. L. Heiberg, prominent intellectuals of the day, and Chr. Jørgensen, a famous actor. It is through such men that nations can achieve their true and proper stature. The full weight of Ibsen's contempt for those that betray the obligations of such leadership can be felt in the two lengthy, scathing letters to H. Ø. Blom.

Two works of this period deserve particular attention. They are both very long. One, *On the Heights*, is a kind of spiritual epic, tracing the dilemma of the poet torn between his longing for the normal satisfactions of life and the exigent demands of art. The other, *Terje Vigen*, is a true epic, one that attains, more fully than any of the previous poems, the objectives towards which Ibsen has been working. *Terje* begins as a humdrum figure out of real life, a fisherman, but Ibsen goes on to develop a sense of his heroic stature; not merely in terms of the suffering he endures during the English blockade of Norway, but of the spiritual strength he manifests when he brings himself to forgive the man responsible for the ruin of his life. The poem pierces to the core of *Terje's* integrity as a great human being; the condensed, allusive imagery of the last few lines is perhaps the most poignant that Ibsen ever employed: the humble, neglected grave, the rough grass growing around it, and the wild flowers that show through.

There is no mistaking the liberating effects of Ibsen's departure for foreign parts. In *From my Home Life* and *The Gulley* his concern is still, narrowly, his own private problems as a poet, but he ranges more widely in subject-matter and forms. The targets for his contempt take on a cosmopolitan dimension. *Abraham Lincoln's Murder* is a trenchant condemnation of the moral hypocrisy of Europe at large; *To the Revolutionary Orator* dismisses the ineffectual posturing of a purely theoretical revolutionary fervour. The perspectives are broader, though the forms are familiar.

The Epic Brand suggests a new development. The setting appears to be narrowly Norwegian, yet in this very long fragment Ibsen is clearly trying to personify the conflict that he has explored in more general terms, namely the conflict between integrity and a corrupt social environment. It was a theme dear to Ibsen's heart, yet, after a year's laborious effort and more than a hundred stanzas, he suddenly abandoned the project.

Several reasons have been adduced, but it seems likely that Ibsen had come to feel constrained by his narrative form. The fragment is impressive, but most readers

would testify to its slow space, to the retarding effect of the stanzaic structure. Characters, settings, actions — everything has to be described. Yet at the very end Ibsen seems to hit upon a dramatic alternative. It presents itself in the scene showing an asinine bailiff distributing relief to the starving peasants. At last the Epic Brand shows that a slow-moving narrative might be turned into a lively dramatic encounter. For whatever reason, Ibsen abandoned the repetitive form for the flexible rhyming, the swift pace, the immediacy and variety of his great dramatic poem Brand which can be thought of as his first modern tragedy.

It is indisputable that the finest of Ibsen's later poems benefit both from the enlargement of his experiences abroad, and from a new flexibility of form, though the preoccupations remain the same. Balloon Letter to a Swedish Lady, written in a lively, ode-like form, is not only an amusing travelogue of Ibsen's trip to Egypt but it concludes with a damning comparison between the lifeless, sacerdotal culture of that country and the deadening authoritarianism of contemporary Prussia. His aim is to define the difference between a distorted and a genuine concept of national identity. In Rhyme Letter to Fru Heiberg the vantage point of distance allows Ibsen not only to survey the whole span of the great actress's career but to celebrate the inspirational effect her art has had on her whole nation. The ode form, with its fluidity and suppleness, conveys beautifully the varied excellence of her performances.

Ibsen continued to write poems, some of them deeply personal, but the poetic impulse clearly wanes, no doubt because he had discovered his true metier as a writer of prose plays. But these works can be seen not so much as a complete break with his poetical output but as the culmination of the various tendencies exemplified throughout the corpus: his determination to create art out of real life, to pursue at greater depth and in more intimately personal terms his exploration of the tragic conflict between individual integrity and social laxity. Furthermore he carries over into his prose dialogue the lessons he had come to learn from his later work as a poet. The passionate vehemence of Solness, the complacency of Manders, the burning frustrations of Hedda are conveyed not merely by what they say but through the subtle movement and rhythm of the prose they speak. It could be argued that Ibsen never ceased to be a poet.

John Northam

Note: In the Norwegian Centenary Edition of the poems, those that appeared in the selection made in 1871 are printed as a separate entity. In this version of the corpus they have been intercalated in substantially chronological order. As to form, I have risked the hazards of reproducing as nearly as possible the verse structures, rhyme schemes and meters of the original.

POEMS FROM THE GRIMSTAD PERIOD

A MISCELLANY

from the years 1848, 1849 and 1850

While still at Grimstad Ibsen put together this small collection of poems in the hope that it would be published. He was, in the event, disappointed.

RESIGNATION

(1847)

Is the flash from soul's dense darkness,
 Breaking through the murk forlorn,
 Flaring forth with lightning starkness
 Merely for oblivion born? —
 Were it vain, all my desiring,
 Were my dream but fantasy,
 I, denied the soul's aspiring,
 Cold and void my poesy! —
 Then be mute, ye Intimations! —
 If I cannot comprehend, —
 Let me, in the ruck of nations,
 Live forgotten, and so end! — — —

BY THE SEA

Foam-surge a-wallow
 With joy of the fray!
 Who's he that could follow?
 Whence sheer you away?
 Who's he could restrain you
 Your boisterous course?
 Who that could rein you,
 Could trammel your force?

A youngster delighting
 In fray wildly fought,
 You joyed in inciting
 The cliff for your sport.
 Yet midst all your striving,
 Midst your unrest,
 Small sea-blooms are thriving
 That spangle your breast!

Ah, brief is the hour; —
 Your prime just the same! —
 It fails you, your power,
 You ebb whence you came! —
 A grave, look, awaits you,
 A cleft in the seam, —
 Ha, wave! thus abates, too,
 Your vainglorious dream!

O, blend but your plaining
 With surf's boisterous song! —
 What is there remaining? —
 No memory lasts long! —
 For while in that heaven
 You dream you're enshrined,
 To the waves' seething leaven
 You've long been consigned! — — —

DOUBT AND HOPE

Ha, such a night, such gloom and stress!
 A raging storm outdoors! — — —
 A lion in the wilderness,
 Mark how the tempest roars! —
 Ha, do you come from Death's dark vale,
 You ghostly shapes that crowd
 Night's field of combat, there to trail
 In grey-spun garb of cloud? — —

And then yon thunder, loud and strong
 As very midnight passed! — — —
 Like murk's wild, savage victory-song,
 Like judgement's trumpet-blast! —
 O, many a time I would pour scorn
 On dread of Judgement Day, —
 Ha, that contempt fine fruit has borne,
 This present wild dismay! — —

Long, long ago while still a lad
 I'd pray with such delight
 To God in Heaven for Mum and Dad
 And little ones at night; —
 But long, ah! long that ceased to be,
 I have forgone my prayer,
 No more incline to piety,
 No more seek solace there! — — —

Ha, feeble soul! do you so quail
 Before these thunder-claps? — —
 You think in this night's dreadful gale
 To see Doomsday perhaps —
 A day that never could befall, —
 As oft your creed denied;
 And in the God on whom you call
 Your faith has long since died! — —

Ha, demon, are you watching yet? —
 Foul tempter, get thee hence!
 O, like the hurricane's wild fret
 My soul's one turbulence, — —
 And in that doubt-tormented sea
 No channel, no safe way! — —
 God, for one childlike prayer to Thee
 All worldly wit I'd pay! — —

But ah, 'tis past, my infancy,
 I lack the childlike mind! —
 The path the innocent can see
 Through faith, to that I'm blind! —
 O, this dread night where horrors hide
 Is lightning-lit at best, —
 Yet it is day's clear gleam beside
 My own benighted breast! — —

Yet even so I'll not despair
 But heed the bosom's call:
 I shall cleave fast to Hope, declare
 Faith in my God withal! —
 Just let the tempest howl away, —
 I'll sleep and rest withdrawn,
 — Assuredly I'll wake some day
 With childlike faith reborn. — — —

THE GIANT OAK

Far in the North a great oak-tree soared, —
 The heathen days saw its dawning; —
 Deep down in the soil its root explored,
 Full noble its heaven-bent awning; —
 The massive great branches, lush growth from the bole
 Spread out from the Eider and north to the Pole,
 It flaunted its shade over Svea's reaches
 And wreathed the Atlantic's rock-bound beaches! —

But against the giant Time's gales went forth,
 The might of that trunk they shattered,
 And o'er the divided, diminished North
 A wild funeral dirge they scattered.
 And eastward, eagles with lustful glee
 Eyed, bent on plunder, the Baltic Sea,
 As Germans reached for the prey that was lying
 Defenceless, abandoned and left for dying! — —

But shoots sprouted forth from that shattered tree, — —
 Faint spark soon fanned into flaring! —
 The young recalled how it used to be, —
 Old greatness they longed to be sharing. —
 So soon as the man, now apart, can extend
 His hand to his brother again as true friend, —
 So soon they'll be one, soon blending, combining
 Like winter-night skies with the Northern lights shining!

The tree imagery, deriving perhaps from the great Ash-tree of the Universe (Yggdrasil) of Norse mythology is often used by Ibsen as an emblem of Scandinavian unity. Here he invokes it in the face of German claims on Denmark's Duchies of Slesvig and Holstein, represented as the vital southern sector of the whole Scandinavian defence system. Svea is Sweden.

1849

MEMORY'S SOURCE

A lassie is sitting at eventide,
 Scanning the stream that shimmers, —
 And in the depths where the waters glide
 The wood's dark reflection glimmers.

She stares and stares with a wistful smile
 As though she felt something lacking;
 But blithely, embraced by lush banks meanwhile,
 The current flows on ne'er slacking. — —

Thus oft she'd sit as a guileless child, —
 Deep down see a phantom shaded:
 A stripling who beckoned her, softly smiled, —
 The vision had long since faded. —

Ah, now she's grown up, and however fain
 Her thoughts to go childward yearning,
 He never, never comes back again,
 His vision no more returning.

Yet often she'll sit by the streamlet's verge,
 Cheeks all bedewed with her crying; —
 On glides the current's soft rippling surge,
 Scarce ruffled by dusk's mild sighing. —

And then the moon casts an eerie light
 Down from the arched vault yonder; —
 She stares in the wave and she thinks she might
 Still see that phantom there wander! — — —

Water spirits were, by tradition, dangerously seductive.

DANCE OF DEATH

The night on spread wing has come sweeping
 The graveyard that all forsake; —
 The dead are so peacefully sleeping,
 A sleep that is hard to break; —
 And there, to the gleaming moon,
 Glint eerily marble stones
 That, garnished with wreathes tear-strewn,
 Are covering dead men's bones. — —

But once the grave's peace is broken
 By midnight's sepulchral knell, —
 Then, if you'd but mark, you'd hear woken
 A vague and tumultuous swell, —
 Come closer, draw ever near, — —
 Then thunder o'erwhelms the scene — —
 The passer-by quakes with fear
 And crosses himself, though nought's seen! — —

Each moss-covered stone is now gaping,
 Each hollow and sunken mound,
 And then, their low cells escaping,
 The dead all troop forth without sound.
 But marking each step came a tap,
 The clatter of knuckle-bone;
 But white linen shroud and cap,
 They gleamed like the snow fresh-blown. — —

They seem, with hands clasped, uniting
 As though on some merry quest;
 A will-o'-the-wisp provides lighting,
 Each skeleton's welcome as guest, — —
 Each clutches his neighbour's hand
 And whirls in a giddy dance; —
 The ghost of a prince might stand
 To partner some beggar's perchance! — —

Don't fancy musicians are lacking
 At such a sumptuous rout:
 One skeleton's knuckle-clacking;
 One hammers a drum-beat out
 On a skull with accomplished art;
 It sounds like the dying breath
 From deep in a breaking heart, —
 See, that is the music of Death! — —

Round crumbled memorials gyrating
 They dance, o so merry a crowd;
 The graves are still there, though, and waiting,
 One hour is all they're allowed. — —
 — It's over, the ball that they gave;
 For hollow the bells now chime,
 And deep in the peace of the grave
 They'll sleep to the ending of Time! — — —

RECOLLECTIONS OF LEAVE-TAKING

(On the departure of O. Schulerud)

When paths are sundered and friends part too,
 Severed in Life's commotion,
 We gaze on the brightness, the heavenly blue
 Of Memory with fond emotion.

There glint like affectionate stars, though small,
 The memories from days departed, —
 Not even Time with its cloudy pall
 Can dim the fair radiance imparted. —

Yet midst the affectionate starlets there,
 Our eyes seek out one with much pleasure, —
 It gleams with a shimmering, wistful air
 And yet it's the star we most treasure! — —

The name denotes sorrow; to leave-taking time
 The name is sincerely accorded, —
 Yet mildly it bathes from a blue that's sublime
 Each memory of friendship we've hoarded! — —

Ole Schulerud, a law student and one of the only two bosom friends of Ibsen's at the time, worked tirelessly to find a publisher for Ibsen's first play, Catiline, both in Grimstad and after his departure in 1849 in Christiania. He eventually spent a legacy to have the play printed privately. Catiline had been rejected by various theatres and failed to find a single bookseller who would buy it. Ibsen lodged with Schulerud when he in turn arrived at the capital to seek, unsuccessfully, admission to the recently founded, and solitary, university in Norway.

AUTUMN EVENING

Getting dark, look, raindrops keep
 Lashing at the window-paning,
 Blend with winds that howl, complaining,
 As across the heavens sweep
 Cloudy shapes, — like apparitions
 From Death's realm, mute admonitions; — —
 As far thunder rumbles, so
 They approach, withdraw and vanish,

Much as fickle maids' hearts banish
 Memories of a recent beau. — — —

Close against the stove I'm curled, —
 Brooding as the lightning's starkness
 Leaves the room in semi-darkness;
 But to me it is a world,
 Where, amongst the coal's dark crannies
 Dreams of mine, ethereal mannies,
 Build a palace all aglow; —
 (Hard to find the like, though, really;
 For within the walls I see the
 Loyalty young maidens show!)

Ha, what setting have we here! — — —
 Can it be my long-since vanished
 Childhood days my heart's ne'er banished
 That begin to reappear? —
 — Or has (would that I might see it)
 Distance's dark veil, albeit
 In a random, hasty style,
 Here been twitched aside, you reckon?
 Does the Norn of Future beckon
 With a kind or warning smile? — — —

But it's cold reality
 I wake up to from my dreaming; — —
 Down it comes, the rain's still teeming, —
 Palace, that's collapsed I see. — —
 What a bleak, unhappy session,
 Spells like these can breed depression,
 Cause the heart to feel inclined
 To feel sorely what it's lacking; — — —
 Company? — There's little backing
 There for a depressive mind! —

Just as each man has his own,
 So I too have my adored one! —
 Ah, but no mundane and flawed one
 Is the She who's mine alone; —
 Just a vision-dream, high-lighted
 By a yearning unrequited,
 Unrequitable I fear!
 (What if love's desire, once risen,
 Stifled in the heart's close prison,
 Just, like her, a nice idea! —)

Ha, you spot some earthly Miss,
 Do you, in my loved-one's features,
 Think I took some earthly creature's
 Charms to make her what she is! —
 Took from one the pensive forehead,
 From another one that torrid
 Sea of passion in the glance
 My beloved one would bestow me? — — —
 No, it's not to earth I owe the
 Attributes that I advance! — — —

Come, o come, my heart's ideal!
 At your side I'll service render,
 From your glance, so kind, so tender,
 I shall seek cool balms to heal
 The desires that so devour me,
 That my day-dreams nourish hourly,
 That will, never quenched it seems,
 Only learn to glow discreetly
 When I chance on earth to meet thee,
 Spirit-bride of all my dreams! — — —

THE SOUL'S GLIMPSE OF THE SUN

O my heart is so stirred!
 The same voice I have heard
 That I know from my reverie-land,
 When I, slumbering light
 In the glimmering night,
 Heard the whisper of waves on the strand!

I have seen now the gaze
 That my soul-bride displays
 In the fictions love weaves in my dreams!
 Through the depths of my soul
 Like a hurricane roll
 My presentiments' quivering streams!

And the pang of desire
 My ideal set on fire
 In the depths of my aspirant breast,
 From a wild, blazing flame
 All-devouring, became
 A sweet warmth, o so calm and unstressed!

— But no, — by the shore all is sultry, oppressive! —
 Far out on the waves I must fare from the land.
 There wafts the sea-breeze, brow-cooling, caressive,
 There I shall quench the sad yearning's fierce brand
 That gnaws at my bosom — o there all is quiet,
 The sea's empty wastes there so sleepily wallow, —
 I voyage alone, the dead only can follow,
 Whose eyes in the billows so eerily riot. — —

Can it be stars there that gleam, do you reckon,
 Down yonder with tear-veiled effulgence perchance?
 Ha, see how they come and they go, how they beckon
 And whirl themselves wild in that mystical dance? —
 It's there I could well feel at home, in that setting, —
 It's there every torturing pain I could vanquish,
 There still every pang that consumed me with anguish! —
 Yes, there lies my bliss; — there's my hope of forgetting! —

MIDNIGHT MOOD

Mists of the night come gliding,
 Over the river's brink,
 Deep in the soul, confiding
 Dreams of fair visions sink; —
 While living things are sleeping,
 Elves bent on sport appear,
 Through yon dark woods go creeping; —
 — Midnight's hour is near. — —

Here is the spot for dreaming,
 Here in the silent night,
 Here where your heart's fond theming
 Is with sweet music dight:
 The tones that the wave produces
 Ring out as though spirits played,
 Sighs from yon forest spruces
 Add to the serenade. —

Here you can summon the hidden
 Memories from Bygone's waves,
 Greet, as dear friends, the unbidden
 Ghosts that rise up from the grave,
 Blend o so well the darkling
 Clouds out of memory born
 With the gleam that's sparkling
 Hope's all resplendent dawn! —

Comes there no music spilling
 Hither through night's calm mist?
 Softly the waves are trilling,
 Birds on their branches list; —
 On woods where elves play spritely
 A sudden silence rests, —
 Moonlight shines so brightly
 Through ancient oak-tree crests. —

Hear you the sprite sing, staying
 Close by the river's flow,
 Down where the willow tree's swaying
 O'er shadows the stream below! —
 He strikes the gold strings with his fingers
 Wrapt in the brake's dim light,
 The soft-sounding echo lingers
 Long in the still of night. — —

And Nature right mournfully listens,
 Attuned to the Nøkk's sad lay;
 Tear-like the dew-drop glistens,
 Sparkling from every spray, —
 Swathed in the cloud's thin veiling
 Softly the moonlight beams,
 Sadly the music's wailing
 Twines with the mournful themes.

When day shines here for us brightly,
 The Nøkk keeps his river-bed,
 But once the moon climbs its nightly
 Way o'er the spruce's head: —
 You will see him float on the river,
 Singing of griefs untold;—
 O, the lament could quiver
 High o'er the stars' bright gold! —

In song there are gentle forces,
 There hallowed powers reside:
 The goal that your heart endorses,
 Though deep in the future it hide,
 Will solace your breast some morrow,
 And raise you high above earth, —
 Then each of the notes of sorrow
 Will blend to make blissful mirth! —

Nøkk c.f. – our nixie – the water sprite

TO THE STAR

(Dedicated to C:E:)

Pallid star! Despatch a sign
 From the heights eternal! —
 For the soul's eye twinkle, shine
 Friendly, though supernal! — —

Must thy symbolled message seek
 To rouse yearning merely?
 Teach me so that I may tweak
 Future's veil, see clearly! —

Sweep misgiving's cloud forlorn
 From a soul that's ailing,
 Let a blest assurance dawn
 Through the gloom prevailing! —

Ah, but all too rash, my plea; —
 Dare I ask assurance! —
 Can a son of earth soar free
 From his earthly durance? —

O, what comfort had I known
 With faith's beam to guide me! —
 I must feed on hope alone,
 Certainty denied me. —

So when heaven's feeble light
 From afar shines palely,
 I'll watch gladly in the night
 For my star to hail me. — —

C:E: was Clara Ebbell, Ibsen's current girlfriend. Tact, or perhaps caution, caused him to substitute "Blege" (pale) for the "Klara" (clear) in the draft. He later sent back six poems dedicated to her.

AN EVENING ROAM IN THE FOREST

It is too bright, it is too bright
 Where moonlight casts its glow; —
 My heart is, by this calm of night,
 Transfused and trembles so;
 On every bloom, each leaf that curls
 Rests evening's string of dew-drop pearls
 And quivers to my gaze! —

It is too bright, too bright the glow
 Here by the water's brink! —
 Behold the waves too-silent flow,
 And mirrored stars that sink
 Till in the watery deep they're bathed
 Seem like forget-me-nots grief-swathed,
 Like eyes that sorrow shrouds.

Far yonder, to the distant North
 Where fir-trees darkly press,
 Where Huldurs in the fell hold forth
 (You might well call it wilderness)
 There I possess a cherished place,
 There I'll direct my steps apace,
 My sanctuary's there!

Behold the mountain peaks abrupt
 That muffling clouds enclose; —
 An autumn storm will soon erupt,
 Night's wind already blows! —
 — O, sweet; — as though I were inspired
 I feel by this same tempest fired
 To journey through the night! — —

Deep in the woods, away, away!
 O, further still from here,
 Until the soul falls wholly prey
 To this wild, panic fear, —
 Till you're convinced the wraiths of night
 Attend you on your headlong flight
 However swift you speed! —

Hush, silence now; — this is the spot! —
 Amidst the forest bound
 Hark, owls are shrieking, — mark you not? —
 Ah, how sublime they sound!
 Theirs is a merry melody, —
 Let not one note neglectfully
 Escape you; — ah, how sweet! — —

The spruces, standing black and tall,
 The tarn's dour verges crowd;
 — As through the air the storm-winds squall,
 Observe the misty shroud, —
 It glides aloft and then glides down,
 Now wraps about the forest crown
 Now covers the black depths.

Here may the heart find such content
 Amid the raging storm;
 Here Nature's visage can present
 My breast in mirrored form,
 An image of my given doom:
 No peace in life nor in the tomb,
 No peace eternally! —

Hulder, another dangerously seductive spirit, a mountain-haunting enchantress identifiable by her tail.

IN THE AUTUMN

Summertime's songsters forsake now the glading; —
 Where once their melodies rang from the boughs,
 Autumn already so plaintively sighs
 Stirring the last of their yellow-leaved lading.
 Here where the carpet of blossom was blent,
 Jewelling the fragrant green sward with its treasure,
 Summer's farewell sounds a tremulous measure,
 Straw for its strings now, — a lyric lament!

Lily, why left you your stem here, but bending,
 Bared of its leafage, — where hence did you flee?
 O, you'll return in the springtime-to-be,
 On the kind angel of summer attending!
 Rose, from whose beauteous chalice would trill
 Joy's dulcet language that whispered so fairly,
 Thorns are the memory left with us merely, —
 — Wounding, but — ah, — but I love you so, still! —

Many a seed from the spring-time plantations
 We have seen ripen, its fruitfulness flaunt; —
 O, but there's many a plot that can vaunt
 Nought but the husks of its high expectations.
 Summer! too swift for the south you were bound,
 Hope soon departed, too brief was its hour, —
 Ah, and the mourner is left with no flower
 Modestly gracing the grave's hallowed mound.

Yet, midst the graves there is one bloom remaining
 Living in all of its loveliness still, —
 One that the Autumn's cold blast could not kill; —
 O, why need heart, then, prolong its complaining! —
 — Memory we call it, — see, still it can bring
 Hope from the rigours of hibernation, —
 Bind it in wreaths for the Past's celebration,
 It will give solace, presaging a Spring! —

The first of Ibsen's poems to achieve print.

MEMORIES OF SPRING

(Set to music by C.Due)

God grants, all giving,
 Once while you're living
 A Spring-like spell,
 When joyous dreaming
 Sweeps through you, streaming
 From soul's deep well —
 Each cloud then trimly
 Is conjured hence
 From what but dimly
 You tried to sense.

Hope brings its summer,
 Fair-bloomed new-comer,
 From heaven afar
 As inspiration, —
 Such coruscation,
 Each bloom a star; —
 While life's solution
 Seems manifest,
 Sweet Spring's profusion
 Reigns in your breast!

Ah, soon 'tis ended! —
 But sweetly blended
 On heart's own strings,
 A wistful sadness
 Recalls the gladness
 That Springtime brings, —
 Those tuneful hours
 With echoes throng
 Of dream-like flowers
 And spring-tide song! —

Christopher Due was the other close friend from the Grimstad days. He became a Customs Officer.

TO HUNGARY

Now the hollow warlike clamour from the Magyars' land is ended!
 Muffled sighs from field of combat with the deads' last moaning blended
 Bear through still of night the tiding, full of grief, a muted rattle:
 Now the Magyar is no more, it has been fought, his last great battle! —

Freedom's band of heroes fallen to barbaric, crude invasion, —
 Tyrant power, freedom's butcher, once more struts the desolation.
 Come, rejoice, ye purple-mantled monarchs! Brute force has repeated
 Its old triumph, — Freedom's flame is yet again, perforce, defeated!

Wretched land! Their finest life-blood drained away from sons you sired,
 Yet those noble fallen heroes have a martyr's crown acquired.
 Lo, you bind the hopes of Europe to their corpses, each a Roland; —
 — Soon, perhaps, that ravished country will become another Poland! —

Yet, beyond the night of bondage there shall dawn a glorious splendour, —
 Then shall all your freedom-fighters rise again from death and tender
 Fellowship to those that perished by the Vistula's sad waters
 And to those that from the scaffold drench Hun soil with reek of slaughters!

Yes, when bold young scions storm the throne in vengeful reparation
 Like an autumn gale and topple tyranny to its foundation; —
 Then the Magyar name, ennobled by its heroes, famed and glorious,
 Shall, a noble war-cry, thunder from the ranks that march victorious! —

The Hungarian uprising in 1848 against Habsburg domination was one of several freedom movements — Poland's was another — sparked off by the February Revolution of that year in Paris.

SCANDINAVIANS AWAKE!

A summons to the Norwegian and Swedish brothers.

1849

Hush, do you hear the southward thunder crashing?
 It spans the Kattegat, the hollow boom; —
 It is the tumult of two forces clashing
 That casts o'er Dannevang a night of gloom! —

A night that is so bloody and so daunting,
 Just now when Freedom's tree begins to sprout
 Spring's tender buds that prank it with their flaunting,
 But lack the peace wherein to burgeon out.

There German bullies poise themselves to rifle
 A part of Denmark's soil with sword in hand;
 A soil so sacred to the Nordic races!

Up, brothers, up! — we dare no longer trifle; —
 So bids us yonder Nordic brother-band
 That joins Swede, Norseman, Dane in its embraces!

Full long there lurked a yearning in our breast, —
 Our soul flew out towards our Danish brothers
 When they determined, by warm zeal possessed,
 To bleed, in our great common cause, for others.

But if we stand in silence, grasp no sword,
 Do not march boldly on the Hun-horde's breaches. —
 Then with our fathers' worth we ill accord
 And with our brethren's on the Danish beaches.

If we within our mountain cordon cower,
 Think us secured because our crags rise sheer, —
 O, may that trust not all-too-soon be blighted!

Remember, Norsemen, the fierce eagle-Power
 That spreads its claws, — remember it draws near, —
 — What if the prey has been already sighted?

Is not then Slesvig a most sacred shrine,
 A shared possession for the North to cherish,
 Against Germanic thrusts a holding-line, —
 But what if that same bulwark were to perish?

— If Eider's stream past German banks were sweeping,
 While Nordic tongue and genius were expelled,
 If in the Teuton gripe the folk were weeping
 For Denmark, for its own dear mother, quelled?

— If Denmark's wind-borne groans reached hither, trembling,
 To make their way into our inmost heart,
 While gathering storm-clouds threaten from the distance:

Then stand, your cheeks with shame's dull flush dissembling,
 Ye who, endowed with strength, declined the part
 Of grasping swords to aid the North's resistance!

Must Slesvig for the Danish folk supply
 The place of Finland for the Swedes' brave nation,
 A land for which the sad, tear-trembling eye
 Alone expresses grief's keen desolation?

Must Slesvig be the Germans' destined prey,
 Must child be ravished cruelly from its mother?
 — No, brothers, no, a sacred law will say
 From deep within the soul: Preserve thy brother!

Will say: Assist what Nature long since tied
 Close to your heart in sound and seemly bonding,
 Woe, if in danger's hour you were to fail!

Norn Future reads your saga, steely-eyed,
 Asks, for your inward nurture, deeds responding,
 Not empty rhetoric to weight the scale.

Shall Norway stain with deed of craven sort
 Its youthful Freedom's rosy dawn, unheeding?
 Who planted in the people's breast the thought
 Of sitting idle when the Danes were bleeding?

Was it the men who were the people's choice

To guard, in Parliament, its reputation?
 Why not respond to Honour's lovely voice,
 Why call down on yourselves stern reprobation?

Was choice so doubtful when it fell to you
 To heed the call of love between true brothers?
 Say, heard you not then what the people cried?

The Hun already near, still nearer drew
 And yet you could forget those hard-pressed others
 Who still, with confidence, on us relied.

Say, Swedish kinsman, why pause timidly?
 Why speed you not across the Sound's near waters?
 You hold the Dane full well as dear as we, —
 You cherish Zealand's gleaming wood-land quarters.

Say, does the din not pierce your very souls
 As you, from Øresund, view Denmark sadly, —
 Is it not vile, the victory-cry that rolls,
 A German arrogance you'd humble, gladly.

Ha, is it true, what's softly whispered here?
 Do you then eastward stare, but fearful-hearted?
 Are Svea's sons thralls to barbarity?

No, no, you need no foreign censure fear; —
 Each saga-page from days long since departed
 Bears noble witness to the contrary.

And if some single band should venture thence
 From Sweden's shores and Norway's fells, one merely,
 What is the use? Posterity far hence
 Will at its bar arraign the folk severely.

When we have long, long since been laid in earth,
 Our offspring will feel shamed by these outrages,
 "From a degraded stock we trace our birth";
 And quickly turn our leaf in saga's pages.

For does the folk live but the Here-and-Now?
 Is not our past repute a kindly flower
 Bestowing on our present flaws its charm?

Soon shall our pledge, our loyal "Nordic vow",
 Sound on our lips like empty rant turned sour,
 Our offspring lack for memory's sweet balm.

Shall loving brotherhood be turned to hate?
 Shall brother blush for shame because of brother?
 Shall we not gather gladly as of late,

Not share the boons of peace with one another?

What Future hides must darkly still extend
 Before us — but ere long comes revelation; —
 What then if treachery towards our friend,
 Towards Denmark, prove the last feat of our nation?

Ha, what shall fire us in that final war;
 Where should we, for the nerve and strength, be turning
 When national honour lies there in its grave?

Woe, that we sped not thither long before, —
 Where warm fraternal hearts for us were burning,
 Despite our Norway's coldness, fell and wave!

You, Oskar! long the North's expectancy,
 On you our trusting gaze has been directed.
 Do not be deaf when nations cry, all three,
 That from your lips the king-word long expected!

Your promise, Oskar, was a pledge, no less,
 With you can Denmark still achieve salvation,
 — Lead us, bold Prince, on to the North's success. —
 But one way's left to reach that destination.

Why not enlist the folk's men to advise?
 They will respond, King, promptly to your calling,
 The Past's brand in the North glows undeterred!

Still there is time — still by swift enterprise
 Fair Denmark can be saved, even now, from falling
 Through trust deluded — in a kingly word! —

But stir the people, bid it follow you
 Before Sloth clamps its soul in enervation,
 Lead it in paths of duty, honour true,
 Before all's lost forever, past salvation.

In thanks then for your rousing them to war
 Two kindred folk would, at your throne's foot, rival,
 And Nordic honour, Denmark's unspilt gore,
 Would well repay you for the Danes' survival.

Then, King, a new-born splendour you would shed,
 An ancient glory that the North would cherish,
 Your name exalted by the joyful race;

While brother sank in brother's glad embrace
 And decked the double crown with garlands bred
 Of love and loyalty that ne'er would perish.

But were hope cheated, were it proved mere fraud, —
 Were Denmark left in need, with none sustaining,
 Should Svea, Nor, betray the North's accord
 That many a Dane met hero-deaths maintaining; —

Then hear, ye Danes, one Norseman's voice enjoins:
 Let not the whole folk bear the blame unjustly,
 Know, many would have gladly girt their loins
 To wield their weapons at your side robustly.

Midst Norway's fells there's many a breast that bleeds,
 There's many a heart that burns for your condition,
 Fraternal flame that will survive the years.

'Tis only Treachery spreads hatred's seeds
 And wakes Stupidity's unproved suspicion
 By threatening the folk with fancied fears!

Yet once again, — ye noble sons of Norway,
 Brave Swedish brothers! Stir before too late!
 Hark, still from Denmark drones the din of war-play,
 The page turns swiftly in the book of Fate.

Remember, Slesvig was, from days long vanished,
 A fair branch of the North's great oak, true-grown;
 — Soon all that's Denmark will perchance be banished
 Except its honour as memorial-stone.

Posterity will judge our conduct then,
 Do not repay heart's noble call with treason,
 Nor break the North's most fair fraternal band.

To work then, boldly, sword and word and pen,
 Sound forth the voice of Honour, Duty, Reason,
 Reach brother-folk a loving brother's hand!

Another call for Scandinavian unity against the continuing German threat to Slesvig and Holstein; Dannevang, the ancient name for Denmark; the Eider, the river between the two Duchies; Finland, the Swedish province annexed by Russia in 1809; Øresund, the narrow channel between Sweden and Denmark; Oscar I, King of Sweden-Norway 1844-59; Zealand, the largest of the Danish islands, on which Copenhagen is situated.

Poems from 1850
 TO NORWAY'S BARDS

Why, Bards, so obsessed with a Past so far distant,
 With long-interred eld, with memories that moulder,
 An image as faint as the cloud-muffled smoulder
 From stars when the night shows that dawn is insistent?
 — That spark you possess, was it not, then, acquired
 As a gift to be used on behalf of the nation,

Which asks that the bard with a mouth that's inspired
Interpret its longing, its pain, its elation?

So often you've sung of "the proud heights that tower",
Where pine-forest thrives and the glacier's begotten,
But visions and dreams that erupt with such power
In brotherly hearts, — these you may have forgotten!
Why heed not the ferment that souls can display
So richly, intensely before it's expended?
Why weave not these visions to fashion your lay,
Why shape not these tones to a harmony blended?

O, fair forms indeed in the present now shimmer, —
From valley, from fell, when it shines, when it lowers.
Ha, do you not see there the riches that glimmer,
A poem of folk-life with beautiful flowers!
These transient images must be set free
In songs that describe them, in lifelike portrayal,
They lack but the bard's inspirational "Be!"
To don the grand garb of our poesy's raiment!

Appropriately "Bards" (medieval court poets) in a poem that castigates contemporary poets for their obsession with Norway's heroic past. In his plea for a poetry of the present and of the people, Ibsen follows the example of Wergeland.

MEMORIES OF A BALL

A fragment of life in poetry and prose

PROLOGUE

To Stella!

Here before thy feet I lay
This fresh gathering of flowers
Sprung from Memory's garden bowers,
The late summer's fair display;
 You'll not find for-
 Get-me-not or
 Smiling pansy
 There or tansy,
Not the opulence we see
That the sun of spring empowers.
— Stella! Those the blooms I gave
Are mere pale-as-alabaster
Sheaves of sad, autumnal aster
That had burgeoned from a grave! —

1.

We're assigned, for life's duration,
Angel Memory's ministrations;
From your childhood's beauteous spring
He will fondly fare beside you,

Gently hum old songs, provide you
 Fairly braided,
 Never-faded
 Memories for your garlanding.

Spring-time fades, but there remains
 One bloom yet, of introspection, —
 Yes, each page of life retains
 Its full trove of recollection,
 And, when further down Time's stream
 You, one day, leaf through the pages,
 There stand memories down the ages
 Ranged like figures from a dream,
 Ne'er forgotten,
 Heaven-begotten,
 Just like springtime's lovely flowers
 When your own heart's winter lowers. —

Yes, each moment of your life
 Gently resonates an echo,
 Sometimes brief, at times long-ringing
 From the harp of memory's stringing.
 But of all the days passed yonder,
 Should you call them back to ponder,
 You will find no single hour
 Beats a ball for memory-power!

That may ring a little flat,
 And, moreover, unpoetic, —
 For an ear's refined aesthetic
 It could well be better that
 You should hear, instead of dancing,
 Something "grander", more "enhancing",
 Just as though that gleaming hall,
 Gaily decked out for a ball,
 With a charming flirt-formation
 Rocket-launching invitation
 As the music starts, could be
 Quite devoid of poesy! — — —
 — — — — — — — — —

But it's not such rumination
 That provides soul's inspiration,
 There's the serious side as well, —
 Jollity can't render solely
 That blithe ball-room setting wholly,
 All its fair-bewitching spell! —
 While each face evinces pleasure,
 Many, fevered past all measure,
 Whom conflicting passions seize,
 In the waltz's wild gyration

Swirl to calm their agitation
 Though for but one moment's ease;
 Many a breast, — but I refrain
 From attempting thus to capture
 Coolly that wild play of pain
 In the hall replete with rapture, —
 Play the pilgrim if you please,
 View yourself the scene I've noted,
 To Terpsichore devoted! — — —

What sheer floods of brilliance flow
 From the range of windows sending
 Forth their brightness, condescending
 On the darkened street below, —
 There where many an uninvited
 Propping up the gate, with longing
 Eyes the ballroom's merry thronging
 And the bliss through windows sighted. — —
 Ha, but how well life's depicted, —
 One of two, your scope's restricted,
 — Either go as bidden guest
 To life's banquet with the best,
 Or, while night's keen-piercing wind blows
 Through you, chilled from head to feet,
 You can watch there from the street,
 Staring through the gleaming windows! — — —
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

But inside, what to-and-froing!
 Like the stars of winter glowing,
 Or the clearest crystal-light,
 Untold candles glitter bright,
 While a motley blend of sprightly
 Groups on light and nimble feet
 Passing up and down there meet
 And exchange their smiles politely.

See, however far you stare
 Your eye's met with beauty sheerly;
 But, my friend, don't look too nearly,
 For with flowers in her hair,
 In that dress whose white's enhancing,
 Even a thirty-year-old fair
 Is a sylph when she's out dancing! —
 Roses, roses everywhere! — —
 Rose the very cheeks repair!
 White-armed fillies,
 Breasts like lilies
 With their alabaster sheen
 There set off with lace resplendent;
 Here a pinkish ditto's been

Kept from sight behind a pendant;
 See that Miss there, hardly daring
 To despatch a glance by staring
 At that bunch of youthful gallants
 Who, with opera-hats for form,
 Keep, each one, his lady warm, —
 Give her time, — precocious talents,
 — That young Miss was, after all,
 First confirmed, you know, last Fall! — — —
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Ah, but what rich, motley life
 This same brilliant ball-room houses!
 Like a vision fever rouses
 When your heart's-dream of a wife
 In your sleep's wild fantasy
 Floats right past you airily. — — — —
 O, I'll be there too, you'll find,
 Where there's racketing, rampaging
 Wild, tumultuous as my mind
 When its storm of pain is raging; —
 — In the hubbub to discover
 Swift oblivion or — my lover! —
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

2.

THE LAST PAGES OF A DIARY

— Foolish dreamer! What are you doing here amongst
 these bustling crowds? Is it the irony of fate that has brought
 you to seek your heart's ideal in a ballroom? —

And would it truly please you to find her here? Would
 it give you pleasure if your heart's ideal were made incarnate
 in the ideals of the ballroom? —

Rational or irrational, it is all the same; — *I must!* What
 can will or reason avail against the inner, potently lethal yet
 redemptive yearning? —

"I must!" — — — — —

Remember these words, you clod! who coldly denounce
 the tempestuous longing in the human soul, — remember
 them and do not forget that in them you read the justification
 for so many existences, bewildering and annihilating! —
 — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

What is it stirring inside all these happy, smiling people?—
 They have come hither in the expectation of pleasure and
 gratification; — have they found what they are looking for, or

The dawning of my life on the final page of my diary! — Strange; —
 one speaks of an eternity, — — must there be an eternity to
 follow this dawn? — — — — —

Yes, I shall go home, — I shall once more live through
 my life, my love, — and then out into the dark of night to dream
 and — — — — —

— — — — —
*Stella, the name of Wergerland's spiritual inspiration; the asters maybe a playful reference to
 the flowers in Welhaven's The Last Day of September; they may help suggest a touch of
 parody that undermines the high romanticism of the prologue and prepares for the sceptical
 realism that follows.*

THE MILL-LAD

When in the summer-night's gentle gleam
 The beck roars in its rock-bed yonder,
 While mist floats over the copse and stream,
 The Mill-lad sits, alone, to ponder; —
 A snow-pale radiance filters down between
 The alders' leafage from the moon's bright sheen,
 Casting below
 Its friendly glow
 Across night's silent scene to wander.

It is so late on a Thursday night,
 The Hulder's mountain hall is ringing,
 Deep in the torrent's flood the water-sprite
 Makes flourish with the harp's loud stringing, —
 The Mill-lad to its playing gives good heed,
 Hush, hark! there quaver, echo-like indeed,
 Hulder refrains,
 Torrent-harp strains,
 Borne lightly hence upon night's winging.

And it is Thorgjerd who can entice
 His fiddle's tunes of eerie wonder,
 For he has offered as sacrifice
 The black lamb to the sprite thereunder,
 And thus it is he too has learnt to play,
 And thus his bow so strangely can convey
 Forest-top soughs,
 Fell-beck carouse,
 With Hulder-charm and lur-horn thunder!

But life appears in a dull, cold light
 Back home now and devoid of pleasure,
 For what he has heard and has seen tonight,
 He'll nevermore forget that measure, —
 And so the flood of notes his strings now play

His yearning sang for him — a mournful lay,
 — Melody's stream
 Construes the dream
 That summer night gave leave to treasure! —

The Mill-Lad was the professional name of Thorgjerd Audunsson, a self-taught genius of the fiddle which was esteemed as Norway's national folk-instrument; Ole Bull, the internationally famed concert violinist who founded the Norwegian Theatre in Bergen, was happy to share a concert with him to celebrate its opening; the traditional sacrifice for conjuring up the water sprite was a black lamb.

IT IS OVER!

Hope is quenched! Extinguished, yes, inside me
 Where recently it blazed like flaming noon,
 Magic's flowered portal locked, denied me, —
 Witching dream, why fled you hence so soon?
 Harp-tones through the soul once softly faltered,
 Deep in spirit's shrine a Sabbath reigned,
 Ah, but now that surge of sound has altered
 To a dying breath as heart's night waned.

Spirit's stronghold now lies desolately
 Stone by stone, on heart's dry, barren ground;
 Yet, whenas its mistress enters, stately
 Soars the hall into the night profound;
 She, from Bygone's melancholy region,
 Proffers me with grace the brimming cup,
 And ethereal shades of memories legion
 Palely from their catafalque rise up. — — — —

O, I'll dream so sweetly then and wander
 Through the stronghold in the still of night, —
 Meek forget-me-nots I'll gather yonder,
 Clasp them, as heart's choicest treasure, tight;
 Come, chill Present, with your griefs eternal,
 Shroud like winter but this breast of mine, —
 In my heart a temple stands that's vernal,
 Memory has built there its own shrine! —

ROOM TO LET

Would you care to move, young Miss,
 To a breast you can rely on?
 It's a snug, bright room is this
 In my heart to cast your eye on, —
 But my life there's so absurd,
 Sad and lonesome, — take my word,
 In its walls, without much trouble
 We'd find space to make a double!

True, there's many a little maid
 Dropped in, peeping through the entry,
 But the casual visit paid
 Only leaves the room more empty;
 When she's curtseyed her good-byes,
 Thanked me kindly, formal-wise,
 She's forgotten — but the visit's
 Left me bored and with the fidgets.

No, I can't go on this way,
 As I see the situation!
 If you please, move in to-day,
 Sign a lease for the duration, —
 We're agreed on terms, in sum,
 Only come, young Miss, do come! —
 Let the sun while still on station
 Witness our cohabitation! —

True, the room's no hall, its clear,
 For a blaring social meeting, —
 Plain and cool while summer's here,
 Not, come winter, short of heating; —
 There's one picture on the wall —
 It's my portrait — and that's all;
 I shall paint, should you decide it,
 A friendly cherub close beside it.

Then a tidy of the room. —
 Everything to its compartment,
 Then I'll feel no empty gloom
 Henceforth in my heart's apartment;
 Sabbath-smiles the whole day long,
 Life one smoothly-flowing song,
 I shall guard your every pleasure
 As my room's most priceless treasure!

THE BARD IN VALHALLA

(On the announcement of O. Ehlenschläger's death)

Death's harp has quivered!
 Cleansed and delivered
 High soars the Bard from Earth's pall,
 But on his lofty
 Heavenward journey
 Visits the Æsir-gods' hall.

There the Bard striding
 High over Bifrost
 Into the gods' keep ascends,

There Odin greets him
 Gladly from Lidskjalf, —
 Yet, with the gladness, grief blends;

For the most holy
 Gods of North's regions
 Lose their earth-spokesman henceforth,
 Now is the bonding
 Broken that knitted
 Æsirs to folk of the North!

Strangely they brooded
 Solemnly mooded,
 Mindless of Idavold's joys,
 Valfader's heroes
 Ranged all-resplendent
 Benched in long rows, without noise.

Brage then seizes
 The fair harp that pleases
 With silver-toned cadence of chord,
 Hermod with pleasure
 Leads the gods' treasure,
 Their bard, to his place at the board.

Bard, benched and greeted,
 Silence entreated,
 He of the resonant span
 Hailed the Alfader,
 Frigga and Balder,
 Solace to gods and to man.

To the high-vaulted
 Halls of Valhalla
 Hosts of slain warriors repair, —
 War-splintered shielding
 Decks the unyielding,
 He discerned Starkodder there. —

He the famed hero
 Greets the great singer,
 Asks him of Dana and Nor,
 Asks him of Ingild's,
 Olaf's and Helge's
 Fatherlands, soil they adore. —

Haakon the Holy
 Nears him, but lowly,
 The Bard whose strong voice had maintained
 Unto the listening
 Sons of North's regions

Nobly the tasks he sustained.

Soon the great stronghold's
 Vaulted gates open, —
 Enter the sanctified pair;
 Tranquil their dwelling
 Stands in the shining
 Greenwood of Freia the Fair.

Grateful the stripling
 Kneels to the singer, —
 She, the most wonderful She,
 Hands her most noble,
 Glorious poet
 Eternity's garland in fee.

Soon unto Folkvang,
 Love's proper dwelling,
 Hasten the amorous twain, —
 Freia there waited, —
 The Bard knew the fêted
 Hagbart and Signe again!

Urd of the Past then
 Hands him her beaker
 Filled with the draught that allays, —
 Faithful Verdandi
 Follows her sister,
 Thanks him with sorrowful gaze.

Dimly but sweetly
 Skuld then approaches,
 Points to the Future's blue sky:
 "Singer! eternal
 Fame shall record thee,
 Ne'er shall thy minstrelsy die!

Soon shalt thou enter,
 Benched amongst spirits,
 Transfiguration's abode,
 North's great descendents,
 Howso they alter,
 Ne'er shall forget what is owed!"

The poem draws heavily, by way of compliment, on the Danish poet's Gods of the North; Æsirs, the dominant gods whose chief was Odin (Alfader); Lidskjalf, the throne-cum-watchtower from which Odin surveyed the world; Bifrost, the rainbow by which warriors nobly slain in battle entered Valhalla; Idavold, their field of combat in preparation for the final battle, on the plain of Vigrid, against the gods, monsters and giants who would finally destroy the Æsirs, an event to be followed, after a terrible, protracted winter, by the creation of a new world; Frigga and Balder, Odin's wife and son. The myth had attractions for those who saw nineteenth-century Norway as the brave new world emerging from the ruins of its

heroic medieval past and the centuries-long national torpor under Danish rule; Bragi, the god of poetry and Hermod, conductors of the dead; Freia, goddess of love and pleasure; Folkvang, her palace; Hagbard and Signe, victims of a Romeo and Juliet type tragedy. Æhlensläger himself had written a play on the theme; Urd, Værandi, Skulda, three fate-like beings standing respectively for Past, Present and Future; Haakon the Good (here translated as Holy), a tenth-century king credited with having attempted to Christianise Norway; Starkodder, the name of both a mythical figure and the slayer of Haakon.

IN THE NIGHT

Nature in night doth nestle
 Enwrapped in oblivion's dream,
 The soul then prepares its vessel
 To voyage on Memory's stream; —
 Is borne in a silence sad
 Past shores that are flower-clad
 Yonder where sighing billows
 Lurk under shadowing willows.

See, a consoler is climbing,
 Kindly of mien, aboard,
 Familiar voices start chiming
 A melting minor chord;
 Its soothing harmony
 Wafts o'er the soul of me, —
 So greet as old friends the fair-seeming
 Visions so wistfully dreaming!

Stir not the phosphorescent
 Waves of recall with Life's gust,—
 Truly one thought of the present
 Shatters my world to dust!
 Remembrance's violet that shows
 In twilight, by day will close,—
 Ah, but unfolds again, sprightly,
 Under the stars twinkling brightly.

So gently, my soul, go gliding
 Onward for Memory's shore,—
 There, in night's calm abiding,
 Free to wreath blooms of yore!—
 What bliss in the dream to extend
 Each memory a welcome as friend;
 — Yes bliss, led by yearning's devotion
 To venture Remembrance's ocean! —

One of the six poems sent to Clara Ebbell in 1850.

MOONLIGHT MOOD

Wanly shines the moon's faint light
 In the silent winter night,—
 Would it could as long and sweetly
 Penetrate heart's night so meetly!

Would its silver gleam might peer
 Softly, gently down as here,
 Pacify the mind that's fretful,
 Render Memory forgetful!

Moon, I thank thee for this peace
 That has made my soul its dwelling!
 For the balm's so-brief perfection!

Oh, but should this calm not cease
 To reside, — 'twould mean my quelling
 Heart's most treasured recollection! —

MOONLIGHT STROLL AFTER A BALL

(Written at the request of Sophie Holst, Catherine and Martine)

Hush, how silent! – from the ballroom no more sound of merry-making,
 Not a voice, no note of music through the night-time stillness breaking.

In the west the moon will shortly send its final glances sweeping
 O'er the earth that dreams oblivious, 'neath the snow's white lilies sleeping.

The ball is over; but in fancy still I see amid the whitely
 Figures gliding, inter-weaving in the dance, a sylph that's spritely!

Swiftly sets the moon, and I shall rest in slumber's arms at leisure,
 Then, upon the dream's flood faring, soul can glide with Memory's treasure!

The poem was sent to Sophie Holst shortly before Ibsen left for Christiania. Sophie was the youthful aunt to Rikke Holst with whom Ibsen was later to fall in love.

VOICES FROM THE FOREST

(a fragment of a longer poem)

Do you not hear it, the mournful voice stealing
 Hollowly there through the pines' brooding night?
 Do you not recognise treasures aright,
 Splendour our long-hallowed shade is concealing?
 Pay you no heed to the voice meant to warn
 When through the leafage it faintly comes drifting,
 Does not the bard come, the overcast lifting,
 Spreading the brightness, the solace of dawn?

Long has our lay through the wood's chamber faltered,
 Faint as a zephyr it came and was gone,
 O but the spell that had bound us worked on
 Though generations and times may have altered;
 Over this opulent Nature a-dream,
 Murk of a spiritual gloom spread its pinion, —
 Does not the bard come to end Night's dominion,
 Flooding the gloomiest scree with day's gleam?

Shall not the lofty, the lovely conception
 Nature has pleased to instil in our lays
 Gush from our breast in that splendour's bright rays
 With a new-clarified strength of perception;
 Shall not the folk then awake before long,
 Seize on our lay as a conscious possession,
 Construe in myriad ways its expression,
 Dignified, cleansed by the ring of the song?

Brynjolf Bjarme

Probably composed during the summer of 1849. Nothing is known of the 'longer poem'.

Ibsen left Grimstad for Christiania on 13th April 1850.

POEMS OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANIA PERIOD

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 uncloset
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.

6

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.

7

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' (page 36) 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 fancies 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 gallant!

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,
 Deep 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 unbaptised 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 Søkvaæk.

“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 Høgenesøn, 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 dastardly consigns 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; Søkvaðek, 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!”

POEMS FROM THE BERGEN PERIOD

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 tingling
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.

POEMS FROM THE SECOND CHRISTIANIA PERIOD
1857-64

PROLOGUE

at

THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF THE TALE OF THE MOUNTAINS
at the Kristiania Norwegian Theatre
[18th Sept. 1857]

It is not so far distant — the memory survives —
Since we found wholly alien the common people's lives,
Since ancient peasant ballads, the lur's resounding tone,
Were likely to be met with in country parts alone.

A little to the south, though, art bloomed and bard-hood too,
Whereof we caught a little whiff (at second hand, it's true),
But life in moor and forest, the life the folk there lead
Remained a world denied us, a book we could not read.

Could an artistic subject be wrought of such-like stuff?
Therein can the aesthetic be treated well enough?
Thus posed our bards the question and sang of "pagan days",
Composing — on Apollo and Bacchus — "folkish" lays.

But two of Norway's sons saw things in quite a different light.
Of course, — for they had slumbered a whole midsummer night,
Dreamt of the sprite's weird chanting close by the rushing fall,
And what it was they heard there, they sang back to us all.

Yes, — poetry thus issued from out our native ground;
It was the first spring bird-call song to make our groves resound, —
It sang a long while lonely, grew poorly for a spell,
But what grows now but slowly may some day grow right well.

For should the bush and berry make green our summer clime,
Then birds will sit and sing beneath the sæter-trees with time!
And if the folk list kindly to lur and zither string
Then in the farm-yard, on the scree it's tenfold they will ring.

But yon pair who delivered our true and native voice,
Shall, till the final reaping, in high esteem rejoice;
Now may they share in slumber the mother-land's embrace, —
Their graves may be forgotten, their names nought can efface.

Henr. Ibsen

*Ibsen was appointed artistic director to the Norwegian Theatre which had failed, since its foundation in 1852, to promote specifically Norwegian talent, subject-matter and language. Within a fortnight of his arrival Ibsen put on a double bill: *The Tale of the Mountains*, a ballad-opera by Henrik Bjærregaard, and a sequel by Henrik Wergeland — the two, now dead, “sons of Norway” who had drawn on native themes. The production was very well received “A little to the south” — a reference to Danish literature.*

AT OLE VIG’S GRAVE

Thursday 24 December 1857.

Warrior, rest! your day of battle ended,
 Wounds, no longer burning, mended
 In your noble breast!
 For the goal of your ambitions,
 For your folk, you fought life’s missions
 To the last, dour test.
 Good the deed you have exemplified,
 Grace’s bounty you’ve now sampled, —
 Bliss’s timeless rest.
 God’s hand will in charity
 Open to your soul now free!
 Your reward, now strife must cease,
 Is heaven’s peace!

H.Ibsen

Ole Vig, of yeoman stock, became one of the leading activists in the field of education. He died of mental exhaustion at the age of 33.

TO THE MEMORY OF CARL JOHAN

(dedicated to the Carl Johan Society)

Dead Prince, what more tribute, pray?
 Has the North, your bier-side keeping,
 Offered you no filial weeping,
 Mourned not by your lifeless clay?
 Have we not in song and rhyme
 Raised memorials unstinted
 Where your name in gold imprinted
 Will resist the lapse of time?

Judged we not our fame to rise
 With your noble reputation?
 Drew we not, with approbation,
 Profit from your enterprise?
 Your triumphant faring forth
 On your Alexander-mission, —
 Stands it not, a shared tradition,
 In the annals of the North?

Dead Prince, what more tribute, pray?
 Are all claims not met then, truly,
 Has the folk not praised you duly,
 Mourned beside your lifeless clay?
 Do you think that memory's due
 Can be traced in other fashion
 Than through word-play fired with passion,
 Limned in ceremonial hue? —

Why, in Norway's youthful breast
 Warm and vital tides are streaming;
 Brother, quit nostalgic dreaming,
 Share in day-time's epic quest!
 Let a spring dawn be imparted
 To our northern region's sky,
 Let *our actions* testify
 To the great, the great departed!

Gaze turned inward, gaze intent
 On the heritage endued us!
 He well knew and well construed us
 When he wrote his testament!
 For our hero-monarch's grave
 Folds more than the *hero* in it, —
 There, though buried deep within it,
 Lies *our time's first Scandinave!*

Brotherhood on freedom founded —
 Thus the King's last testament!
 An unfinished muniment
 There it stands yet, scrub-surrounded.
 For the cause, then, up! Away!
 Up, North's sons, to toil ungrudging!
 Tasks achieved repay the drudging,
 Morning's moil, the strenuous day!

Bard-like, of prophetic power,
 Noble Carl Johan would stand;
 Past the mundane's desert sand
 He glimpsed future's garden flower.
 Whet your eyesight's blunted sense;
 Then your gaze shall dwell, arrested,
 On the vision that attested
 Carl Johan's percipience.

Storm dissension's soldiery!
 More heroic spearhead never
 Led the Nordic sons' endeavour
 On to war and victory!
 Spurn the present's petty strife,
 Conflict between rival factions;

Look towards the whole, not fractions,
Towards our noble future life!

May the North's strong foster-ties,
Royal dream in deeds new-minted,
Be the epitaph imprinted
Where the buried hero lies!
Kinship scorning fell and wave,
Mutual aims with mutual power,
Be our thanks to the endower,
This our time's first Scandinave.

Henr. Ibsen

Count Bernadotte, one of Napoleon's marshals, elected Crown Prince of Sweden in 1810, became King, after Norway's severance from Denmark in 1814, of the joint kingdom of Sweden/Norway with the title Carl Johan. Norway, which had sought independence, was initially hostile to him, but Ibsen hails him as the originator of the concept of a united Scandinavia. He died in 1844. Ibsen was a member of the Society. Alexander mission — Carl Johan visited Alexander of Russia to obtain his consent to the amalgamation of Norway with Sweden; in return he supported Russian claims to Finland.

SONG AT THE CELEBRATION OF OUR FOREFATHERS' MEMORY

13th January 1858

(Mel: "Vift stolt paa Codans Bølger")

In folk-lore's ample regions
Are spots that clouds o'erlay;
There rune-stones in their legions
Portentous signs display;
We note, so be our choice is
For myth or history,
A host of scattered voices; —
But never harmony.

But if the mind's exertions
Attain its Nordic goal,
In Memory's scattered versions
We'll find a theme that's whole;
And should the bard's flame kindle,
And should the folk respond, —
The Present's murk will dwindle,
We'll see one mutual bond.

For Bygone's clear perception
Is what our times most need,
If that inspired conception
Is ever to succeed,
If yonder thunderous presage
With triple potency

Is to bear North its message
Of Memory's poesy.

Henr. Ibsen

Triple potency — the collaboration of Norway, Sweden and Denmark to form one Scandinavian bloc.

SONG

at

THE CELEBRATION AT KLINGENBERG

17th May 1858

Mel: "Høiest løfter jeg nu Guldpokalen."

Brother Norsemen, let your song go swinging
Fairly o'er the fell;
Set your joy in freedom freely winging
In bright evening's spell!
Let your joyous lay be dedicated
As a festive song
To the strivers who've worked hard and long
That your birthright may be reinstated!

But a solemn vow too must be blended
In your sounding lay:
Vow that Memory's range shall be extended
And enriched some day: —
Vow to stand unmoved, like sturdy paling,
By your legacy, —
Guard it with mind's perspicacity,
Ward it well 'gainst fury's weapon-flailing!

Yes, that gift you'll honour by your striving,
To the North you'll tell
That the Bygone's golden seeds are thriving
Freshly on the fell!
Hail, then, Norway's muster, fair and vernal!
In its freedom see
No bedizened, rootless maypole tree,
But a sturdy pine-tree that's eternal!

Henr. Ibsen

Klingenberg, the oldest and best known amusement park in Christiania, later named the Tivoli.

KING HAAKON'S BANQUET HALL,

a narrative poem.

(By Henrik Ibsen)

In Bergen's burgh high revelry;
King Haakon's hall rejoices;

A score of turrets to the sky
 Rang out their brazen voices;
 Nine nights in jest and pastime flew,
 Mirth made each day seem shorter,
 For Scotland's prince was plighted to
 King Eric's little daughter.

For guard and groom the cloth was spread
 Upon the royal table,
 A mesh of green wreathed overhead
 From castle-spire and gable;
 The throngs, decked out for holiday,
 In every street-way clustered,
 And moored abreast in Bergen's bay
 Gilt dragon-prows lay mustered.

At last — one evening in the fall, —
 The merry-making ended,
 Swept from the east a misty pall
 On fjord and fell descended;
 The palace grove where elm-trees lean
 Above the strand was crowded,
 Though late the hour folk still were seen,
 Their brows all grave and clouded.

The pretty five-year-old king's bride
 To Scotland must be sailing,
 The ship's hauled off the Holm to ride
 Before the wind prevailing; —
 It lies beside the quay close by
 The church of the Apostle,
 And kindled lanterns hung on high
 In elm- and birch-boughs jostle.

And to a thousand torches red
 The leaves glowed as on fire;
 Along the strand a whisper spread,
 The lur-horn sound rose higher;
 And then the palace gates unlock;
 The foreign delegation
 With henchmen, guards, approach the dock
 In stately ostentation.

The king's musicians followed them, —
 The king's self next in order;
 The king's brow girt with many a gem
 Set in a golden border;
 From the king's sides and shoulders flowed
 The scarlet he was wearing,
 But in his wake four squires strode,
 His train right proudly bearing.

His eye a pensive grief portrayed
 As in a glass reflected,
 Upon his brow a shadow played,
 His mind soared, far-projected;
 For distant Scotland's royal throne
 It gull-like spanned the water,
 Where sceptre, bride-bed, burial-stone
 Stand ready for his daughter.

On the king's left strode pace for pace
 The Scottish lord new-cited
 To serve in the Crown Prince's place
 And to his bride be plighted.
 He raised upon his massive arm
 The fair maid who sat gazing
 Upon the evening's noisy charm,
 The links and lanterns blazing.

Like a small plaything of her own
 Her little hands were bearing
 The crown which on far Scotland's throne
 She would, as queen, be wearing;
 She showed the precious jewellery
 As on the troop went sweeping:
 "See what my father's given me;
 Now it's all mine, for keeping!"

The throng laughed loudly and with zest
 And clapped their hands right bravely;
 But in the king's wake strode a guest,
 With teeth tight-clenched, full gravely.
 Withdrawn, a frown his forehead seamed,
 His smile, part indignation;
 Sir Audun Huggleikssøn, esteemed
 The first man of the nation.

But Haakon, Audun's near of kin,
 A duke, the king's own brother,
 At the child's words, with crafty grin
 Looked sharply at the other;
 He stole a glance at Audun's grip,
 In fury clenched so tightly,
 Then nodded at the sweet young slip
 Who sat the Scot's arm lightly.

And after in a medley streamed
 Lords, ladies bright as flowers;
 Fine silver head-tires softly gleamed
 Beneath the green-wood bowers;
 As phosphorescence in the night

Burns where the rudder races,
 So man by man the train shone bright
 That trod the monarch's paces.

Aboard the Scottish craft the sail
 On gilded yard was swelling; —
 And townfolk, chatting, homeward trail,
 Each one to his own dwelling.
 Soon Eric, festive-garbed, appears
 Back in the banquet quarter,
 But down the firth the vessel steers
 That bears the king's young daughter.

Within the elm-grove all is night, —
 The lamps' red glow, abated.
 Where, at the bluff, to left and right
 The fjord was separated, —
 Two men in secret linger on,
 One handsome, full of fire, —
 It is Sir Audun Hugleikssøn
 And Haldor, his good squire.

Sir Audun from the bluff observed
 Far off the ship receding,
 While still outlined where Ashland curved
 It could be seen proceeding,
 But then it altered course to run
 Up through the Sound and vanished; —
 And then he bowed his head as one
 Whose every hope is banished.

How tall he was and strong and proud!
 Cheeks brown and freckle-spotted,
 His forehead manly deeds avowed
 With candid rune-lines plotted;
 The brow's keen stars, they testified
 To saga-thoughts most daring; —
 So stood he while the little bride
 On sea-borne planks went faring.

He summoned Haldor with a word; —
 His deep voice seemed to ponder;
 "I think of what last year occurred
 At Hægranæs, home yonder, —
 Returning from the chase one night
 We paused a while together;
 A raven from the nearby height
 Croaked o'er us in the heather.

"Your kin have long possessed the art
 Of bird-call divination;

You once tweaked Future's veil to chart
 My life's predestination, —
 You swore to me the raven's cry
 Predicted, come all weather,
 That she who quits the land and I
 Should end, one fall, *together*.

“One lie your prophecy has been,
 The raven's croak mere prating;
 Soon she must grace as Scotland's queen
 The golden throne there waiting.”
 And Audun turned away enraged, —
 But Haldor then, his squire,
 Laughed in his beard as he engaged
 Right warmly with his sire.

“What though the young princess be gone
 For Scotland yonder sailing,
 This, sire, you may depend upon:
 You'll meet again, unfailing;
 The raven's croak declared your fate
 And hers, for both 'tis plighted, —
 Where're she goes she'll, soon or late,
 Be at your side, united.

Sir Audun simply shrugged askance
 And gave his words no heeding;
 He stood as in a thoughtful trance,
 A torpor vision-breeding.
 He creased his thick and matted brow
 And clutched his sword-hilt tightly,
 Reviving many a memory now,
 Some gloomily some lightly.

“I meted justice, set the law,
 Gave Lagabøter backing,
 I warded rapine's tooth and claw,
 I soothed the land's sore racking;
 And as his envoy I have plied
 The wild and western waters,
 And brought back Eric's royal bride
 From Britain to these quarters.

“King Eric I in peace sustained,
 In time of need, defended, —
 Base trickery was all I gained,
 With death, perhaps, intended —
 He's wroth with me, I well may guess,
 But north, by Søndmør's sector,
 In Lyster, high on Hægranæs,
 My stronghold stands protector.

“There I am safe and there I’ll go;
 My business here is ended;
 I turn my mind from Eric though
 We’re from one line descended.
 I asked for the princess’s hand,
 To meet his debt of honour,
 And he — discourteously banned
 The regent’s claim upon her!

“On Hægranæs such dreams I’ve dreamed
 Past any man’s conception;
 The raven’s prophecy I deemed
 No fanciful deception.
 I thought a message was implied
 That I’d fain prove not hollow;
 Were but the princess once my bride
 Then many a thing might follow.

“For heirless is King Eric, far
 Declined into recession, —
 Prince Haakon, scarcely popular,
 Can thank me for succession.
 No expedition-leader he,
 No statesman in the making —
 Were I king’s son-in-law, I see
 The measures I’d be taking!”

And thus he dreamed and further dreamed, —
 Then started from his trancing;
 For from the banquet-hall there streamed
 High mirth, to set night dancing.
There breathed the harp, the fiddle rang
 Like spruce when spring is blowing,
 The comely palace-maidens sang,
 While on the dance kept flowing.

He cried “Away! leave merry jest,
 King’s banquet, harps and laughter;
 When Eric’s child set in the west
 My kingdom followed after.
 Make ready ship, this very night
 We’ll wend our way together!” — —
 A raven from the nearest height
 Croaked o’er him in the heather.

Sir Audun halted in mid-stride,
 He felt his blood was rising,
 He turned to Haldor, staring-eyed
 And voiceless, for advising.
 The squire made but a little bow
 And smiled through teeth clenched tightly:

“Hail to thee, Norway’s lord — for now
Thy fate I fathom rightly!”

Then Audun’s mighty bosom swelled,
The silk shirt ripped asunder:
Into his voice a tremor welled,
He scarce could speak for wonder;
He whispered: “Raven — what’s foretold?”
Thus answered his escorter:
“It sang then of a throne of gold,
For you and Eric’s daughter!”

He tore the chain from round his neck; —
“God help a traitor, squire — —!
If Norway’s throne’s for sale, I reckon
To know who’ll be one buyer! — —
Take this as pay and thanks in one, —
Bear home alone the tidings —
That Audun Huggleiksson stays on,
Here, with the King abiding!”

Then in the east a bank of cloud
On storm’s wide wings ascended;
But still from Haakon’s hall rang loud
High mirth and music blended;
On, for the laughter, harps he pressed,
The feast’s right royal quarter; —
But west the ship fared, ever west
With Eric’s little daughter.

King Eric’s infant daughter, Margaret, was, through her Scottish mother, next in line to the Scottish throne to which there was no male heir; as such she was in political terms a valued prize competed for, (though Ibsen omits the politics) by England and Scotland. Margaret died en route for Scotland in the Orkneys in 1240. Audun Huggleiksson, a powerful figure during the reign of Magnus the Law Giver, acted as regent during the minority of Eric. An ambitious and unscrupulous man, he was imprisoned in 1299 and executed by Eric’s successor in 1302 — hence the enigmatic prophecy and the tragic intimations of the rising storm. Hægraness, a headland east of Trondheim.

SONG
at
THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
OF THE
FRIENDS OF CHRISTIAN AUGUST.

[25 Sept.] 1858.

(Mel: Vift stolt paa Codans Bølger)

War-weapons drawn, in order,
Betrayed but undismayed,
On coast and mountain border
Stood Norway’s watch arrayed,

Brows broke in that contention,
 Our soil blushed red therein,
 That neighbourly dissension
 With doughty Swedes, our kin.

But heaven's will decided
 The North should live it through;
 For both sides were provided
 A helmsman matched by few; —
 His fame shall spread wherever
 May beat Norwegian hearts;
 His task, his dear endeavour:
 To fetch Spring to these parts.

And therefore, here we muster
 To offer him our song.
 He stood here mid the bluster
 Of kin-strife loud and long; —
 Now kin, once wroth, see truly
 Strength comes from unity;
 Hence it is meet *Friends* duly
 Should praise his probity.

But more yet is befitting
 The great man's league of Friends:
 We'll drain a pledge committing
 To reconciliation's ends.
 Strike on, then, Norway's rifles,
 Strike on at strife's behest!
 But not, or honour stifles,
 Our doughty kinsmen's breast!

Henr. Ibsen

Christian August, Prince of Augustenberg, leader of a government mission sent by Frederick VI, who, as King of Denmark/Norway, provoked in 1808 an English blockade that cut connections between the two parts of his kingdom. Christian August won the love of the Norwegians by his democratic ways and by his support for Norway's ill equipped citizen army when it briefly resisted being incorporated with Sweden. However, he showed statesmanship by refusing to attack Sweden in retaliation. His love of Norway, combined with his concern for Scandinavian unity, made him a popular prospective heir to the new joint kingdom of Sweden/Norway. Elected Crown Prince of Sweden in 1809, he died a year later..

A WAKE

Way up the dale that verges the fell
 A log hut lies with its byre;
 Through the smoke-vent two bare summits scowl
 Down on the open fire.

They are short of sky in the farmstead,
 There's scarce a strip of it showing;
 They are short of sun; midsummer time

Brings just an hour's glowing.

But folk on the farm scarce give it a thought;
They calmly perform their labours; —
Six week-days, milking and on the fell,
And Sundays, church with the neighbours.

Now, though, the worst has befallen, —
The man lies confined and tended,
The door stands wide open, just one last time
Will he darken it; then it's all ended.

The holy words have been read and been heard,
Church-candles light the bier dimly;
Grandmother stares with an eye of grief
Up through the smoke-vent, grimly.

Today the old lady feels crushed between
Those summits devoid of cover;
It seems to her that the pair of them loom
Over the roof above her.

Each mourner there broods and then broods again,
Each breast feels the sorrow's starkness;
As though it were perched up there on the peaks
And were beating its wings of darkness.

But out where the church is the valley's broad,
Heaven's heights are displayed, the sun's shining, —
Out there such a beautiful light's bestowed
On those who must sit repining.

The weeks will pass by for those quiet folk
Up at the hut and byre;
The naked summits will doubtless glare,
Yet more closely massed, on the fire.

The sun will appear to them briefer still
When the mid-summer light starts sinking;
But wounds will be healed, the mind is strong,
The years will pass, to their thinking.

For though it is hard in loss and gloom
To cope with the daily labours, —
Yet it is bliss to be looking ahead
To Sunday church with the neighbours.

SONG
at
THE DEDICATION OF THE NEW BUILDING
FOR LILLEHAMMER'S GRAMMAR AND SECONDARY SCHOOL
Friday 5th Nov. 1858.
(Mel: I Rosenlund under Sagas Hal.)

When slopes are fading and woods must shed
Their autumn leaves in their legions, —
We consecrate a new seedling-bed
For Mind's perpetual regions.
High up on solid rock it rears,
By sturdy walls protected; —
God bless benignly through the years
This work that we've erected!

But mountain progeny know full well
That highland plants keep on thriving,
That pine-tops grown on the lofty fell
Thrust bravely, heavenward striving;
They know that straws mid rocky falls
Ripe, golden ears can nourish; —
So here, within the school-house walls
May fertile learning flourish!

For God will answer this garden's needs
With His fair, clement weather,
That Thought's young shoots, and that Mind's new seeds
May thrive and ripen together;
He sends mild outdoor breezes where
Light gleams from Life's high places;
For Thought depends upon fresh air
As bird-songs need Spring's graces.

* * *

Be pledged, then, blessed nursery,
To Mind's inspiring tendance!
The seed sown here will sprout sturdily
On graves of our far descendants.
Do not divide life's springtime zest
From disciplined instruction, —
See, in the school-house walls, the best
Of shields, but no obstruction!

Henr. Ibsen

Norway had reason to be proud of its educational system; by 1860, ten years earlier than England, it instituted universal and compulsory education.

SONG AT THE STUDENT BALL
the 15th December 1858.

Festive is the student's mind;
In his rich young soul there's beaming
Lamp-light cast by Thought refined,
The Ideal's bright tapers gleaming;
Everyday's null regimen,
Where folk slave and where folk slumber,
Lies beyond the student's ken,
He'll not yield and swell the number.
(Festive is the student's mind!)

Spell-bound is the student's sight;
World's grim field where carnage lowers,
Lit by Soul's brave flash of light
Seems to him the best of bowers.
Strife itself seems festive play,
Boldly in the ranks he marches,
Seeks his goal the nearest way
Through fair rose-chain-woven arches.
(Spell-bound is the student's sight!)

Lovely is the student's dream,
Precious his envisioned booty, —
Long live, then, the student's dream.
Long live Woman in her beauty!
Her ideal-fired radiance, —
For the youth, a dew-like shower, —
Never fell on him perchance
With tonight's abundant power.
(Lovely is the student's dream!)

Henr. Ibsen

LIFE'S SPRING

A poem

by

HENR. IBSEN

1858

1

I will out, I will out, God's nature's there,
The joy of a bright spring day;
My bosom bursts, at my cage-bars I tear,
I've the wings and the heart for the fray.

I've the heart for a battle with worldly woe;
It has fettered me far too long.
Now I must revel and laughing go
With the spring-time's fluttering throng.

I've breathed elegiacal frost-flowers white
 On window-panes chill as ice;
 A heart-felt beam from the home of light
 Has destroyed now that cold device.

My mind's like a barque with topsail spread,
 I am blithesome, young and I'm free;
 My course is set for the heights ahead,
 You'll be left behind in my sea!

So out with the ballast of judgement sound!
 Then set the last scrap she'll take!
 Perhaps I'll be running my vessel aground
 But I'll leave your astern in my wake!

2

Birch trees sprout on the mountain sides
 Mid anemones, stones clad in mosses,
 A seething vitality resides
 In each fresh young branch that tosses.

Birches turn green in the fell-side's lee
 So lushly as though they'd be bursting;
 A birth-pang courses voluptuously
 Through virginal twigs, life-thirsting.

Birches brightly spangle the fell,
 Scent freshly the dew of morning,
 Though they, come Mid-summer Eve, could well
 Be stripped for the vent's adorning.

Hillside birch! For each leaf you gain
 For your glittering virgin raiment, —
 I'll treasure a pregnant pollen-grain
 To grow into song, as repayment.

Like you I have vital strengths that heave
 And strive for the daylight shining;
 Should they run dry come Mid-summer Eve
 That's little cause for repining.

Perhaps I'll fall silent ere you are stripped bare —
 Can I know what fate to adjust to — ?
 But free in the Spring while it's lush and fair
 I'll keep singing, because I *must* do!

Like a thousand ensigns fanning
 When a calm alights,
 See — young, tender pines are spanning
 Moorland and the heights.

There's a path through, wheresoever
 It may chance to lead —
 Anywhere, but homeward, never. —

Vent, the smoke-vent or chimney customarily adorned with greenery for the occasion.

THE SEAGULL'S CRY

On land and sea the outlook's rough,
 Bad weather southward too;
 My Danish brother, sign enough
 An evening storm is due.
 Up here, from the Norwegian fjord
 A flock of gulls compete
 In soaring flight to spread abroad
 A warning cry that, by the Lord,
 Is more robust than sweet.

But ride, grey sea-bird, even so
 The rack on Ran's wild steed!
 Scream out, scream out; 'tis meet although
 Your voice be harsh indeed!
 'Tis meet your cry should be so hoarse,
 No dulcet minstrelsy;
 The blind reefs break the billows' force,
 A rain-squall hither sets its course, —
 Shriek, 'tis your destiny!

You nightingale in Denmark's wood,
 Why are you vexed that trills
 You uttered in yon regions should
 Be lost mid pine-clad hills?
 Here in the North you have no place,
 Abroad your fostering,
 By Norway's fjords no kin can trace,
 Nor did the glaciers e'er embrace
 Your birthright in their ring.

Say, brother, have you heard aloft
 The grebe when clouds hang grey; —
 Has *that* a voice as trim and soft
 As larks down Zealand way?
 A thousand feet at least it sails
 The height when Autumn's due,

Like some blood-boltered child it wails,
 It never learnt sweet, dulcet scales,
 Spring's serenade, from you!

Trust me, as little as the spruce
 And birch on moorland ground
 Will to the tempest's bow produce
 The self-same fiddle sound,
 So little can your starling be,
 Your royal bird, a sounding-board
 For the late Autumn's melody
 Sea-borne at dusk across the sea
 From Senjen's nesting horde.

You, Dane — you are yourself as weak
 In voice and meanly bred;
 But do not bid us, out of pique,
 Change Norway's steel for lead.
 For you it was who missed the breeze
 That sped the time's swift keel,
 Long since you held the obsequies
 For language keen as winter seas,
 As your forefathers' steel.

You coped well, on the frontier lined,
 When your dear blood must flow;
 But hostile forces in your mind —
 When did you face *that* foe?
 You trounced the Teuton in fair fray,
 Drove south his horde in flight —
 But exultation fades away;
 The Hun troll in your breast holds sway,
 Still claims his freehold right.

You lauded feats your sons achieved,
 But German was the mode, —
 In German style your daughters grieved,
 So too your bards' song flowed!
 And German your best runic stave
 On saga-folk of yore — ;
 Come, break the bond, the times so crave!
 And if you dare not — then the grave —
 You will be worth no more!

Henr. Ibsen

Ibsen's admiration for the physical courage shown by the Danes in the face of German aggression was matched by his contempt for their reluctance to recognise native Norwegian language in place of the Dano-Norwegian used for literary purposes. He goes further by accusing the Danes of cultural subservience to Germanic models. Ran, a sea-goddess whose wild horse symbolises the storm; Zealand, the island on which Copenhagen stands; Senjen, a rookery of sea birds off the Norwegian coast.

SONG AT
MADAM MARIE GERHARDINE HOFF'S GRAVE
30 May 1859.

Life's garden blossomed, you walked there, no other
So richly endowed, as a wife and a mother;
You gazed on a future through Hope's bright hue —
A grave, a grave lay in wait for you!

Death's angel beckoned, he bade you attend him;
On radiance's billows you steer now, ascending;
You cannot now solace your loved one's dearth —
A grave, a grave is your home on earth.

Springtime's fair blooms on your coffin now scattered
Contain welcome comfort for hope that's been shattered, —
They bury a life-seed deep in the mould:
The grave, the grave, then a dawn of gold!

Souls who lament now, o'er shadowed by sorrow!
Beyond night's veil beckons the promise of morrow;
In faith there's a salve for bereavement's sting:
The grave, the grave, then reunion's Spring!

TO WOMAN
AT THE FOURTH GREAT SONG FESTIVAL
WHITSUN 1859
IN ARENDAL

With summer in soul through the fjord and the Sound we bowled;
High spirits bloomed as the choruses rolled!
In hillside leaf display,
In bird-song on our way
We found the same craving, the urge that we feel, —
Lust for the light, jubilation and zeal!

The soul of a singer's a birch when the Spring's at best;
Veins all a-seethe with a mighty zest;
It ripens there one day,
A leaf-crown on the spray, —
See, there's his fulfilment, in song that now blooms:
Lust after light is life's challenge that looms!

But here in the land of light's luring is Woman's place, —
Soul-seedlings owe their fresh shoots to her grace;

Will seek her for their own
 Anew as songs full-grown!
 Praise be to Woman where song's billows ring,
 The fairest of beams in the songster's bright Spring!

Henr. Ibsen

SONG

at

THE GYMNATIC FESTIVAL

26th June 1859.

(Mel. Aa Kjøre Vatn aa kjøre Ved etc)

A cheerful, chirruping flock are we,
 Of mettle, manly in our thinking;
 We've stayed indoors long enough where we
 Were ice-bound, on our anchors jinking;
 Countryside, coast know the summer's here,
 We in our breasts can feel summer's cheer!
 Blue is the fjord;
 We must abroad,
 To drink the air where massed blooms are winking!

So let life threaten its grind and grief;
 We'll scare those gloomy demons soundly!
 We have a potent, a mild relief
 That heals both soul and limb profoundly;
 The goodly spirits are with us arrayed,
 We face the foeman's army undismayed;
 Level the lance, —
 Heroes, advance,
 Sing victory's chorus, fresh and roundly!

Yes, hence our brotherhood still exists,
 Has kept, through the years, surviving;
 We champion Light's cause in the lists, —
 God bless the goal and the striving!
 It's time for action, and that calls for men
 Whose minds are clear to gird swords again; —
 If that is so, —
 Well then, let's go!
 Though small our flock is strong and thriving!

Henr. Ibsen

4th JULY 1859.

Youthful Norway, strike your flag,
 Leave it to the flag-staff clinging;
 Festival wears sorrow's gag,
 Autumn's weight subdues the singing.

Summer's sun is in eclipse,
 Brings no smile to peoples' lips;
 Through the land the rumours quicken
 That our King lies sorely stricken.

Yes, lies stricken far from here,
 Has no eye for sun-lit bowers,
 Youthful Norway, send him cheer,
 Send the folk's fair, heart-grown flowers!
 Air from life's reviving spring
 May remit his suffering.
 Watch his couch in silent session,
 Offer all in your possession.

He gave all to serve the folk,
 Modest, held in warm affection.
 Now vile sickness at a stroke
 Veils his brow with foul infection; —
 Visit him with lullaby,
 Have him in your bosom lie,
 Let him steer for dreamland's beaches, —
 Sweet dreams share the gift of leeches.

Stricken King! His straining breast
 Heaves, a sea storm-lashed and surgent;
 Ah, what was a treasure chest
 Houses now death's fatal serpent.
 Youthful Norway, sooth its pain
 With the dew of song's refrain;
 Folk-hymns for the king's condition,
 Though no cure, may bring remission!

Drowse then, King, and gently rest,
 All the folk will be attendant; —
 Visit grove and mountain crest,
 Norway's pine-wastes, fells resplendent;
 By the firth, in every bay,
 It is one fair Sabbath day;
 King, repose! A pensive nation
 Broods upon its celebration!

In yon dales where torrents foam,
 Skirting ridge and fallen boulders,
 Stands the peasant's log-built home
 Shaded by the leaf-clad shoulders.
 White of beard, the peasant waits
 On his threshold near the gates,
 Stops each rider-by and, hailing,
 Asks him if the king is ailing.

And the old man, lone again,
 Stands outside his humble dwelling,
 Shakes his white and hoary mane,
 Strews the hearth with sweetly smelling
 Birch. It is King Oscar's day,
 Hence the hut's in fine array:
 Hedge-blooms on the shelves and presses,
 Pensive thoughts fill heart's recesses!

Steer your flight above the bay,
 Watch that garden fenced with railing;
 Watch that rag the boy at play
 Fastens red upon the paling!
 He once heard his father brag
 That the flag's King Oscar's flag, —
 So he, in right kingly manner,
 From the arbour, — hoists the banner!

Swan-winged, creaming foam and froth,
 Out to sea the brig goes faring
 Dressed in triple-coloured cloth,
 Our King Oscar's name declaring;
 Weather-tanned, the lad astern
 Scans the dancing waves that churn.
 Each Norwegian ship bears on her
 Norway's flag in Oscar's honour! —

Ah, King, — 'tis a paltry dream
 Your folk's lullabies provide you;
 Serpent's death-bite, torment's stream
 Strengthless to your bed have tied you; —
 But if ever cool relief
 Wafts o'er all your pain and grief, —
 Take it for a prayer addressing
 God, with all your peoples' blessing!

Henr. Ibsen

King Oscar's birthday was celebrated on July 4th; he died four days later. King Oscar's flag: one of the King's first acts on his accession was to authorise Norway's naval vessels to fly specifically Norwegian colours, something that Norway had pressed for over many years.

THE PEOPLE'S GRIEF

The church bells now a message bear
 Wide o'er the fjord and fell;
 Two kindred folk in mourning-wear
 Now bid their prince farewell.
 Today there's but a single thought
 In thronging market, silent room, —
 From log-built cabin, royal fort

One race, two kindred folk consort
To honour Oscar's tomb!

Long have the people and its prince
Shared drawn-out days of pain;
The palace is now silent since
The king's long fight was vain.
The chapel portal will soon close,
There he will rest in sleep,
But outside there's a seed that grows
In course of time fair blooms, and those
Death's scythe shall never reap.

His clay within the grave sleeps sound,
In light his soul aspires, —
There Son and Father he has found
Mid the transfigured choirs.
As heroes famed neared Heaven's gate
In hosts slain by the sword,
So marched King Oscar in like state,
His host of witnesses as great,
To stand before the Lord.

His train was not of warrior breed,
Steel-smitten men in ranks;
His cause a better voice can plead:
The people's hymn of thanks!
In Oscar's modest steps on earth
Resplendent fairies trod;
They came to witness to his worth,
His following made up the dearth
When he approached his God.

And so with God now take your rest, —
Your mission here is spent;
Your deeds stand, in fair Summer dressed,
Your finest monument.
And sorrow's cloud that spread its night
Shall clear the land henceforth, —
But Oscar's strife for truth and right
The folk, the royal line, shall write
In annals of the North.

Henr. Ibsen

Written for King Oscar's funeral service 8th August 1859. The poem awards heroic stature to a king who furthered the cultural life of the nation.

PROLOGUE,
 delivered in the Norwegian Theatre
 21st August [1859].

Grief for Oscar, our bereavement,
 Hall and church have long conveyed.
 His late deeds, his high achievement
 Verse and music have portrayed.
 Here, from this place too, shall rise
 One more voice that testifies; —
 Testifies there are few places
 Where his fame has left no traces.

Sagas are like symphonies,
 Filled with tunes and themes unnumbered,
 Sometimes muted, sometimes thundered,
 Rich with life's complexities.
 Hårdråder's in major key,
 Set for lur and brazenry, —
 Athelstan's sweet minor, cherished
 By the race, have never perished.

So, too, shall King Oscar's ring
 Fresh and hale throughout the ages;
 His display, though sparse, presages
 Whispering, a northern Spring.
 Hence his saga is repaid
 With fair Memory's accolade;
 It shall never be rejected,
 Never by the folk neglected.

Yes, it prophesies a Spring
 Dawning o'er these northern quarters,
 The first daylight on our waters,
 Our hill-people's burgeoning!
 And as grown men in extremes
 Hark back to their stripling dreams,
 So the North shall hark, with reason,
 Back to Oscar's radiant season.

Well his thought bloomed in us all,
 Understanding of his mission:
 Kindred souls in coalition
 Was the folk's great rallying-call.
 And thereby we came to long
 For a living verse and song
 That would picture our Norwegian
 Life in dale and upland region.

What makes us so rich and strong
 As our life in rock-bound straitness,
 As our forebears' deeds of greatness
 Limned in imagery and song?
 As our own reflection's gleam
 Mirrored in Art's welling stream,
 As the music whose profusion
 Answers all the heart's confusion?

Hence King Oscar's signature
 Deep in runic stone is rendered;
 Folk-verse, drama folk-engendered
 Blazed new trails, his guidance sure.
 Still the road is hard and bleak,
 Still the seedling's young and weak;
 But it houses vital power,
 May well burgeon forth to flower.

And, in course of time maybe,
 Art with manly approbation
 Will construe his reputation,
 Celebrate it worthily.
 He who swung the spirit's sword
 Merits poesy's award,
 Merits poesy in native
 Speech that's folk-spun and creative!

Henr. Ibsen

Hårdråder, the great Norwegian warrior, leader of the Varangian mercenaries in Constantinople before he became King of Norway in 1047; as claimant to the English throne he fought, and was killed, at Stamford Bridge in 1066; Athelstan, a successor to King Alfred, was a promoter of learning and literature in England. He made gifts of books to various religious foundations.

THE STORM-PETREL

“Storm-petrels roost where the land is sheering”; —
 An old skipper said that, in my very hearing.

She dabbles her wings in foam as she's floundering;
 Rides the big rollers; no sign of foundering.

The bird and the waves rise and fall there together;
 In calms she is silent, shrieks in foul weather.

She moves in a way that's half swimming, half flying,
 A dream between heaven and hell's pit plying.

Too heavy for air, too light for wave-wallowing — :
 Poet-bird, poet-bird, — the line I've been following!

Yes, and what's worst is, — in pedants' eyes
Most of this passes for sailors' lies.

Sheering: where the underwater land mass falls steeply away.

THE STUDENTS' GREETING
TO
HIS MAJESTY
KING CHARLES
5th October 1859.

Spirit's troop, the youthful and aspiring,
Greet our Norway's King!
Burning breasts entice the tongue to choring,
Dance and revelling!
Hence we flock in force on this occasion,
Visit you with song,
Carve the student memory in strong
Runes, that ne'er shall yield to time's erosion.

You are Oscar's heir in double manner,
Heir to debts and rights,
Left by him who hoist the three-toned banner
Over Norway's heights.
Royal rights you will defend with mettle,
They are rich and rare,
Hoard the northern peoples' loving care.
Royal debts you will, in due course, settle!

Settle them, recall his exhortations,
Oscar's message, well:
"There's no place for strife 'twix northern nations;
There but brothers dwell!"
Freeman rights alone and freeman powers,
With their freehold lease,
Can unite them in a time of peace
As when mighty Vigrid-contests lower!

On then, King, command the flag's unfurling,
We shall march behind!
Kin beyond the peaks and billows swirling
Share the self-same mind!
Lo, the cynosure of all the nation,
Now's *your* time to act, —
Ours, to hope: that you'll not break the pact
Promised in your kingly proclamation!

Henr. Ibsen

At
 THE GRAVESIDE OF SOLICITOR OLE CARELIUS SCHULRUD
 12th October 1859.

PROLOGUE

So soon perforce the bond was broken,
 So soon you sought your resting-place;
 And yet the coffin-wreath, grief's token,
 Is not your memory's final trace;
 Beyond the grave it will sustain
 Hope that we'll meet in God's domain.

A blessed hope amid life's anguish,
 Best remedy for the bereft!
 A boon for those that strive to vanquish
 Their woe, whom you untimely left, —
 For her, who must grief's journey brave,
 For him, the old man by the grave.

EPILOGUE

Arise then, soul, and freely winging
 Seek home in God the Father's breast!
 For us Hope's voices shall keep ringing
 Of union after death's brief rest!
 Our home's not mould and night forlorn
 But in eternity's bright dawn.

Schulrud was Ibsen's bosom friend in Grimstad.

At
 THE DEDICATION OF THE CHORAL BANNER
 23rd Nov. 1859.

Once more flocks of singers blithely cluster
 Neath the banner's play,
 Once more sons of song in memory muster
 West, to Agder's bay.
 Once more sagas with fair-coloured figures
 Pass before soul's eye, —
 Conjure Spring and verse and melody,
 Sprinkle May-time's dew on Winter's rigours.

As a hewn stone on the warrior's barrow
 Soundless speaks but bold, —
 So the banner shall song's precinct hallow,
 Muster young and old, —
 Carry onward o'er Time's rapid streaming
 Legends, richly dight,

Of our songster-faring, songster-flight,
Of its blithe adventures and its dreaming.

Gold-embroidered, Woman's fair creation
Has been song-baptised; —
For song's heirs a spire of inspiration,
Faith, Hope there devised, —
Under thee we meet, thus congregated,
Soul's song to revere,
Hand in hand towards the light we steer,
Swell the wealth of gold that's ne'er abated!

Henr. Ibsen

At this festival, two choral societies, the Professionals and the Artisans, combined to dedicate the banners made for each by the ladies of Bergen.

OPEN LETTER

to

H.Ø.BLOM.

When things went wrong for northern gods — quite madly —,
When Balder was struck down and Odin sat
Like some decrepit granddad, propped up sadly
On Lidskjäl's cushions, body-guard out flat,
When even Thor eschews the brimming vat
And Brage slouching o'er his harp plays badly:
Thus spake the warrior: "World's extinction looms."
Now Wiehe's gone, — the forecast's H.Ø.Blom's.

You are the warrior who's the populace's
Prophetic lightning, giving folk a lead,
Reporting metrically common-places
That give the shoal of minnows what they need,
You glimpse already snouts and horns indeed
In goblin swarms poised where our frontier traces;
But what you spied on Pegasus, from heaven,
Appeared in *Morning Post*, December 7.

You fear a Ragnarok's about to thump
"Barbarically" on our door already.
Accordingly, the tail-piece, bright, unsteady,
Stuck on your poem-comet's scrawny rump;
Trust me, the Muses find it all too heady,
Your image-figleaf didn't hide the bump.
So please, stop throttling, as a bard, our calling,
Use prose; — your verse is clumsy, quite appalling.

Remember that your faith's known by your deeds,
Don't fool yourself, thin ice is hard to manage.
You fancy you're a Knight of Taste, one reads,

And yet you'd "yoke" our mother in a marriage
 With one of Thespis' pair that draw his carriage, —
 With both, may God forgive you, of the steeds!
 That fleshy thought is rotten to the kernel,
 In verse that mental diet's quite infernal!

You write about a star-role's understudy,
 When folk require a battle-song to scream,
 On "substitution" you're a fuddy-duddy,
 Your eye is blinded by tea-table steam, —
 You've got a well-trained hippogriff for cuddy,
 Yet hire the pedant-poem's cart-horse team;
 Ahead, a castle — peaks and turrets sally, —
 But you prefer retreating to the valley.

They raised once, from a pyramid's recesses,
 A balsamed corpse, and put it on display.
 There proudly in its fossilled shroud it lay,
 Had quite forgotten how the sun caresses;
 What new it saw, it ten times worse assesses
 Than withered, bankrupt gods of olden day;
 "A bitter smile" played on its lips, emphatic
 Scorn for the times — because they were not static.

Exactly so you opened up this brawl;
 You want the age to sleep, on your compulsion,
 Life's clamant vigour fills you with revulsion,
 Back to the silent pit you long to crawl;
 Yet *your* breast housed a sounding-board, recall,
 Where many an elfin thought gained winged propulsion,
 Flew forth and settled, bred a generation, —
 But you — denied them their legitimation!

You fail to gauge the people's disposition,
 You scorn the very fruit of your own seed,
 The plot you meant to plough is full of weed,
 Abandoned by your spineless inanition.
 Is growing weeds the scope of our ambition?
 Those verses of your own — take those indeed; —
 On every line it's Danish style that battens,
 Even Vinje's clogged with Danish thinking-patterns.

But back now to your gloomy prophesying
 That after Christmas Ragnarok is due.
 Come, all of you, turn out and let's start trying
 To change Art's food, find something that will do.
 Our native bark-gruel's sour, and bitter too,
 Which can't be helped by praying or by crying, —
 But readers know that Art is international, —
 So bring a Japanese troupe here — that's rational.

No, royal Copenhagen, when all's told,
 Monopolises all our importation;
 Thus as Madeira's blended imitation
 Becomes fine vintage, barrelled in the hold,
 Just so nonentities brought here get sold
 Much over-priced because of their migration;
 We seat at Art's high boards those who'd be able
 To grace, at best, a Zealand tailor's table.

Your fault if I now put my guns to use,
 And in the host picked off each dreary snuffler,
 And blazed away at every worn-out scuffler
 That pours you out your Dry Madeira juice.
 Cothurnus hasn't, surely, turned old shuffler,
 Ambrosial food to grub a peasant chews,
 With that bouquet of comment, hardly handsome,
 In Number 3, for choirmaster Hansen?

Well, let that wait its turn to come along; —
 I seize this chance of glimpsing through the doorway
 The marvel that's awaiting us in Norway;
 That near event lamented in your song.
 To pick on individuals would be wrong;
 I found my case upon *your* dirge, sung *your* way:
 This coming age is Ragnarok, you grumble;
 It follows, then, Valhalla too must crumble.

For Ragnarok precedes Valhalla's fall,
 We all learnt that from our first kindergarten.
 We've got Andhrimner, who is still on call,
 And no-one doubts his diet can enhearten, —
 At least those Thursday bellies, though more Spartan
 Than what the old gods ordered in their hall.
 There is no lack of heroes; critics strike them,
 But don't quite kill — for still the public like them.

But where is Thor now, yonder with his hammer?
 That mighty Thor who cleaves the beetling height
 And brings home Freia to the North's blithe clamour,
 Leaving the troll to chew his beard for fright.
 And where is Freyr, who can bestrew such glamour
 Upon the slopes with birch and rowan bright?
 And where is Ydun's apple? Where, dear fellow!
 All I can see's a pear that's over-mellow!

No, Ydun's apple's gone, that's the position,
 And Balder's off come April or before,
 That's why the Last Day limps towards fruition
 Despite the club- and arrow-wielding war;
 Ground arms, stand easy, and escape the chore,
 Climb on the table, sewing shrouds your mission;

A god who drowns — don't commit that blunder —
Can never be revived — he must go under!

But trust me — Ragnarok, too, has an ending; —
Beyond the ridge a new sun tincts the skies;
It's dawn already in the young's fresh eyes,
The better morrow's near for apprehending,
Then you will see the light of day extending,
Though tree-trunks were bolt-blasted in the night, —
Then you shall see: the highest of the seven
Is — not Valhalla — Gimle's brave new heaven!

Henr. Ibsen

Blom, a conservative writer of plays, poems and critical articles, had infuriated Ibsen by describing the departure of the Danish actor Vilhelm Wiehe as portending doom for the Norwegian Theatre, though he had himself been, in his day, a national romantic. Ibsen, mocking his fixation with the old literary tradition, claims that the future lay not with the old Valhalla (a mocking reference to the Danish Theatre in Christiania) but with the young and native talent that inspired the Norwegian Theatre. Vinje, a near contemporary of Ibsen's who strongly espoused the cause of Norwegian literature.

For the mythological references, see 'The Bard in Valhalla' above. Andhrimner, the cook to the gods; Ydun, a goddess whose miraculous apples gave eternal strength and vigour; Ragnarok, the catastrophic collapse of the Nordic heaven, which was followed by the creation of a new heaven, Gimle.

LINES DASHED OFF TO H.Ø.BLOM

Roof aflame, wolf at the door
Can make many a sluggard rally,
Stir up those that drowns before
To the ultimate reveillé.
Even you, old H.Q. sweat,
Even you the trumpet roused
From the bunk-bed where you frowsted
Like some pine the wind's upset.

Wolf at door, the roof aflame
Can revive when strength's at zero,
Danger's great demands reclaim
Café blow-hard as a hero.
Why, the old grey in its stall
Whinnies at the bugle-call;
You, too, made your sabre rattle,
You, too, wanted to give battle!

Last year someone spread the news
(Called, in Dansk, pup for his labour)
That your old and rusted sabre
Still sat sheathed, unfit to use.
Ah, the faces pulled, my word,
By the good-folk who replied

That at last you must have died,
Thue-buried, print-interred.

Such talk was irrational,
Kite-flown rumour, wildly flighted, —
We can see now, clearly sighted,
You're awake and — national.
For such cunning holds and blows,
Nordic clinches, body-blasters
From the good old days, one knows
Only a real Norwegian masters.

Dale-bound, tied in torpor's trusses,
You have skulked for many a year;
Now you've gone beserk, I fear,
Blasting off your blunderbusses!
And you've little ammunition
Left you for the wars that rage:
Powder in cheese-ripe condition,
Words that match liqueur for age.

“Dolt” and “thug” and such like cries
Through the raging racket rattle;
Ah, I thought the last supplies
Banged off in the Campbell battle.
Notwithstanding my dissent,
In the fjord The Shoal's still showing;
Hence the Daily's seas present
To our gaze the Marwhal blowing.

Ha, if only our young force
Boasted some such Birchleg power
Up front, where the arrows shower,
Victory would be ours of course!
That's what we're objecting to!
Makes one grieve, it's far from cheering
When one sees a man like you
Join the Danes by volunteering.

May it profit you, I say,
Fighting in the foeman's fetter!
Hope they settle to the letter
Down Norse-Copenhagen way!
Monies you expect for wages
Could stay on account for ages, —
Just because, before year's dying,
Denmark's colours will be flying! — —

I forgot, when last I wrote,
Any mention of Herr Comus,
Domicile refused by vote

Of good taste's own major domus.
 Now all that's become redundant;
 From *your* pit's poetic seams
 You've mined comic ore that gleams,
 Eighteen-carat, and abundant.

As our Tybo you sang loudly
 Of yourself and Brabant too;
 You did Master Gert right proudly, —
 But another time will do;
 Wit's weak hams may look anæmic
 Hosed in verse, but terms Hellenic, —
 School-beak alpha, beta, gamma, —
 Earn no public shame or clamour!

Cock-crow seems to suit you poorly,
 There could be a reason why;
 Cock-crow in the night still, surely,
 Carries its old prophecy.
 Best, then, straighten what's misshapen;
 For as sure as good taste's capon
 In the stalls starts plumage-showing,
 So the cock on stage starts crowing! — —

You've worn out the native jerkin,
 Cast it scornfully away!
 What about that bear-fight, worked in
 Saga-style, that bold affray?
That was language, full and rounded; —
 But by Danish mouths expounded, —
 Just you try it — you'll see how
 Bear turns into "mast-fed sow".

Your brown bear, he was Norwegian,
 Quite a viking's match you know;
 So let's grasp his middle region
 Then, — hop, step — it's down we go.
 Watch out for the bog, man, natheless,
 Keep the hide quite clean — be strict —
 Let the battle-field inflict
 Skin-wounds but leave honour scatheless!

You'll not, in this blind condition,
 Rail long in your folk's dispraise;
 Folk-life and the folk-tradition
 Claim you to construe their ways!
 Rather than raise Cain to harm a
 Youthful state we've newly made, —
 Sing out from the stage a drama
 As a *double* renegade!

Thue, a Norwegian grammar school teacher, author of a reader containing "Texts in the Mother Tongue"; Campbell battle, the notorious fracas at the performance in 1857 of 'The Campbells' by Wergeland; the play was heckled by the "Danish faction"; Marwhal, Ibsen's deliberate misspelling (Narrehvalen — idiot whale) for narwhal; Birchleg, a warrior who wore birch-bark leggings; volunteering, Bløm had earlier joined the Danish volunteers to fight the Germans, but Ibsen now taunts him with being on the Danish side in the critical war and joining the coterie of Norwegian writers congregated in Copenhagen. Comus, a devotee of Bacchus; Tybo (who boasts of his exploits at Brabant) and Gert Westphaler, two characters out of Holberg's plays; the bear-fight, perhaps a reference to Ibsen's "The Vikings at Helgeland", where the plot turns on a hero's (Sigurd) fight with a bear and ends with Hjordis throwing herself off the edge of a cliff; "double renegade" invites Bløm, having deserted once to Denmark, to desert back to Norway and the Norwegian Theatre.

UPLAND LIFE

Deep in the valley, summer night
 Outspreads its shady veils;
 Eve's wind-stirred sea invades the height,
 The beetling crag assails:
 And there the cloud's blue billows sweep,
 No eye can now attest
 The glacier that by day could keep
 A watchful eye upon the deep
 With sun-gold on its crest.

But higher there's a land sun-kissed,
 An island group on show,
 Set in a surf of rolling mist,
 Bathed in an amber glow.
 The silent mountain birds incline
 Like ships far out to sea,
 While peaks beyond the glacier-tine,
 Ranged like a troll-manned battle-line,
 Confront God westwardly.

But view yon herder's hut and fold
 Below the glacier's dome:
 The fell shows blue, snow glitters cold
 About the tranquil home.
 A world unto itself it seems,
 So, too, the folk who fend;
 Barred from the dale by rocks and streams
 They share the heavenly vault that gleams,
 The self-same God their friend.

View yon fair sæter-wench who waits,
 By evening's shadow stirred.
 The elfin thought she contemplates
 Still unbaptised by word.
 She does not know how long 'twill stay
 Nor what might be its name, —

But as the lur and cow-bells play
 Her dreams sense haven far away, —
 Beyond the glacier's flame! — —

Your summer life's so brief a boon
 On pastures glacier-bound;
 The giant's rigid cape will soon
 Enfold both peak and pound.
 Then to the inglenook you'll cleave,
 At life's familiar chores, —
 But spinning flax and wool to weave,
 Take heart — one golden summer's eve
 Is well worth winter's flaws!

ON THE HEIGHTS

1

My pack slung on my back at last,
 My rifle in my hand,
 The damper closed and door made fast
 With pin and withy band;
 A step, then, my old mother's way —
 Her own hut stands close by, —
 A parting handclasp, — just to say
 "I shall be back as soon I may, —
 And until then, — goodbye!"

The narrow path winds up the hill,
 It curves into the trees;
 Behind me fjord and valley fill
 With moon-hazed reveries.
 On past my neighbour's wall I press, —
 The farmyard still as night;
 But from the hedge-row gate I guess
 At leaf-sounds on a linen dress,
 A tinkling soft and light.

She stood there all in white arrayed
 And bade me time of day;
 She was so fair, so fine a maid,
 Fresh as a highland spray.
 One glance she used for teasing me,
 One for a hint of smile! —
 I smiled like her, and suddenly
 I was hard by the gate, and she, —
 Her eyes turned moist the while.

I threw my arm about her waist,
 She blushed and paled as well;
 I claimed her for my wife, embraced, —

Her bosom rose and fell.
 Now she was mine — I swore it true,
 Entire, not partly, no!
 I sensed her gaze down at her shoe, —
 The leaf-brooch tinkled forth anew:
 Because she trembled so.

She begged so nicely, I refrained,
 The teasing mood returned;
 My pounding heart-beat throbbed and strained,
 My frantic bosom burned; —
 I begged so nicely, she fell still,
 We made a well-matched pair;
 I sensed a song came from the hill
 As though sprites, elves and spectres shrill
 Laughed in the leafage there.

The narrow path wound up the hill,
 It curved into the trees;
 Behind me fjord and valley fill
 With moon-hazed reveries.
 I sat so fevered, she so white
 Near where the cliff's edge turned;
 We whispered in the sultry night, —
 I do not know what followed, quite,
 But know my forehead burned.

I threw my arms about her waist,
 She hung within their arc, —
 As my young wife and I embraced
 The sprite sang in the dark;
 If ghouls laughed as I made her mine
 I now but faintly know; —
 I feared no sprite's contemptuous whine, —
 I only saw her scared, and fine,
 And felt her tremble so.

2

I lay in the south-facing coomb
 And watched the sun's first rays;
 The depths lay veiled in clouded gloom,
 The ice- and snow-fields blaze.
 I see the red house yonder where
 Both I and mother bide.
 My mother's slaved and drudged down there,
 I've grown up blithe and free from care, —
 God knows what else beside.

She's up betimes; the smoke-swirls reach,
 I fancy, through the air,
 I think I see her go to bleach

White-woven stuffs down there.
 Yes, carry on your usual chores;
 God bless you and provide!
 I'll fetch you from the reindeer moors
 A splendid pelt that shall be yours,
 And some too for my bride!

And where is *she*? Must still delight
 In dream's disjointed play.
 Remember nothing of last night,
 Though dream of it you may!
 But once awake — rip out the stress
 From memory, — as do I.
 You are my lovely bride, no less,
 Weave linen, sew your bridal dress;
 Our way to church is nigh!

How hard seems separation's path
 From her one's heart holds dear; —
 But longing is a cleansing bath,
 It brings me health and cheer.
 I stand here like a soul inspired,
 My blood's so purged I feel; —
 A life not even half complete,
 A life where sin and guilt compete
 I tread beneath my heel.

Each dark desire, each passion wild
 Expelled as by the rod;
 I feel so blithe and reconciled
 Both to myself and God!
 A glance now over fjord and scree,
 The pine-crests crowding tight, —
 And then, the reindeer trail for me; —
 Goodbye then mother! Bride-to-be!
 And now I'm for the height!

3

Low in the west there's cloud ablaze,
 There's flame above the fell,
 But shrouding mist still overlays
 The remnants of the dell.
 My foot was weary, sad my mood,
 I pondered ill at ease;
 But from the cliff's edge where I brood
 Ling gleams as though by blood imbued
 And trembles to the breeze.

I picked myself a sprig of ling
 And stuck it in my hat;
 Close by, a sparse bush, furnishing

Snug lodging for all that.
 And thoughts they came and thoughts they went
 Like folk who go to pray;
 They flocked around, they stared intent,
 Held session, sentenced by consent,
 Then softly slipped away.

Had I been close to you again,
 My yesternight's plucked stem,
 I would, a trusty hound, have lain
 Before your kirtle's hem;
 Have bathed deep in your eyes' sweet balm,
 Have scoured my soul forlorn;
 The troll that witched me with its charm
 Last evening at your father's farm
 I would have slain with scorn.

I sprang up triumph-flushed to raise
 A winged prayer to the Lord,
 That He throughout your length of days
 Bright, radiant sun afford!
 No! I'm too strong for that I swear,
 Too young to shrink from strife,
 I *will* a task more hard to bear,
 And so, God, harken to my prayer:
 Make hard her way through life!

Dam up whatever stream she meet,
 With ice the footbridge glaze,
 Let screes draw blood from stone-gashed feet,
 Make steep the sæter ways;
 I'll raise her high upon my arm
 Across the wildest chute;
 I'll bench her in my bosom's calm, —
 Dare then to visit her with harm,
 And *that*, Lord, we'll dispute!

4

From a long way south he's travelled,
 Travelled an expanse of waters;
 On his brow mute thoughts lie ravelled
 Like the lights in northern quarters.

Sorrow lurks within his laughter,
 Lips speak though they do not utter;
 But of what? As well ask after
 Wind's song when the pine-slopes flutter.

His cold eye is overpowering;
 I've no more its full depth sounded
 Than the black tarn's which the towering

Glacier's breasts have bred and bounded.

Gloomy thoughts are there reflected,
Lumber bird-like, helter-skelter;
There's another squall expected, —
Take in sail then, — run for shelter!

In mid-moor occurred our meeting,
I with rifle, he with setters;
Fellowship from our first greeting, —
I would gladly break those fetters.

Why accept then this submission?
How I've wished this bond could sever;
Now I think it's *my* volition
That he's robbed me of, for ever.

5

"Why, come evening, yearn for mother's
House down yonder? Tell me whether
You sleep better under covers
Than on plumped brown highland heather?"

Mother, and the cat, watched o'er me
By my bed at close of daytime,
Span and sang until dreams bore me
Off into the night for playtime.

"Dreams, oh dreams, — why this abstraction?
Daytime deeds are better, trust me!
Drain life's cup; — more satisfaction
Than a nap with sires grown fusty!"

"Reindeer race across the moorland;
After them, go hell-for-leather! —
Better that than clearing poor land
Down there, piling stones together!"

But I hear the church bells ringing
From the headland stretched before us!
"Let them ring, and keep on singing —
Fosses make a better chorus!"

Churchward *she* and my old mother,
Prayer-book kerchiefed, will be wending.
"Trust me, man, you're meant for other
Tasks than routine church-attending!"

Organ sounds within the choir;
On the altar, candles glowing.
"Mountain storm-songs rate far higher,

Snow-glare makes a better showing!"

Hell-for-leather then! Come, wander
O'er the fells' white hump and hollow!
Let them walk to church down yonder,
Those that choose to, — I'll not follow!

6

Autumn's near; below the ranges
Hark, the last few herd-bells falter!
Upland freedom's lost — life changes
Back to cattle-stall and halter!

Winter soon will hang its awning
From the bluff, enfold it thickly;
Paths will soon be blocked — a warning
That I must head homeward, quickly.

Home? Is *that* my home then, truly,
Where my mind's no longer turning?
He's long chastened my unruly
Thoughts, I've steeled, myself, my yearning.

Dale-life stifles emulation!
Drudgery for mere survival;
I found *here* my stimulation,
I need fells and moors to rival.

Here in this deserted dwelling
I have housed my wealth of treasure;
There's a bench, a stove, sweet smelling
Air, and time to think at leisure.

Elf-thoughts in the night, evoking
Danger's scent to warn the chary;
He has offered magic's cloaking;
I, though tempted, am still wary.

Winter in these wildernesses
Steels weak thoughts I need to master, —
Bird-song's sickly-sweet excesses
Do not make the blood pulse faster.

If till Spring this loft's to house me,
Then I'll strive for their expansion, —
Raise them from their chores, and rouse me,
Bench them in the highlands' mansion,

Teach the doctrine that I've chosen,
Tempt them to home-spurning laughter;
Upland life, though ice-bound, frozen,

Will not seem as strange thereafter.

7

Here through long, long weeks I languished, —
Loneliness made heart the fonder;
Drained by warring memories, anguished,
I must seek my dear ones yonder.

Just one day, then break the tether,
Hers, my loved one's, and my mother's, —
Scale again my realms of heather
Which, come Spring, shall house two others.

I must go! — Ugh, drifts are forming!
I have been a little tardy.
Through the waste wild winter's swarming, —
And now every path's debarred me.

8

Long weeks passed; I shook off the cloud,
Nostalgia no longer disturbed me;
River and stream shared an icy shroud,
Round hung the moon where the drifts stood proud
And glittering stars shone superbly.

I was too lively to sit and mope
Indoors as the day descended;
The hut allowed spirits and thought no scope,
I went ranging the heights till the plunge of the slope
Halted me, where the fells ended.

The dale was at rest in the gulf displayed;
Then chimes, from the headland winging — !
I listened — , how gentle the sound they made;
Where was it before that I'd heard it played — ?
Then I recognised church bells ringing!

They rang with the festival yule-tide sound,
The familiar chimes were assuring.
A light appears past my neighbour's pound,
My mother's hut casts a gleam around,
Beguiling me, strangely alluring.

Home, despite all its wretchedness,
Now a saga with images thronging!
Up here the harsh upland ruggedness,
Down there I'd a mother and wife, no less, —
Small wonder I felt such longing.

A laugh behind me, so dry and short;
It was the hunter, the stranger.

He had heard my every wordless thought;
 "I think my young friend is overwrought, —
 Ah, yes; home sweet home, there's the danger!"

Once more I stood resolute, staunch and bold,
 Was strong again by my reckoning;
 Upland winds fanned my bosom cold,
 Never again would it throb as of old
 To the yule-tide symbols' beckoning.

Then farm-yard and roof were caught in the play
 Of light from my mother's dwelling.
 At first like the dawn of a winter's day;
 Then clouds of smoke spread an overlay
 And then the red glare came welling.

It burned, it blazed, then a mighty fall;
 I screamed in the night for sorrow;
 The hunter soothed me: "Why fuss? — no call —
 It's only the old house burning, that's all,
 The cat and the punch for tomorrow!"

He sounded so wise in my despair
 That I was seized with trembling;
 He showed how effectively the glare
 Blended with fitful moonbeams there,
 A sunset sky resembling.

He viewed the setting, his hands cupped round
 To gain just the right perspective;
 Then music, a song made the fells resound,
 And then I sensed mother's soul had found
 The angelic host protective.

"Patient in drudgery, patient in pain,
 Patient you passed through life's sorrow;
 Thus gently we bear you to God's domain
 Far o'er the heights to find peace again
 Where heaven delights in the morrow!"

The hunter was gone, the moon concealed;
 My blood — fire and frost contending, —
 With my burden of grief I ranged far afield — —
 But it must be confessed the effect appealed
 Of that mingled sunset blending!

The perfect midsummer day released
 Its shimmering light o'er the heather;
 Church bells rang to the wedding feast,
 Crowds on horseback down there increased,

Lining the route together.

A shot from my neighbour's ramp rang out,
 There were birch-twigs to mark the turning,
 The farmyard was crowded enough, beyond doubt,
 But I laughed loud in my steep redout
 Though wind-flushed tears were burning.

I seemed to hear rhymes that were meant to sting,
 Cruel laughter from spite proceeding;
 I sensed I was butt for crude ballading,
 I lay on the cliff-edge, I tore at the ling,
 And bit till my tongue was bleeding.

A gallant sight as away they go,
 She riding tall as they started,
 Her waist-long tresses about her flow,
 They glisten, they shine — as well I know
 From that evening down there when we parted.

She crossed the stream matching stride for stride,
 The bridegroom and she together. —
 My heart was set free and my tears were dried,
 I had fought the fight to the end, sore tried;
 I had no more trials to weather.

Composed, I stood on the brink and scanned
 That summer scene, reflective.
 The cavalcade seemed a glittering band, —
 I cupped my eye with a hollowed hand
 To gain just the right perspective.

The fluttering scarves, the coifs that shine,
 The mens' coats gleaming redly,
 Church with its consecrated wine,
 Lovely bride who was once all mine,
 The happiness that had fled me, —

I saw it all as I watched serene,
 Viewing from life's high regions;
 A nobler radiance bathed the scene
 But lo, that is something that none have seen
 Who huddle below in their legions.

Then laughter behind me, so dry and short,
 It was the huntsman, the stranger:
 "My dear man, from what I heard I've brought
 My neatly-laced rucksack and all for nought, —
 Not needed, now there's no danger!"

No, now I'm a man who can stand alone,

But thanks for your kind intention;
 The blood in my veins doesn't race now, I've grown
 Aware that my bosom becomes as stone,
 Symptoms, not mere invention.

I drained the strengthening draught, the last;
 The heights are no longer freezing;
 My sail's collapsed, I've a broken mast, —
 But look, the colour her red skirt cast
 As it gleamed through birch-trees — how pleasing!

Away they gallop, then show anew
 Far off, at the church-path turning.
 My fairest memory, all joy to you.
 I've traded my final verse for a view
 That is loftier, more discerning.

I'm resolute now, respond to the call
 That bids there are heights to wander!
 I've lived out my life as the lowland's thrall;
 Up here there is freedom and God withal,
 The rest merely grope down yonder.

Leaf-sounds, leaf-brooch: a brooch hung with little metal leaves.

PROLOGUE

[at a performance in the Student Union theatre on
 19th March 1860 in aid of the Student Building Fund]

A legend lives on, an old one,
 From India's fable-land;
 It tells of a palace created
 On the most holy strand.

It says there the lucky fellow
 Owning the magic lamp
 Raised up the golden turrets
 All in one night, the scamp.

His yearning soared strong and lofty,
 Desire became stone, well-dressed,
 It grew into pillars and arches
 As the proud work progressed.

His aim was another world-wonder,
 But youthfulness reigned in his mind,
 And so he could laugh at the hazards
 And doubt had no role assigned.

And that's why good spirits came flocking
 From earth and from sky and from sea,
 His longings they cast in metal,
 Gave form to his fantasy.

And that's how the lucky fellow
 Owning the magic lamp
 Raised up the lofty turrets
 All in one night, the scamp! — — —

Time has run out for fables,
 Faith ranks below a call;
 Building means deeds, not dreaming,
 If it's to grow up tall.

But youth has a self-reliance
 That's of a deathless sort;
 To Hope, ever-fresh and lovely,
 Flock spirits to lend support.

See, that's why we're boldly building
 The castle of Thought's proud pile;
 Favouring spirits are with us, —
 That's why it proceeds in style.

'Twill soon be a task accomplished; —
 Our thanks, then, to one and all,
 Who brought to our lucky vision
 A stone to augment this new hall!

The Danish poet Æhlenschläger, whom Ibsen greatly admired (see the Bard in Valhalla above), wrote a work called "Alladdin".

EPILOGUE

at Mr and Mrs Døvlé's Benefit Performance
 30 April 1860
 (delivered by Mrs Døvlé)

Memories, that by day go diving
 Deep into oblivion's well, —
 Visions, dowsed by life's rude striving,
 Now, this evening, work their spell.
 Feelings intimately stirred,
 Fumbling for interpretation, —
 I shall bunch for presentation
 In a warm and grateful word.

I was just a child when here
 My young talents were first tested;
 Then the star for which I quested

Seemed to beckon me so near.
 Oh, a fine conceit forsooth, —
 Day by day I learnt the truth:
 Yonder road is steep and wearing,
 Life itself too short for faring.

Distant, strange the world seemed, truly;
 Art-vocation's tender shoots
 Sprouted from my own mind's roots,
 Grew like home-reared young, unruly.
 Full of life, oft prone to wildness,
 I would shoo them out of doors;
 You embraced them as though yours,
 Watched them with the eye of mildness.

Wench-song on the sæter's lea,
 Dreams, delightful dale-side measures,
 Forest life past peak and scree,
 I'd depict as dearest treasures.
 If I managed to convey
 Just one heartfelt trait and plainly
 Brought it to the light of day,
 I shall not have lived quite vainly.

Thanks for all your loyalty,
 Thanks for kindness truly proven,
 Thanks for memories richly woven,
 Vestments for life's apogee!
 Some day I may well impart
 Better how I yearn at heart,
Yearn, despite the fells' attraction,
To give thanks, on stage, in action!

THE STUDENTS' GREETING
 to
 PROFESSOR A.M. SCHWEIGAARD
 13TH MAY 1860

Like a clearing where dense woods are soughing
 Lay our fatherland.
 Vainly the old peasant shares went ploughing
 Through the barren sand.
 What was needed most was sun's admission,
 Light to cleanse the shade; —
 Forth they went, with shining broad-axe blade,
 Noble pioneers of blessed tradition.

Then, amidst that waste where tree-trunks mouldered,
 Life began to show;
 There, where flickering pine-roots spat and smouldered,

Corn began to grow; —
 And as soon as pioneer-work was ended, —
 Farm flanked farm by then, —
 There sprang up a breed of mighty men, —
 Single singers too the greenwood wended.

Noble pioneer in spirit's regions!
 You are of that band
 To whose day-task murk must yield its legions
 In our fatherland.
 Sun-gold sifted down through wind-felled spruces
 To your broad-axe blade; —
 Hence we greet you with this serenade
 That a heart-felt gratitude produces.

Wide-spread though it be, your life's endeavour,
 Saga does you right;
 We, true sons of Reason's church forever,
 Honour you this night.
 Far your visions shone, the uplands brightening
 At their gleam's behest; —
 Legend has it, seedlings flourish best
 When to westward there's the flash of lightning.

A tribute to the professor in his twentieth year in office. He had been brilliant and influential, both as an academic and as a political thinker of the reformist and Utilitarian tendency.

TO PARLIAMENT
 (17th May 1860)

Members, find you
 Tales that bind you,
 Saved from legend's night?
 Or have you forgotten
 Egil's king-begotten
 Jæmte-mission,
 Earl's submission
 To our king's geld-right?

Egil's tried men
 Fain would hide when
 Forth the greybeard strode.
 One by one flee, shirking;
 On the hill-side lurking
 Jæmte glowers; —
 Blood-red flowers
 Rose-like bloom the road.

Anger burrows

Deep its furrows
 In the greybeard's frown;
 Round him foes were packing;
 He was trapped, shield lacking.
 Then, a vision
 That tradition
 Hands, through saga, down.

Roughly battered
 Rock-slabs shattered,
 He with hemp-rope lashed
 On his breast's vast hollow,
 Strode, though none would follow,
 Goalward freely; —
 Jæmte steel he,
 Jæmte's host he smashed.

Earl discovered,
 Geld recovered,
 He graced Jæmte's hall.
 Friendly words resounded,
 Table-mead abounded,
 Strife had ended; —
 None contended
 Since for Egil's fall. —

Freedom-sired,
 Folk-inspired
 Men from dale and strand, —
 You have Egil's mettle,
 Hence on each shall settle
 His high glory
 Garbed in story
 Who, like him, dare stand!

Egil was sent by his king to demand tribute due to him from the Earl of Jæmte, a district of Sweden inland from Trondheim. Details, for example the improvised breastplate of stone, are taken from Egil's Saga. Ibsen uses the theme for its contemporary relevance: Norway's parliament had recently refused to accede to a Swedish attempt to renege on the agreed terms of union between the two countries.

SONG
 for
 The Winners
 AT THE SHOOTING-MATCH AT LADEGAARDSSØEN
 1st July 1860
 Mel. For Norge, Kjæmpers Fødeland.

Our Norway is a citadel
 With ramparts sound though battered.
 Before them bloodied foemen fell,

The foe's strong shield-wall shattered.
 For on its walls there stood arrayed
 A muster, weak, but undismayed, —
 And freedom's flag on high displayed
 A splendour o'er them scattered.

Keen was the Norseman peasant's sight,
 His aim a skill to treasure;
 His ancient piece flashed lightning-bright,
 Which gave the foe small pleasure.
 But then peace breathed its summer gust;
 The gun hung on the wall to rust, —
 But woe should it so stay there, just
 When none dare fail to measure!

No, Norway's son is strong and free,
 Would honour his extraction;
 Sport once, he knows, lent dignity,
 Man's noblest satisfaction.
 So cheer all those who bear away
 A winner's trophy from the fray!
 Let all men shoot like these today
 When time calls out for action!

Henr. Ibsen

Rifle associations were highly regarded; they recalled the volunteer militia that repelled Sweden's attempted invasion in 1814 to prevent Norway from establishing, at Eidsvoll, an independent constitution. Ibsen was a member of one such association.

SONG
 AT THE MILITARY BALL IN KRISTIANIA
 ON KING CHARLES'S CORONATION DAY
 [5th August 1860]

Upon the King of Norway's brow
 The crown's bright circlet's shining;
 The whole land joins the revel now,
 The country, coast combining.
 And though he's far beyond our view
 His name amongst his men rings true;
 The King's the soldiers' friend, whereto
 They'd swear without repining.

Behind the frontier ranges dwell
 Our Swedish kin, stout-hearted;
 His steel has been recorded well,
 We know how it has smarted.
 He's like a greybeard, staunch in stress;
 But we've a lad's hot-headedness;
 Combined we'd harder smite, not less, —
 A thought to foes imparted!

Yes, should the need to fend the North
 From foreign foes betide us,
 We'll in the King's steps venture forth,
 With Sweden's sons beside us.
 Fresh coronation it would seem:
 A kingly circlet of esteem
 Would on the King's brow cast the gleam
 That summer dawns provide us!

Henr. Ibsen

SONG
 for
 THE SWEDISH PARLIAMENTARY CORONATION-
 DELEGATION IN TRONDHJEM 1860

You beheld the temple, chancel shattered,
 High vaults broken down;
 Still it tells, though hoary-grey and battered,
 Tales of high renown:
 There the doughty Swedes once hymned their force's
 Blood-drenched battle-line;
 To the altar's foot in Olaf's shrine
 Reckless Swedes once dared to tie their horses.

You beheld the land's white snow-fields yonder,
 Narrow dales you saw;
 They too speak and make the memory ponder
 Enmities of yore:
 Shattered temple walls past restoration,
 Olaf's shrine destroyed; —
 But up yonder there's a host deployed,
 Wrapped in sleep and moorland isolation.

Swedish brothers! O'er the mountain border
 Now a roadway climbs.
 Now the shrine is a new tale's recorder,
 Tale of recent times.
 Here, where fiercest hatred blazed its warning,
 Kinsmen now unite;
 Here, remembrancer of havoc's night,
 Stands a hall of promise, triumph's dawning.

Yes, though Olaf's hallowed church was broken,
 Yet the folk still thrive;
 And, if Sweden's manhood sleeps unwoke, —
 She has more, alive.
 Blest then be her flag's high reputation,
 Ours too, newly-won; —

Let them in the North's cause wave as one,
Led by one prince to one destination!

King Olaf II — St Olaf — was buried after his death at Stiklestad (1030) in St Clement's Church in Trondheim; The great cathedral that was later built in his honour fell into disrepair but was restored later in the nineteenth century.

SONG
to
THE SWEDISH MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT
at the celebration at Klingenberg 17th August 1860
(Mel. Hellig Olaf stod ved Fjorden)

Out from Norway's coast the ship bore Norway's men,
Mælar's strand their destination;
There the North's high prince gave pledge to Sweden's men,
There performed his coronation.
Sweden's future hopes were consecrated there;
Norway's men stood by, that all might witness bear.
Calm the pledge they gave:
Triumph or the grave;
Peace, fraternal federation!

O'er the mountain barrier fared a solemn band;
It was Sweden's best, its manhood's flower.
High the King raised Norway's sceptre, sword in hand,
Freely crowned himself in regal power.
Swedish brothers, you stood by then, witness true,
Saw the northern prince wears not one crown but two!
You shall safe maintain
All the King's domain
Should the threat of brute force glower.

Coronation verses through the North now ring,
Fairest Saga taught the measure:
You have nobly honoured Norway's Spring,
Yours our hearts most fondly treasure.
High and hallowed still resounds the call
That neighbours' sons be fostered in one's hall.
Our North's Yggdrasil
Keeps its vigour still, —
To the crushed root-worm's displeasure.

Henr. Ibsen

Mælar, the lake on which Stockholm stands. Yggdrasil, in mythology the great tree sustaining the universe; Norway's Spring, the process which had gained momentum during the 1850's and 60's, whereby Norwegian literature joined the mainstream of European modern realism.

ON THE DEATH OF J. L. HEIBERG

Now all mouths his praises number!
But the bard had first to slumber.

Tearful thanks the folk now pay him;
First, though on the bier must lay him.

Denmark's youth, you could have truly
Honoured your dead bard more duly!

Praised on high his life's achievement;
Spared the trappings of bereavement.

He strove, made the times' trolls yield all;
You, though, crushed him in the shield-wall.

He a torch to Denmark handed;
You his bosom with it branded.

Sword-skill he to you confided;
You against his heart applied it.

Smiles and tears his song created;
But the man you immolated.

Many in our northern regions
Now enlist in Tyrfing's legions;

Many a breast has here been branded
With the very torch they handed.

Woe, if Danes forget the ringing
Of their own bards' voices singing.

Woe, if that grand sound were muted
In the clamour southward bruited.

Woe, if the new generation
Found their song a strange creation.

Woe, if heirs to bardic passion
Grew up garbed in German fashion!

Time can further strong alliance,
Sometimes hatred and defiance.

Brother ever bound to brother
 Can in kinship's fetters smother,

Scorn shared blood and shared tradition,
 Hate the ties of coalition.

Break one link, make one concession,
 Then Remorse will take possession,

Like some night-bird soar, aspire,
 In the breast cool hatred's fire.

Plainsmen, men too from the valley
 To their forebears' hall now rally.

Men from fjord, from upland others
 Wield the sword to aid their brothers.

Out of enmity, of striving,
 Fairest pines grow, stoutly thriving.

In the North's chain links past number
 Deep within its soil now slumber.

But a seed that shall not perish
 Has come down for us to cherish.

Tend it, if the thorn-crown baited
 Sower is to sleep placated.

May it bear and burst and scatter;
 Fight on to the end, no matter!

Henr. Ibsen

J. L. Heiberg, a Danish intellectual of remarkable range — philosopher, scholar, theatre director, playwright, poet. His wife was a distinguished actress for whom Ibsen wrote what is perhaps his finest poem, the Rhyme Letter to Fru Heiberg (below). Tyrving — Tyr the god of war.

TERJE VIGEN

There once lived a man, very grizzled and grey,
 On the furthestmost reef there could be; —
 He harmed not a soul in the slightest way,
 Whether by land or by sea;
 His eyes though sometimes with menace glared, —
 Most when a storm was nigh, —
 And then he seemed troubled, so folk declared,

And then there were few who'd not feel scared
With Terje Vigen by.

I saw him later, just once — he lay
With his catch alongside the quay;
His hair was white but he sang, as gay
And spry as a boy was he.
He bantered with lasses who happened abroad,
He joked with the lads, each one,
He waved his sou'wester and sprang aboard;
Then hoisting the jib he left the fjord
For home, the old eagle, in sun.

Now all that I've heard about Terje I'll try
To tell you from first to last,
And if it should sometimes seem a bit dry
It's true to what really passed;
It isn't exactly a first-hand piece,
But still it's from friends of his then —
From those who stood by at his last release
And closed up his eyes for the sleep of peace
When he died near on three-score and ten.

He proved quite a scamp in his younger days,
Left home soon to range abroad;
Had gone through a lot in all sorts of ways
As youngest seaman on board.
Later, jumped ship in Amsterdam,
But pined in the end for home,
And sailed on "The Union", captain Pram;
But there no-one knew him, the straying lamb
Who'd left, a mere lad, to roam.

Now he'd grown tall, in a handsome style,
And he dressed with a certain pride.
But father and mother had died meanwhile,
In fact all his kin beside.
Then Terje moped for a day, maybe two, —
But soon shed his misery.
With land underfoot he found much to rue,
No, better to build, live the freedom he knew
On the surge of the mighty sea!

Then, a year later, young Terje wed, —
The die had been quickly cast.
He must have repented the deed, folk said,
That suddenly bound him fast.
So under a roof of his own he stayed
One winter, one long carouse —
Though gleaming window-panes still displayed
Neat little curtains and flowers arrayed

In the small, red-painted house.

The ice broke up when the mild winds blew
 And Terje's brig sailed straightway;
 Come autumn he'd meet the grey geese that flew
 On course for their southern stay.
 A weight seemed to fall on the seaman's breast;
 He knew he was in his prime,
 He'd come from shores that the sun caressed,
 Astern lay a world of light and zest, —
 Ahead, a grim winter-time.

They anchored; his shipmates on shore-leave bent
 Were gone, for a long carouse.
 He eyed them with envy as off they went,
 Then he stood by his silent house.
 He peeped in through curtains as white as can be, —
 Inside he saw two bestowed, —
 His wife spinning flax there quietly,
 But there in the cot lay a sight to see,
 A pink baby girl, who crowed.

It's said that Terje was inspired
 To soberness in one leap.
 He toiled and he slaved but he never tired
 Of rocking his babe to sleep.
 On Sabbath eve when the nearest farm
 Rang wild with the dancing there,
 The songs that he sang at home held most charm
 When little Anna lay in his arm
 And tugged at his thick brown hair.

Life ambled along till the war broke out
 In eighteen hundred and nine;
 The people's plight is still talked about,
 Privation and slow decline.
 Cruisers from England blockaded each port,
 Starvation afflicted the poor,
 Crops failed and even the rich went short,
 A pair of strong hands was but scant support
 With death and disease at the door.

Then Terje moped for a day, maybe two
 But soon shed his misery.
 He thought of a comrade old and true,
 The surge of the mighty sea. —
 Out west his exploit still lives, compiled
 In legend, a deed of great note:
 "As soon as the gales blew a bit less wild,
 Terje Vigen rowed for his wife and child
 Overseas in an open boat!"

The smallest cutter that he could find
 He chose for the Skagen trip.
 Sails and tackle he left behind, —
 Such gear he forebore to ship.
 He reckoned, did Terje, the boat would steer
 If seas ran contrarywise;
 To keep clear of the Jutland reef was a chore, —
 But worse was the English man-o-war,
 The lookout's keen eagle eyes.

Then trusting to luck with a faith profound
 He lustily plied the oars.
 He got to Fladstrand quite safe and sound
 And shopped for his precious stores.
 God knows his cargo was nothing grand:
 Three casks of barley, that's all;
 But Terje came from a wretched land, —
 He now had the means of life to hand;
 His wife and child had first call.

He slaved on the thwart three nights and days,
 That hero, that man of might;
 The fourth dawn, there in the sun's first rays
 A band of mist hove in sight.
 It wasn't just fugitive cloud he knew,
 It was mountains, clefts, peaks he saw;
 But over the ridges there came in view
 The Imenes saddle, broad and blue.
 He knew where he'd made the shore.

He'd almost reached home, although he must
 Hold out for a last brief plod!
 His heart was uplifted in faith and trust,
 On his tongue was a prayer to God.
 And then the words froze on his lips; he found
 He'd made no mistake, it was true, —
 He saw a corvette in Hesnes Sound
 With canvas a-back, hove to.

His boat was hailed; a signal was fired,
 And the nearest escape was barred;
 The flurry that moved with the sun expired
 So Terje went westward, hard.
 They lowered the jollyboat over the side,
 He heard the song raised by the crew, — —
 With his feet on the cutter's ribs spread wide
 He rowed till the sea-foam seethed to the stride,
 He drew blood from his fingernails too.

Gjæsling's the reef with the covered top

Just east of the Homberg Sound.
 An onshore wind makes a ugly chop
 And but two feet under there's ground.
 The foam flashes white there, glitters like gold
 However dead calm it be; —
 But though the breakers be never so bold
 Inshore it's most often calm, all told,
 In the broken force of the sea.

Inshore Terje headed; his vessel flew
 Like an arrow through foam and spray;
 But hard in his wake the jollyboat crew,
 Fifteen of them, toiled away.
 It was then that he called through the surf's loud roar
 To God in his direst dread:
 "Hidden away on the stony shore
 Sits my wife in a house that is wretched and poor
 And waits, with the child, for bread!"

But fifteen raise more of a din than he can;
 An echo of Lyngør's griefs.
 Luck's on the side of the Englishman
 Patrolling through Norway's reefs.
 Then Terje rammed on the shoaling top,
 The jollyboat grounded as well;
 The officer in the bow called "Stop!"
 He lifted an oar-butt and let it drop
 To stove in the cutter's shell.

The impact shattered both rib and plank,
 A torrent of sea gushed through;
 In two feet of water that cargo sank,
 But Terje's defiance grew.
 He broke the armed cordon that had arrived
 And over the gunwale he sprang, —
 He dived and he swam and again he dived;
 But the jollyboat cleared; though he turned and contrived
 The gun-fire and sabres rang.

They fished him out, hauled him over the side;
 A salvo from the corvette;
 Aft on the poop-deck, flushed with pride,
 Stood the captain, scarce eighteen as yet.
 His very first prize was Terje's boat,
 His vanity knew no check;
 But Terje saw that escape was remote; —
 That strong man knelt with a sob in his throat
 To plead on the warship's deck.

He bargained with tears, in return they made fun,
 They bartered their scorn for his plea.

An east wind was rising, so England's son,
 Triumphant, put out to sea.
 Then Terje fell silent: befall what may,
 He kept his grief private now.
 Yet all of his captors were moved to say
 That suddenly something seemed blown away
 From the clouded span of his brow.

He spent five long years in the hulks, men swear,
 Confined in the prison's din.
 His shoulders grew bent, he turned white of hair
 In dreaming of home and kin.
 He brooded on something he never unveiled
 As though the one treasure he owned.
 Then eighteen-fourteen came and peace prevailed;
 Then home Norway's captives, with Terje, sailed
 In a frigate the Swedes had loaned.

Back home on the quayside he came ashore,
 Ship's pilot by royal writ;
 But few in that grizzled creature saw
 The young sailor who'd left so fit.
 His home was another's; he went to crave
 Some news of his darling pair:
 "The husband forsook them and nobody gave,
 They both ended up in a common grave
 That the parish's pauper-folk share." — —

Years passed by and he plied his trade
 On the furthest isle did he;
 There wasn't a foe in the world he'd made,
 Whether by land or by sea.
 His eye, though, sometimes with menace glared,
 When surf on the shoals tossed high, —
 And then he seemed troubled, so folk declared,
 And then there were few who would not feel scared
 With Terje Vigen by.

One evening — bright moon and a leeward flaw —
 There's a stir where the pilots sit;
 An English yacht being swept ashore
 With foresail and main both split.
 The flag on the foretop displayed the red
 And wordless appeal abroad.
 A little inshore was a cutter that sped
 Close-hauled and tacked through the gale ahead
 Till the pilot stood firm on board.

He looked like a grizzle-haired hero — he manned
 The helm, showing no concern; —
 The yacht responded, stood out from the land,

The cutter in tow astern.
 The lord came aft, doffed the hat he wore,
 His lady, with babe, at his heel;
 “Preserve us alive from this surf’s wild roar,
 I promise more wealth than you’ve lacked before.” —
 But the pilot let go the wheel.

His cheek became white, a laugh twitched his lip
 Like a smile that breaks through at last.
 Carried in further the lord’s fine ship
 Ran up on the reef, stuck fast.
 “Abandon ship! To the boats with all speed,
 My lady, my lord I say!
 We’ll shiver to pieces, — clear signs to read, —
 But closer inshore there’s the sheltered lead;
 My wake-line will show you the way!”

Phosphorous blazed as they raced along
 Towards land with the precious load.
 Aft stood the pilot, tall and strong,
 And keenly his fierce eye glowed.
 He sighted to leeward on Gjæsling’s bare top
 And on Hesnes Sound windward as well;
 Then letting go helm and the stay-sail strop
 He lifted an oar-butt and let it drop
 And stove in the cutter’s shell.

In rushed the sea with a burst of spray, — —
 A shudder ran through the wreck — ;
 But the mother, all pallid with dismay,
 Had snatched up her child from the deck.
 “Anna my baby” she cried out distraught;
 The greybeard he started, did he;
 He put the helm over, he made the sheet taut,
 The boat seemed a very bird when brought
 To ride the rough seething sea.

It grounded, they sank; but calmness itself
 Inshore of the arc of rough seas;
 Under the boat ran a hidden shelf,
 The water came up to their knees.
 His lordship shouted: “The reef — look here,
 It’s moving — no skerry I trow!”
 The pilot smiled: “You have nought to fear:
 Three barley-casks on a boat sunk here
 Is the reef that holds us now.”

The thought of a half-forgotten deed
 Flashed over his lordship’s face —
 The seaman who’d knelt on his deck to plead
 In tears — he recalled apace!

Then cried Terje Vigen: "You held my all
 In your hand, — thrown away for renown.
 One moment from now and revenge will fall — —".
 'Twas then the Norwegian stood there, tall,
 While the proud English lord knelt down.

But Terje stood propped on the upright oar
 As straight as in younger days;
 His hair streamed wild in the gusting flaw,
 His eyes one compelling blaze.
 "You sailed in your mighty corvette with pride,
 I rowed in my humble boat;
 I toiled for my own till I nearly died,
 You robbed them of food and then when I cried
 Found it easy to mock and gloat.

Your wealthy lady's as bright as the spring,
 Her hand is all silken-fine, —
 My poor wife's hand was a roughened thing,
 But still, for all that, she was mine.
 Your child's hair is golden, her eyes as blue
 As a little guest of our Lord;
 My daughter was nothing to boast of, true,
 Was thin, God help us, and grey-faced too
 Like most at the poor folks' board.

See, *those* were my riches upon this earth,
 They were all I could claim as my due.
 I thought it a treasure of such great worth;
 Yet it weighed but a mite with you.
 The hour of revenge has now struck, beware, —
 Your turn to endure has come round
 To match the long years that I've had to bear
 That bowed down my shoulders and whitened my hair
 And buried my joy in the ground."

Seizing the child he wrenched it free,
 With his left grasped the lady's waist.
 "Stand back there, my lord! One step and 'twill be
 At the cost of both lives, your haste!"
 The Briton poised to renew the fray,
 His arm, though, was limp with fright; —
 His breathing came hot; his eyes turned away,
 And his hair — it showed in the dawn of day —
 Turned grey in that single night.

But Terje's forehead had shed its frown,
 His bosom moved calm and free.
 He reverently set the young infant down,
 He kissed its hand, tenderly.
 He breathed as though loosed from a prison cell,

He spoke in a mild, level way:
 “Terje Vigen’s himself again, he is well.
 Until now my blood raced like a stream on the fell;
 For I *had* to, I *had* to repay.

The long, long years in the prison’s maw,
 `Twas they turned my heart amiss.
 Since then I’ve bent like a highland straw,
 I’ve peered in a foul abyss.
 But now that’s all over; we’re quits withal;
 You sinned without guile, I know.
 I gave what I had — and you took my all,
 And so, if you think you’ve been wronged, then call
 On God, for He fashioned me so.” —

All safe and sound by the dawn’s first light;
 The yacht lay in port at last.
 The less said the better about that night
 But still Terje’s name spread fast.
 The nightmare’s grey clouds were swept away
 By one night’s wild storm and wreck;
 And Terje bore straighter than most from that day
 The shoulders that bowed the time he lay
 To kneel on the man-o-war’s deck.

Milord and milady came — crowds indeed —
 As he stood in his poor abode;
 They shook him by hand, bade farewell and God speed
 And paid him the thanks they owed:
 For rescue from howling gale, distress,
 For rescue from shoal and wild sea;
 But Terje was stroking the young child’s dress:
 “Not so, our saviour in need was no less
 Than *this* little mite by me!” — —

The yacht then headed for Hesnes Sound,
 The Norwegian flag was raised.
 Just to the west there is foam-washed ground, —
 And *there* a salute-gun blazed.
 A teardrop glistened in Terje’s eyes;
 He watched from a nearby height:
 “Much have I lost, much gained likewise.
 Perhaps ‘twas a blessing in disguise, —
 So the thanks, God, are yours by right!”

‘Twas thus that I saw him, just once — he lay
 With his catch alongside the quay;
 His hair was white but he sang, as gay
 And spry as a boy was he.
 He bantered with lasses who happened abroad,
 He joked with the lads, each one,

He waved his sou'wester and sprang aboard
 Then hoisting the jib he left the fjord
 For home, the old eagle, in sun.

In Fjære churchyard I saw a grave
 That lay in a weathered spot;
 Unkempt, it was shallow, decrepit, save
 For the headboard that marked the plot.
 It read "Thærie Wiighen" in white, the year
 He went to his rest shown too.
 He lay to the winds and the suns that sear,
 So stiff and tough was the grass growing near,
 But wild flowers were showing through.

Henr. Ibsen

Terje Vigen written probably during 1861. The English blockade of Norway was undertaken because Denmark/Norway had agreed with France and Russia to close its ports against English commerce. Skagan, Fladstrand, on the northern tip of Denmark. Prisoners such as *Terje Vigen* were kept on hulks at Chatham; Lyngør, a harbour north of Grimstad where in 1814 British ships sank Norway's last frigate. Fjære, *Terje Vigen's* reputed burial spot, is near Grimstad.

EPILOGUE AT MR BUCHER'S BENEFIT APPEARANCE
 IN THE NORWEGIAN THEATRE
 (14th January 1861)

I made my first appearance
 A stranger here, and new,
 By fjord and fell divided
 From home, from kinfolk too.
 Hence I approached faint-hearted
 The narrow strip of stage,
 For shrewd eyes were observing
 The unknown's pupilage.

The space here was restricted
 And low beneath the roof,
 And thought, when it went groping,
 Met many a sharp reproof;
 But out of the shrewd eyes watching
 Beamed a kindness, bright and clear;
 No longer as a stranger
 The stranger now stood here.

Here friendship's hands were proffered,
 A compact nought can harm,
 I grew as much at home here
 As on my mother's farm —
 I felt then my youthful powers! —
 I would, nay I must succeed!
 My new-found home's advancement

Became my most sacred need. —

The space here now is lighter,
 There's height beneath the roof —
 And time is pointing onward,
 A dawning sky the proof;
 But who can have forgotten
 That childhood wretchedness;
 Child-labour was enlisted
 To save the house, no less!

And down came the ancient structure,
 Today, in the rubble's stead,
 There rises a finer building,
 Much lighter, with space overhead;
 Whence comes a thought that's soothing
 'Mid the stresses of time, the strain:
 I too played a part, supplying
 My stone to the work in train.

So thanks for the tonic potion
 Provided so cordially!
 Thanks for each glowing reflection
 I carry through life with me!
 Hard I shall strive, with ambition,
 Though it come brief and short,
 On, to the temple of Vision,
 Up, to the stronghold, Thought!

Henr. Ibsen

The Norwegian Theatre was comprehensively redesigned and refurbished during the summer of 1860. It was reopened on October 11th with an orchestral overture conducted by the famous violinist Ole Bull, who also, after the reading of a prologue, played to the audience.

PERIL AT SEA
 (Written March 1861)

With surf-troubled holms and no trees to boast,
 It shows pretty grim, does Norway's coast,
 The western approach most dourly;
 Close in, though, you'll find many bays disposed,
 Sun-warmed and sparkling and snugly enclosed,
 Where your anchor will hold securely.

There you've a shelter of leaning trees;
 Fields that resemble the very seas,
 Their crops waving golden-mellow.
 In by the quay where the flag is seen,
 Tucked under the slope on a thin patch of green,
 Wooden houses stand, red and some yellow.

Places I visited, where I had dreamed
 As the full-blown storms and as flurries streamed
 Cooling the brow of the waters.
 Life in these parts has its wretcheder side;
 Yet many a deed showing strength and bold pride
 I can vouch for still in some quarters.

I still recall, though it's years since then,
 The quiet women, the silent men
 At war with the might of the weather.
 Their saga's but short and briefly run, —
 Yet in its course a great deed can be done;
 Such as this I shall put together.

There lived in a haven that's much the same
 A pilot, — old, I forget his name
 But know that war-service intruded.
 He'd fought as a lad in the Roads the day
 That Nelson put the white flag on display, —
 Then came home when peace was concluded.

Now he was stooped, weather-beaten and grey.
 His trio of sons, as all would say,
 Were but so-so, and rated according.
 Lads for the sea they were, that much was clear;
 Were named thereabouts as first, without peer,
 When it came to a ship and its boarding.

When perishing cold set in, blizzard and hail, —
 It was out with the cutter — a reef in the sail,
 Then off on the wings of the welter.
 They knew every channel, restricted or clear,
 They knew every inlet, far and near,
 And they'd bring a ship into shelter.

They would yell in high glee when a loud tempest broke,
 And headwind or no, they would stroke by stroke
 Keep on till the ship was sighted.
 But if they liked fighting the surf and swell
 They fought just as gladly on land as well;
 "A shame" said the folk, united.

In such a haven, as well you know,
 Quite a large muster can often grow
 Of foreign ships on their mooring.
 Sometimes the cause is a head-on gale,
 Sometimes it's damage to shroud and sail,
 Sometimes it's planks that need shoring.

But then there's some life in that little bay!
 In on the patch there's a dance under way
 With fluting and clarinetting.
 Danish melodies, Russian chants,
 English horn-pipes, can-cans from France
 Weave a right motley setting.

The trio I mentioned were sometimes there;
 But that meant a threat to the whole affair.
 I cannot explain their rancour, —
 Suffice it to say, and it passed for true,
 They would bring out their mightiest oaths on cue
 When a Danish craft lay at anchor.

One day — it was summer — in ran a brig
 With trimmest of cordage and ship-shape rig
 And the Danes' national flag was flying.
 Likelier lads you would seldom see
 Than they were, they reefed so efficiently
 As the brig cleared the point outlying.

Come that evening, it's dance and play,
 Come that night it turned bloody fray, —
 For the trio were there, those bold hearties.
 Oaths from the Danes, the Norwegians bawled,
 But neither side triumphed and no-one crawled.
 Honours all square for both parties.

The Danes made mock of them, teased them raw;
 But next time they met, the three lads swore
 Bloody vengeance could be expected.
 The brig weighed anchor — the day was bright —
 The gaff-mounted flag was a handsome sight.
 The set-to was long recollected.

And harsh were the words they endured, those three,
 For having behaved so outrageously;
 But the talking proved vain and hollow.
 A summer passed by, then the autumn's gone;
 The winter weather dragged on and on
 Till it's time for the spring to follow.

Then all of a sudden the wildest of blows
 One night-time in April with fog and thick snows,
 Big surf on the shoals and beaches.
 That night there was no-one could rest ashore; —
 Then a shot was heard, — and again one more; —
 It came from the outer reaches.

Folk flocked the look-out point, old and young;
 But in rolled dense sea-mist and there it hung,

No glimpse of the waters flowing.
 Just once, where the surf broke in white and gold,
 A hollow sound like a thunder-clap rolled
 And they saw something red was showing.

Then the mist lifted and daylight broke.
 The wild-surfing seas seemed to burn and smoke
 As they drowned in each other's scurry.
 But trapped in the breakers they saw a brig
 With trimmest of cordage and ship-shape rig,
 And the Danes' national flag all a-flurry.

The flag that had proudly waved o'er the field
 Now smote the air but for help appealed! —
 Too late for a tack, folk reckoned.
 The anchor had failed and the sail had backed;
 A matter of life and death in fact
 Quite likely the very next second.

Up at the look-out the old exchange notes:
 "Is this fit weather for open boats?"
 "Isn't the sea much too broken?"
 But all lamented as one; they found:
 "The fact it's *Danes* being blown aground
 Seems dreadful by any token!"

"They sent us over such food as we got,
 We went smuggling together though never a lot:
 Our many shared memories aren't banished."
 So they moaned on in the old-uns' ring;
 But the trio, they said not a single thing, —
 For they weren't to the found, they'd vanished.

But out from the head shot a boat at a rate;
 Swifter by far than the elders' debate,
 There is burst its way through the weather!
 Sometimes it fell, sometimes rose on the sea;
 But the three in the boat, they yelled out with glee; —
 Then they boarded, — they'd won together.

The sea was black, like a torrent of mold;
 Menacing sun added red and gold;
 The wreck showed now bright, now sorry.
 The colours resembled the German three —
 They spread out to windward, they foamed on the lee,
 The Danes' national flag their quarry.

Then the encounter turned war-game instead;
 Aboard the Danes' vessel the fluttering red
 Call for help was no longer blowing —
 The trio who'd come know the fairway sound,

The anchor's cut loose and the bow's brought round, —
The boat scuds with all canvas showing.

And off through the reefs and shoals it flies,
In Øresund the brig soon lies,
Rides safe on its anchor yonder.
But those three pilots from Norway's strand,
They took their pay, they were set on land, —
But went home with a lot to ponder.

Yet if they'd been somewhat better taught,
They might have come up with some such thought:
"You tell them, those Hun high-horsemen,
If you're forced to fight for your Danish flag
We'll all give a hand, there's none will lag, —
But first you'll find Norway's Norsemen!

Henr. Ibsen

A call to Norwegians to forget the old animosities against Denmark which had once ruled over their country. The poem urges support for Denmark partly because it was a vital source of supplies during the English blockade (see Terje Vigen above), partly because it constituted the southern line of defence for the whole of Scandinavia against German expansionism. The Roads — the old man had fought in the battle of Copenhagen in 1801 against Nelson's fleet. Øresund, the sound between Sweden and Denmark.

SONG

at

THE CELEBRATION AT KLINGENBERG

17th May 1861

We are one folk, our land is free!
In song and speech thus sallies
Our jubilation fervently
Through Norway's many valleys.
In travail born, its swaddling, stress,
Baptised in blunt outspokenness,
Cast in the lion's mould, no less,
The soul of Norway rallies.

But, Norsemen, woe if it befalls
That you, through inanition,
Should slump within your forebears' walls,
Day-dreaming of tradition!
You've blows to strike still, many more,
Full many a mile to fare, full sore,
Still many a goal to gain before
You dare claim intermission.

You'll not be free till courage hoist
Its flag at masthead proudly,
Till accents that your forebears voiced

Dare in your song ring loudly.
 You'll not be free till ridge and height,
 Fall's dazzling sunset, spring's clear light
 Pervade the mind as well as sight,
When home's bright meadows crowd thee.

Not free until the North's defence
 Stands firm, the south protected, —
 The Dark-Age thrall-badge flung far hence
 Across the Straits, rejected.
 Not free till all the North is freed!
 Woe, then, to him who dares concede
 Mere words to brothers in dire need, —
 His grave shall be neglected!

So guard your birthright with staunch pride,
 When horn and flag are hailing, —
 Keep night-watch at your brother's side,
 Brave fell-men, never failing!
 Scan well the frontier's mountain wall,
 Spread dale to dale the beacon's call,
 For freedom's God aids free men all, —
 His cause is all-prevailing!

Henr. Ibsen

SONG
 for
 THE UNIVERSITY
 AT THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
 AT KLINGENBERG
 2nd September 1861.
 Mel. Herr Peder kasted Runer.

Across the mountains misty morn came trailing;
 It bore the message: Dark's duress is failing.
 The folk though saw a mirage
 Far off, as in a dream,
 A keep, with spires and turrets
 That o'er the ridge-crest gleam.
 But the ship must be sent a-sailing
 To arrive at the sun-regaling
 Castle Thought.

But here and there mid spruces darkly jumbling
 The wise see clearly, while the folk are fumbling;
 The Doomsday winter ended,
 So, too dream's listless doze, —
 Then was it Norway's May-day
 In land-wide splendour rose:
 Fairest sight of the fell's profusion, —

There it lay in the bright effusion,
Castle Thought.

Yes, 'twas the folk's dream, reared on life's foundation,
Based on the folk's will and its dedication!
Then there soared free a Lidskjalf
High on the stronghold's crest
Where Odin's cunning ravens
Flew in and out to nest.
Still the spirit builds, undefeated,
You've ne'er seen on this earth, completed,
Castle Thought.

'Tis like the church by warriors bold projected:
The trolls of night tore down what day erected;
Up, then, ye youthful muster, —
Keep night-watch unfatigued,
And guard the temple precinct
With Light's own spirit leagued.
When the turrets and spires are soaring
Then shall column and vault rear, shoring
Castle Thought.

Hail, then, our Lidskjalf, this high seat of learning,
With far-flung vistas for the eye discerning,
Thence bridges spring, wide-spanning,
That stretch unendingly,
O'er distance's vast desert
And over Time's broad sea.
Thence shall issue this proclamation:
In the North soars the fair foundation,
Castle Thought.

Henr. Ibsen

In 1811 the King of Denmark ordered a preliminary study to be undertaken that led to the foundation of Oslo University. Doomsday winter translates Ibsen's Fimbulsvinter, the three-year-long winter that portended the destruction of the Nordic gods by the giants; Lidskjalf, Odin's throne-cum-lookout high on his palace roof whence he surveyed the world; the cunning ravens were his spies.

PROLOGUE

at

THE NORWEGIAN THEATRE'S SPECIAL PERFORMANCE

10th October [1861]

Temple spire and royal fort,
Raised by forebears of our nation,
Stand now like the land's stone-wrought
Grief, a muted lamentation.
Norway's banner, blithe and red,
Flew there once with wings outspread, —

Then, half-mast, it drooped and sorrowed
Through the dire days that followed.

Temple-spire's bright golden glance
Squandered on the wind and weather,
Royal hall's once sprightly dance
Soundless, silenced altogether.
But a page from saga linked
These our days with those extinct;
Now the flag flaunts saga's pages
Crammed with runes from distant ages.

People's flag, fly bravely filled,
Free once more, on fell-winds lofted;
Float o'er what the folk now build
As you did once, memory-wafted.
Fan new life, new vigour bring
With your roof-top fluttering;
Let your tongue to freedom rally
Men from fjord and from the valley.

Whisper them: no lifeless stone
Built the people's seat of power;
Prompt them, it was will alone
Brought it, year by year, to tower.
Woe, should none *there* comprehend
What your urgent words portend; —
You would droop, in folds of sadness,
As you did at Svolder's madness!

Woe, should none there in that hall
Heed your message to the nation, —
Let the brave, blue cross then fall,
Shroud the mast in desolation.
Let your blithe red freedom-flag
Droop inert and lifeless sag,
Banner, strike your noble whiteness
Rivalling snowdrifts with its brightness!

Never, that shall never be!
From the fells fair breezes blowing
Raise aloft the colours three,
Bring the strength that's life-bestowing.
In the high-roofed hall there's space,
Spirit's cause deserves a place, —
Harald's vision of our nation
Shall not lack accommodation.

People's pile and royal pile
Opposite each other tower!
Stand like kinfolk, free of guile,
Eye to eye, with equal power; —

Hence will's fiery lightning plays
 In that interchange of gaze; —
 Sverre's, Haakon's, Oscar's holy
 Shades by day build well, if slowly!

May the folk's will, strong and free,
 Watch and ward the folk's endeavour, —
 Shield its works, that liberty
 May, though young, be shrined for ever!
 Let the masonry decay,
 Deeds are columns built to stay,
 Elevate, sustain the nation,
 Norway's weal and reputation.

Henr. Ibsen

The prologue, to a performance of Bjørnson's 'King Sverre', celebrated the laying of the foundation stone of the new Parliament building, which faces the palace from the far end of Karl Johan Street; Svolder, the site of King Olaf I of Norway's defeat and death in AD 1000. King Harald achieved his vision of a unified Norway by his victory over local kings and earls at the sea battle of Havsford in 872.

ON THE OCCASION OF
 ENGINEER CAPTAIN P. STEENSTRUP'S
 54th BIRTHDAY

29th November 1861

Respectfully dedicated by the Engineering Plant's Song Quartet

Birthright's blessing,
 silvered tressing,
 decks the dauntless man.
 Eye and spirit glowing,
 — gifts of heaven's bestowing; —
 labour's guider,
 work-provider,
Steenstrup will and can!

Health and power
 build a bower
 where the boss may dwell.
 Years may pass and vanish,
 but *his* memory banish? —
 Saga's scrivings
 carve great strivings —
his name *she* knows well.

We the choir
 work for hire,
 we who celebrate.
 We stand awe-inspired
 by the good, admired

labour-guider,
work-provider,
Skill's best advocate.

We shall daily
follow gaily
Steenstrup all the way.
A mere taste, our greeting
at this birthday meeting,
as our singing
leads a ringing
Cheer for *him* — hooray!

Peter Steenstrup, born 1807, a naval marine engineer, was instrumental in founding one of the first modern shipyards for the construction of iron-clad steam ships, thus initiating the industrial revolution in Norway. He had captained the first such vessel. Saga: history personified.

17th MAY 1862

Mel: Højest løfter jeg da Guldpokalen

Dark the land lay; — mountains grimly glowered,
shadowing the dale;
fierce against the shore the fjord's foam showered;
loudly sang the gale.
Cruel the hardship in the humble dwelling,
tilth withheld its bread;
seas were barred, across them boomed the dread
din of weaponry; for it was swelling.

Be it noted — during this privation
Liberty moved here;
hence you must now pledge your dedication
to a course that's clear.
Let those prove, on whom your choice may settle,
that in word and deed
they are of sound stock, their sires' true seed,
men in whom run veins of mountain metal!

Norsemen, from the wealth of golden treasure
willed by Eidsvoll's Thing,
you shall beat new pieces out, past measure,
like a Draupner ring!
Cordon round your dearest acquisition,
stand watch o'er the land!
Freedom needs a guard alertly manned;
half the triumph stems from disposition.

Freedom's crown shall blossom forth unstinting,
warded by such might,
spread the barrens with a rosy tinting,

make the black tarn bright!
 Peace's garlands twining Olaf's axes
 lastingly portend:
 Fortune's dew shall on our realm descend,
 Spring by Spring the North's well-being waxes!

Seas were barred: an English blockade resulted from Norway's declaration of independence in 1814; Draupner, Odin's golden ring which was able to reproduce itself indefinitely; Olaf's axes: Saint Olaf became attributed, strangely enough, with Thor's cruciform hammer or two-headed axe.

IN LUND
 AT THE RALLY OF SCANDINAVIAN STUDENTS, 1862
 (Mel: Af Reissiger)

Hail Skaane, low-land's Queen, we hail thee,
 Home of the North's first-fostered dream,
 Where memories of our race loom palely,
 Like mountain walls beyond Time's stream.
 Here once clashed *elders* of our nation,
 Here marched our princes, war to wage,
 But out of conflict grew salvation,
 The North's harmonious Golden Age.

But you have seen a better rally,
 A Braavall worth *our* time's applause.
 Our nation's *youngest* led the tally
 Of fighters in our future's cause.
 It seemed the Valkyr stood there eyeing
 The North, perceiving victory there;
 The North's new leaders in the vying
 Were Æhlenschlæger and Tegnér.

Here flew the flag's initiation,
 Implanted firm on *Sweden's* shore:
 Well met then, Swede, on this occasion
 Shared with your kin from Dan and Nor.
 We'll let our foe's sly, devious legions
 Scan day and night each paper clause, —
 A host of Swedes, of Danes, Norwegians
 Has youth's zeal fighting for its cause.

Henr. Ibsen

Skaane, the southernmost region of Sweden, once part of the Danish Viking kingdom; Lund, the settlement in the south that King Canute turned into a township about C.1020 AD; about 1080 a start was made on the construction of a great stone cathedral there, which later became the seat for the first Scandinavian Archbishop. Braavall, the site of the internecine and bloody battle between Harald Hilditann and his nephew Honig for possession of Sweden; Æhlenschlæger and Tegnér, leaders of, respectively, the Danish and the Swedish historical/romantic movement in literature; our foe — Germany, pursuing its claim on the duchies of Slesvig and Holstein.

SONG
at
THE STUDENTS' RETURN FROM THE RALLY
IN COPENHAGEN
22nd June 1862
(Mel: For Norge, Kjæmpers Fødeland.)

There's mention in an ancient tome,
— Great pagan days it traces —
Of our forefathers who would roam
To trade in far off places;
But when the ship again turned head
And north for home and haven sped,
It carried riches back instead,
Bore gold in its embraces.

But some would rather claim it bore
From earth's far-distant regions
A crop, bred on a southern shore,
Of seed, fair plants in legions.
They thrived in Norway's soil and site
Like garden blooms, their colours bright,
Hence in the North gained freehold-right,
Those plants from southern regions.

You too seek distant kin and dance
The billows wildly flowing;
You bring back gold that will enhance
The soul, much seed worth sowing.
Yes, youth's deep murmurs from the heart,
Each flash audacious thought may dart,
Each grand, fair vision born of art
Is truly seed worth sowing.

But profitless your pains I fear —
Let there be no mistaking —
If journey's end is all you hear
In this our farewell-taking.
Each seed must in its freehold bear
Our northern region's bracing air, —
That kindred growth needs hot-house care
Is mere old-wives' tale-making.

For we must one day read the signs,
That Norway's pines can nourish
The Danish birches as our pines
Midst Sweden's oaks may flourish.
Your native tree has never died;
It prospers best as freedom's bride,

With kindred shoots that grew and vied
In this our festive rally.

Henr. Ibsen

THE PASTURE-HUT ON DRONNINGBJERGET
(By Henr. Ibsen)

Now the hut's built on Norway's fell,
Hugging its foot in their fond embraces
Roses from northern slopes blend well
With blossoms from kindlier places.

Memory's message from southern parts,
Mingled with northern love and affection,
Shall, here renewed, unfold their hearts
Like the ever-green vine's perfection.

Here to this spot that's remote and small,
Memory's knit with its treasure,
Knit too, a name, — just *one*, that's all,
But *three* it serves for good measure.

The pasture hut: a music pavilion built on Bygdø. The occasion was a visit by three Louises: Queen Louise, wife of Charles XV, Princess Louise of the Netherlands and Princess Louise of Norway/Sweden.

COMPLICATIONS
(from a draft of "Love's Comedy")

An apple-tree stood in a garden I know,
it was dripping with blossom white as snow.

About the garden there bustled a bee;
he fell in love with a bloom on the tree.

So peace of mind was denied them both.
But then the pair of them plighted troth.

Off flew the bee on his summer round.
Returned, the blossom had set, he found.

The bee lamented, the set grieved too;
but now there was nothing that they could do.

Close by the tree in a rubble house
lived a quite humble but worthy mouse.

He sighed in secret: "Oh set divine,
my hole would be heaven if you were mine!"

The bee, ever loyal, resumed his roam.
The set had turned fruit when he got back home.

The bee lamented, the fruit grieved too;
but there was nothing that they could do.

Under the eaves, like a basket in style,
a nest clung, a sparrow's domicile.

He sighed in secret: "Oh fruit divine
my nest would be heaven if you were mine."

The bee lamented, the fruit grieved too,
the mouse felt shattered, the sparrow blue.

But things dragged on; no solution in view;—
a case of "there's nothing that we can do".

Then — the fruit fell from the branch and was split.
The mouse, with a smothered "Ah!", died of a fit.

The sparrow fell likewise; still in its hide
when corn-sheaves were hoisted at Christmas-tide.

The bee was now free, but hedgerows stood bare,
and summer's blooms were no longer there.

He entered the beehive, could there relax,
and died full of years as a maker of wax.

It would have been spared, all that bother and fret,
had bee become mouse when the bloom became set.

And all could have ended so well, the whole shoot,
had mouse become sparrow when set became fruit.

SONG

at the Student Union celebration
13th January 1863
(Mel: "For Norge, Kjæmpers Føderland")

We slept the present through, slept small, —
And made us great by dreaming;
But dawn's wind ripped the murky pall
And day took over, beaming.
North's vision, lately reft of sight,
Put Memory's dead dreams to flight,
New life emerged by sound and bight,
Life set the fjords a-gleaming.

We sons of the Norwegian fell

As our Sound-severed neighbours —
 They rouse the North — divine full well,
 We've slept away our labours.
 Dreams are for night-time, deeds for day,
 Our flag shall o'er the victory play
 When we a firm foundation lay
 With clash of swords and sabres.

For cellar-life the lion-shag's
 Too fine a thing to offer,
 Like golden trim on musty rags
 Flung over Memory's coffer.
 It shall be flaunted to serve well
 The brothers three from Sound and fell, —
 Hence here, tonight, we shall repel
 What *Memory's* fare may proffer.

No, *onward, outward* on life's sea
 We'll gaze, though day blow colder,
 A noble brotherhood of three,
 The Cross upon our shoulder.
 Our mission is a *Promised Land*;
 It looms ahead, that lovely strand, —
 Sail, Norsemen! Memory's the grand
 Bold cross upon your shoulder!

Henr. Ibsen

WITH A WATER-LILY

See, my dear, the gift I proffer;
 It's the white-winged bloom I offer;
 Borne on gentle streams it floated
 Fraught with dreams that Spring promoted.

If you'd house it safely, dearest,
 House it in your breast, 'tis nearest;
 Then its leaves shall be the dwelling
 Of a deep and placid swelling.

Child, beware the meek tarn yonder,
 Perilous to those that ponder.
 There the sprite pretends he's drowsing,
 Playful lilies hide his housing.

Child, your breast's the meek tarn yonder,
 Perilous to those that ponder; —
 Playful lilies hide the housing —
 While the sprite pretends he's drowsing.

*My dear — Ibsen originally wrote Marie, the name of one of Susannah Thoresen's sisters.
Perhaps the submerged eroticism of the poem suggested the change.*

SONG
at
THE STUDENT UNION BALL
13th February 1863
(Mel: I Rosenlund.)

A luring, wonderful castle soars
In Memory's earliest morning;
But day-time's cloud of depressing chores
Spread o'er the keep like an awning.
But — should our festival delight,
Your soul will ply its pinions
And for the stronghold's peak take flight,
For Beauty's blithe dominions.

Yes, this is more than a passing fling,
This moment pledged to enjoyment;
It soothes the soul, brings a freshening
To day's dull, sordid employment.
It is a yearning for the home
Where soul, cocooned and flightless,
Bursts forth and soars, transformed, to roam
Midst colour, music, brightness.

So drink at pleasure's prepotent spring,
Go young and warm to your duties!
Seek out, this festival evening,
The tempting shrine that is Beauty's.
Hail, all who've sounding-board for breast,
A mind to jubilation,
Who've wings to join the fray's blithe zest,
Fair swans of this occasion!

H.I.

SONG
at the installation of
THE BUSTS OF
WERGELAND AND WELHAVEN
in the Students' Union.
9th May 1863
Mel. Norafjeld med Jøkel blaa

New-built stands the students' hall;
But within are building
Ghosts from wars rhetorical,
Shades of strife, thought-wielding.
Then our dwelling was baptised,
Graced by female beauty,

Student hopes flocked, well-apprised
By the past, of duty.

Thoughts clash shield on shield, ring bold
Through the thousand valleys, —
It's our folk's thought-Idavold,
This, our hall for rallies.
Here the conflict never dies,
Though *elsewhere* abated;
Here the fallen, god-like, rise
Well-conciliated.

Mind's bold knight shall hew his path
Without hate's invective;
Conflict is Truth's cleansing bath
From the heights' perspective;
Words shall bear a weapon's weight
In those jousts of Reason; —
Well the age deserves its fate
That outlives its season.

From today clear signs invoke
Reconciliation,
Chiselled with incisive stroke,
Memory's warm oblation.
And the lady's gift conveyed
Gentle faith, stout-hearted:
'Tis the loving garland laid
On the brave departed.

Henr. Ibsen

Wergeland and Welhaven, Norway's leading poets who, at one stage, were very strongly antagonistic.

SONG
at
THE SOCIETY OF ART'S RECEPTION
for
THE ACTOR CHR. JØRGENSEN.
30th May 1863
(Mel. Danmark dejligst Vang og Vænge.)

Well I knew the man who sallied
North from Denmark's reach;
Sword, the fervid brow he carried,
Thews, his skill of speech.
Viking-like he sought to measure
Weapon's weight, amass deed-treasure,
Sought to grow, sought high opinion,
Sought a new dominion.

In his mind youth's spate was racing,
 In his heart, Spring's sluice;
 He, mid uplands brisk and bracing,
 Rooted like the spruce.
 Each appearance gained him glory;
 Sometimes he could well be gory,
 But all shared the same opinion:
 He'd gained his dominion.

He, now grey, his mission ending,
 Contemplates the foam,
 Yearns to hear the swan's song blending
 On his island home.
 Drop the shield, axe, sword you wielded,
 Time to rest, you've never yielded, —
 Your great saga of successes
 Shall outlive Time's stresses!

For, as rows of rough-hewn boulder
 By the North Sea waves
 Loud acclaim the brave who moulder,
 Long laid in their graves, —
 So shall you, in Beauty's region,
 Be recalled by boulders legion, —
 To tell ages yet to flower
 Of the man's true power!

Henr. Ibsen

In honour of the Danish actor on the occasion of his departure from the Danish (as opposed to the Norwegian) Theatre in Christiania after more than 30 years service.

A TRIBUTE TO SONG

(Mel. "Hur lange skall i Norden")

Our tongues long ceased their singing,
 Like moping birds, cast down;
 Now song comes freely ringing
 From country, fjord and town.
 The Lead, to summer's gleaming,
 The sons of song parade, —
 Led by a sign, the streaming
 Banner Woman made.

Indeed this Bergen muster
 Holds promise of accord, —
 Where sons of Oslo cluster
 With those from Trondhjem's fjord.
 The bird that ventures soaring
 Round Lindesness and Stat
 May soon be off, exploring
 Kjølen and Kattegat.

Young Norway's voice ascending
 Shall loudly ring abroad,
 With our near neighbours' blending
 The Nordic triple chord;
 Who'er adopts this mission
 Ensures his future fame, —
 But let song's first rendition
 Be ancient Bergen's name!

Written for a student rally in Bergen. Lindesness, an island off the southern tip of Norway; Stat (Statland) in the north, near Namsos; Kjølén, a mountain range between Norway and Sweden; the Kattegat, the straits between Norway and Denmark.

ON A SINGING TRIP

On through the islets that nestle,
 This hallowed and gleaming day,
 Steams our imposing vessel,
 Hundreds of flags on display.

Youngsters aboard are singing,
 Joyous in voice and heart,
 Song floods the fjord, wide-ringing,
 Fills the strait's every part.

Up in the bows, commotion —
 Horns and loud tubas play.
 Church bells call to devotion; —
 But Sawney won't hear them today.

He won't hear the church bell chiming,
 He won't heed his prayer-book's cues,
 He won't heed high mass's timing
 For songs on a Sunday cruise.

But trust me, perched on his foreland,
 Bewildered and gazing out
 Over the echoing moorland, —
 God's not far away, I doubt.

He can't guess our motivation,
 Can't think why we fare so bold,
 But feels well enough the sensation
 Of blood pulsing hot, now cold.

He starts from his clump of heather
 Back there on the headland knap;
 Our singer doffs hat to the weather,
 And Sawney takes off his cap.

Through the brave, bald reach we go faring,
 We speed o'er the rolling blue;
 He watches our smoke, sits staring
 As long as we stay in view.

We fly with flags flaunting out yonder,
 We sing like the birds that fly;
 He settles again to ponder:
 Some big affair just passed by.

We head for the lamps and flowers,
 Bright festivals up the coast;
 No company charms *his* hours
 Save gravity's silent host.

Don't fret that he may have neglected
 Church-going, you kept him so long;
 He's sure to have gained some reflected
 Light from our meeting, our song. —

See, thus shall we youngsters, we brothers,
 Life's voyagers, rich and so gay,
 Rouse and bear witness to others
 Land-wide, in each creek and bay.

There isn't a nook won't be ringing
 With echoes of sorts, though weak.
 It's *we* who are birds blithely singing
 With seed-corn in claw and beak.

Wherever wings may be flourished,
 Ridge-high or low down o'er the firth,
 A seed from the flock is nourished,
 Wind-blown to a pining earth.

Sawny — my attempt to represent Ibsen's faintly derogatory term for a yokel living on the coast north of Bergen.

THE STUDENT UNION'S FIFTIETH
 ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

2nd October 1863

Mel. Hur lange skall i Norden.

Our Union has its saga
 Like most of Norway's breed:
 Brought up in stark privation,
 Its daily guest, harsh need; —
 It strove as strive all Norsemen
 For life the live-long day, —
 Self-help its battle harness,

Humble roof its stay.

Our Union has its saga
 Like all of Norseman breed:
 It owns a golden treasure,
 A memory rich indeed,
 Bred in bright freedom's morning,
 Baptised in derring-do,
 Made in the nation's image
 Carved and cast anew.

When Freedom's fierce defiance
 Swept wildly through the land,
 Where else would soul and sinew,
 As ours did here, expand?
 But when the light of Reason
 Dispersed the wild carouse,
 That light, too, first descended
 On where the students house.

March onward! That's the challenge.
 March on throughout your life!
 March onward, where it matters,
 In Norway's youthful strife!
 Though fifty now, old fellow,
 Your youth's not reached its end, —
 For you have Idun's apples
 In thousands still, my friend!

Henr. Ibsen

Christiania University, the first in Norway, was inaugurated in 1813 after lengthy agitation by students; Idun, a goddess whose apples assured the preservation of youth.

FOR NORWAY!

There musters now on Tyra's lines,
 This time, perhaps, the last, —
 A folk beset, a folk that pines,
 Its banner at half-mast.
 Betrayed in dire predicament,
 Betrayed when battle-clad!
 Was *this* then what the handclasp meant
 That boded well for North's consent
 At Lund and Axelstad?

The words that gushed forth there of late
 As from a heart devout,
 They proved but a mere prosy spate,
 Now it's the turn of drought!
 The tree whose leaves such promise gave

In sunshine's festive spell
 Stands lopped and stripped by storms that rave,
 A cross on Nordic youth's own grave
 When dusk in earnest fell.

It was a lie in terms ornate,
 A Judas-kiss, we found,
 When Norway's sons rejoiced of late
 Beside the Danish Sound!
 When last the kings were on parade
 What passed 'twixt lord and lord?
 O, just the same old game once played
 In Stockholm's palace with the blade
 Of Charles the Twelfth's famed sword!

A grieving folk that all forsook
 As deathward it must go, —
 Thus ends the Nordic saga-book; —
 Who shaped its *Finis* so?
 He shaped it whose response was cowed:
 And Tyra? — held by Huns,
 While Denmark's tattered war-flag bowed
 Its rose-red, ample fold to shroud
 The last-slain of its sons.

But you, my countrymen, safe hedged
 Within your snug terrain
 By virtue of a promise pledged
 And straight betrayed again, —
 Take flight, your ancestry disclaim,
 You steered a craven course!
 Flee port to port in Cain-like shame
 And forge yourself a foreign name,
 Deny that you are Norse!

Conceal your home, your infamy,
 Your mother-tongue deny, —
 Else comes the whisper: "Did you see?
 A Norseman scurried by!" —
 Don't ever to the top-mast tie
 The lovely triple hue;
 For any free man sailing by
 Will think that Norway's flag flown high
 Means that a plague-ship's due!

It was a dream. Wake bold and brisk
 From folk-wide sleep to deed!
 All hands on deck! There's kin at risk!
 Swift counsel's what we need!

Still may the saga-record go:
 Danes, Danes own Tyra's hold!
 Still Denmark's tattered flag can blow
 Above the North's rich future, show
 Its proud and rose-red fold.

Henr. Ibsen

Tyra's lines: the Danish line of defence against German aggression; Lund and Axelstad (the old Copenhagen), places where student rallies had recently been held (see above) professing support for Denmark against Germany — promises that, like those made by the rulers of Norway and Sweden, had come to nothing. The same old game — Gustavus IV of Sweden, who imagined himself a reincarnation of Charles XII, unwisely embroiled his country in war with Russia, as a result of which Alexander I retaliated by occupying Finland.

TO FREDERICK THE SEVENTH'S MEMORY
 (Song in the Student Union)

Danes, their anxious watch south-questing,
 Denmark's bulwark man.
 Roskild's church where Frederick's resting
 Will strife's clamour ban.
 Life Danes fight for, reputation;
 Frederick's absent from his station;
 'Jens' must, on the Nordic border
 Be its only warder.

No, — when round the Jutland gateway
 Bloody work's at height,
 Frederick leaves his tomb and straightway
 Cleaves the winds of night,
 Thunders forth like Ossian's giant,
 Weapon drawn, brave and defiant;
 "On, lads! For our reputation; —
 Frederick's at his station!"

Hence he lives so well remembered,
 Denmark's Danish prince;
 Proof — the courage, king-engendered,
 That his folk evince.
 On then, for what truth endorses!
 Frederick's with his Danish forces; —
 Slav or Pole or Croat foe-man
 Cannot beat a yeoman!

Written 1864, the year after the death of Frederick VII of Denmark. The confrontation with Germany for possession of Slesvig and Holstein was approaching its crisis; Dannevirke the ancient fortifications spanning Denmark's southern border. The poem seems to invoke memories of Frederick the Great who led his army against Sweden in 1659. Roskild, a cathedral town, the seat of the Danish kings, near Copenhagen.

Ibsen left for Italy, via Copenhagen and Berlin, on the 5th April 1864.

POEMS ABROAD

FROM THE DYBBØL DAYS

I sounded a tocsin bell in rhyme
to the land at large; no stir at the time.

We lay fog-bound in the Kattegat;
first night, no one slept because of that.

We made the saloon Operations Room,
where passengers talked of Dybbøl's doom.

The talk ranged wide, debating the various
tales of the volunteers, young and precarious.

A nephew, eighteen, one person had lost;
another his counter-clerk, much to his cost.

And so it was natural to almost feel;
one was involved in a way quite real.

Ensofaed right under the shaded lamp
sat a middle-aged lady of sturdy stamp.

She attracted the bulk of the conversation;
all strove to excel in consolation.

The ladies, they sighed and moaned, each one
their fears for madam's young, only son.

I can picture her now, the way, without flurry,
she nodded and smiled, "O he's not a worry!"

How splendid she was, that silver-haired charmer,
so firm in her faith that doubt could not harm her.

A trickle of warmth filled me head to heel;
it braced my slack spine with a rod of steel.

"Your folk isn't dead, although it is lazing;
it lives in this woman's faith, it's amazing!"

But later I found she was more at home
with worldly ways than with life's great tome.

And so she puzzled me, too, as a mystery.
Whence came this gift of her faith, what's its history? —

The obvious answer came out in due course;
the son was enrolled in our fighting force.

Dybbøl, a key Danish stronghold, recently taken by the Germans.

THE POWER OF MEMORY

Hi, do you know, if a trainer's clever,
how he'll teach his bear something that sticks forever?

He binds the beast in a brewer's hopper; —
then starts a fire beneath the copper.

His hurdy-gurdy starts grinding a hearty
tune out for Bruin: "Life's one long party!"

The beast soon senses a pain that's lancing;
he can't stand still, so he must start dancing.

And if the melody's played again, —
a demon of dance starts to drive him insane.

I found myself once in the copper, seated
with music full-blast, fire equally heated.

I burnt more than hide on that occasion;
the memory sticks, it defies erasion.

And each time *that* distant memory's called on,
I feel I'm bound in a red-hot cauldron.

It feels like one's quick when a sharp thorn's in it; —
I *have* to dance with my verse-feet, that minute.

Written in Genzano, 1864.

FROM MY HOME LIFE

The house was all silent, the street a tomb.
I sat with lamp dimly shrouded;
the room was enveloped in gentle gloom; —
bobbing children burst into the room
that Havana cigar-smoke clouded.

They came, my cherubic youngsters, — a row
of mad-cap lads and young misses
with shining cheeks and a bath-time glow.
Heigh, what sport, romping high and low
through the realms of delight and their blisses.

But just as the romp had reached its best
 I, glimpsing the mirror, was shaken.
 For there appeared so sedate a guest,
 with blue-grey eyes and buttoned vest,
 and in slippers, or I'm mistaken.

A weight pressed down on my mad-cap flock;
 there's one sucks a thumb amongst us,
 another stands like a clumsy block; — —
 a stranger's presence is quite a shock,
 abashes the liveliest youngsters.

GONE!

The guests who tarried
 we saw to the gateway;
 the night winds harried
 our farewells straightway.

The house, surrounding,
 a desert, entirely,
 where tones sweet-sounding
 would so beguile me.

A party merely, —
 till darkness came on;
 a guest too, merely, —
 and now she is gone.

Written in summer 1864. Said to have been inspired to Thea Bruun on whom Ibsen modelled Agnes in 'Brand'. She died some 18 months later from tuberculosis.

A SWAN

My snow-white swan,
 so mute and so still;
 neither bird-call nor trill
 gave hint of song.

Anxious you caringly
 watched the sprite sleeping, —
 listened unsparingly,
 over him sweeping.

But when we parted,
 when vows and when eyes
 were furtive with lies, —
 yes, then it started!

Your journey ended

with birth of the song.
 Your death-song blended; —
 you *were*, then, a swan!

Probably written 1865. Manifestly different from Ibsen's earlier conventional treatments of the dying swan theme, it invites conjecture that there may be a connection between Thea Bruun's death and the completion of 'Brand' in November 1865 (see 'Gone', above).

THE GULLEY

Dense overcast; a raincloud teemed,
 and suddenly a river streamed.

And as the sudden flash-flood swelled
 it foamed and bubbled, rang and yelled.

It soon passed on; a breeze ensued,
 the flood shrank to a brook, subdued.

Then rainbow-scattering droplets flowed,
 the dripping leafage shed its load.

A lovely dog-day; as before.
 The gulley dried its gravelled floor.

But sounds persisted: droplets flowed,
 the brushwood creaked, leaves shed their load.

It raised dim thoughts of gushing streams.
 I've passed an evening there in dreams.

A CHURCH

The king had erected
 all day long.
 By night protected
 the troll came and wrecked it
 with pick and prong.

At last it tapers,
 the finished pile;
 but kingly labours
 and trollish capers
 weren't matched in style.

But knowing prophets
 flocked there in force.
 With day-time profits
 plus night's to scoff — it's
 the thing, of course.

Legend has it that King Olav (the Saint) forced a reluctant troll to build a church for him. Ibsen attacks the Norwegian propensity to strike a compromise between the forces of light and darkness.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S MURDER

Out there in the west a shot was fired,
 and it shook Europe up, the bang.
 Heigh! Look how suddenly life inspired
 every one of the gold-braided gang!
 Old Europe, so orderly, patently right,
 with rules for each rung on the scale,
 with honour unblemished, clean and bright,
 with proper scorn for what's black-not-white, —
 you turned quite remarkably pale.

Now unicorns, eagles are stamped on wax
 and creatures of every form;
 the packet-boat swings as its cable slacks;
 despatches arrive in a swarm.
 Magnates in cotton, 'gloire's' proud son,
 the mob from the land of lies,
 they grabbed for the palm-frond of peace as one,
 then sounded the single shot from a gun,
 and he fell there, one person dies.

And then you took fright. Old Europe's way,
 was *that*, then, so right and true?
 A Prussian venture, at Dybbøl, say,
 the world had been witness to.
 No raven pecks at a brother raven; —
 remember the Poles and that row,
 the English siege before Copenhagen?
 The war-tombs at Flensburg? Was "Sønderborg" graven?
 But why grow indignant *now*?

That crimson rose there whose flowers shock
 and frighten you here at home,
 our Europe supplied the grafting-stock,
 the West its luxuriant loam.
 You planted as seedling that thriving stand
 that reddens the shores of the West; —
 it's you who tied with your own fair hand
 the knightly sash of the martyr's band
 on Abraham Lincoln's breast.

With broken promises, words betrayed
 and with torn-up treaties all round,
 with this year's crime against vows last year made
 you have fertilised history's ground.
 Then sure in your minds you awaited the day
 when an honourable harvest would show!
 Look, it's sprouting, your seed. What a blazing display!
 You're puzzled, confounded in every way, —
 it's not corn but stilettos that grow!

Where law is poised on the dagger's edge
 and right on the gallows' sill,
 dawn's victory is a surer pledge
 than here where it's words that kill.
 A will awakens and courts convene
 to shatter each lair of lies; —
 but the worm must first pick the skull quite clean,
 the times be distorted from what they have been
 to their own gross parodies.

A demon's in charge, one of boundless strength.
 Just cross him! Do try if you must!
 The Aurea Domus crumbled at length
 like Nero's colossus to dust.
 But first must the crime that was Rome spread wide
 o'er the world from pole to pole,
 the tyrant be worshipped and deified,
 the Caesars' gold busts range side by side
 as gods on the Capitol.

Then all of it crumbled; circus, great hall,
 temple and columned roof,
 arches, arcades, they were trampled small
 by the buffalo's armoured hoof.
 But new building began on that ancient base,
 and clean for a while was the air.
 But now there are signs of the plague again;
 the pestilence climbs from its swampy den
 and hovers, now here, now there.

But if we're to sink in corruption's haunts
 there'll be no complaint from me,
 lamenting each poisonous bloom that flaunts
 at large on our age's tree.
 Just let the worm bore. Walls, roof won't fall
 till the skull has been picked quite clean.
 Just let "the system" deform, that's all;
 the sooner comes doomsday and vengeance keen
 on our times for the life-lie they've been.

Written shortly after the assassination in 1865, during peace negotiations between the Great Powers following the defeat of Denmark by Germany over Slesvig/Holstein. The place names refer to outrages committed by those same Great Powers against smaller nations. Gold-braided gang: the diplomatic corps; magnates in cotton etc, England, France and Germany; Aurea Domus, Nero's ostentatious palace in Rome.

THE EPIC BRAND

To the accomplices

My folk, my wretched land, my northern home,
 where sun is screened by snow-fields, peaks that lower,
 the foot forbade, by rock and fjord, to roam —
 soul's wing constrained by yet more base a power, —
 for you I sing a melancholy song,
 perhaps my last, as bard of Norway, granted;
 for there's no poet who would sing for long
 once at the nation's grave the hymn's been chanted.

Plague, even now, is rife. A corpse I see;
 vast as an Ymir carcase, there it stretches
 and spreads a pestilence on firth and lea,
 infecting both the mighty and poor wretches.
 Use all of Norway's flags to make its pall!
 Today's youth, help to drown it in the waters!
 Where Earl faced Jomsborg's men in battle's brawl
 the giant corpse may best find burial quarters.

No longer cling, you fools, to what has perished,
 as Harald clung to Snefrid's corpse so long;
 think not, like him, you glimpse red cheeks once cherished
 and hear beneath the shroud the heart beat strong.
 For what is dead no lie restores to living.
 For what is dead must to the dark, alone.
 The dead have but one function, that of giving
 themselves as sustenance to seeds new sown.

And it is many years since your beginning
 to play this living lie with something dead;
 it is your crime of youth, your adult sinning,
 and from it flows the plague that lies ahead.
 The doom must fall, though, with discrimination;
 it must assail with ten-fold force all those
 that head the mustered people's foremost rows; —
 but hundred-fold the bards of this your nation.

For we have pandered with a line extinct,
 and rouged the corpse of times too great to perish,
 hung up gigantic arms with dwarf-like relish,
 to lend our memory's hall a festive tinct.

We've sung the Past's bright day in Present's night
 with festive glee; but none thought to enquire:
 Can he inherit treasure, as of right,
 who lacks the grasp to heap the treasure higher?

A sultry heaviness invests the mountains.
 The land, wrapped in a silentness, lies still,
 as though the people's life, its very fountains,
 were poisoned cunningly with witch-like skill.
 Like birds that mope at sun's eclipse in blackness,
 I see my folk sit mute, a scattered band;
 its marrow dried, its thews reduced to slackness,
 while noon-tide murk makes dark the dale and strand.

The poet heeds the tide that sweeps a nation.
 His flag should flutter in the vanguard's thrust;
 but solve its problem, that he *shall* and *must*,
 regardless of the final destination.
 The people's yearnings through his song are freed;
 he shrives its sins, interprets its contrition;
 he sighs its terrors forth; its hidden need
 he clothes in words. Hence, singer — hence his mission.

And therefore I have turned both mind and gaze
 far from our past's soul-deadened saga stories,
 far from our dream-lie of great future glories,
 and enter our own present world of haze.
 The solitude of pine-woods I shall wander,
 my cloak drenched through and clammy to my frame,
 in autumn's dusk that serves as veil for shame,
 repose from grief, for me and others yonder.

My poem's like a hillside clad in heather
 that rises gently from the peasant's plot.
 But past the ridge, from some clear vantage spot,
 there you will view white summits wreathed together.
 I've tuned my zither low to set my work;
 but sound is coloured by the under-stringing.
 Hence in the poem shall a poem lurk, —
 and he who grasps *that*, grasps the song I'm singing.

From the time of ripening.

It was a sabbath eve, so calm, relaxing,
 the wondrous peace that's known to everyone, —
 the peace rich in repose and so untaxing
 at sun's decline, the week's long labours done, —
 peace, as though frozen in suspense, displayed
 within a household when, the lamps collected
 reveal the party's ready, table laid,
 the clock strikes and the guests may be expected.

The city lies below, half-veiled in haze,
 beside the fjord, amidst fine summer places.
 It is so new, resplendent-white, ablaze,
 a modern child bedecked in airs and graces.
 There flags, on bay and harbour, flaunt and fly
 where boats are glimpsed in groups and lines contending, —
 but only one sole spire to heaven extending
 points unto Him who gave the name, on high.

As though life's hectic pace there could confer,
 as heaven's pointer, but one finger solely,
 as though the folk caught up in turmoil wholly
 had built for myriad ends deemed worthier;
 here one can see the city's bulk expanding,
 see where it scrabbles in the dale's rich soil;
 for that employment countless hands will toil,
 none though to attain the heights demanding.

Some leaf-clad islands rise out of the fjord
 and sway like wreathed mermen, tossing, arching,
 viewed from the prospect where the slopes go marching
 north from the valley floor in contours broad.
 But on their further side that faces yonder,
 the landscape falls away, a space enclosed,
 with woods, fresh-water lakes, swift streams that wander,
 with waste-lands and, for hedge, steep hills disposed.

Stretched on the ridge that such twinned views imparted,
 a pair of lads lay, twelve-year-olds, thirteen.
 Autumn was coming. Only stubble seen
 still in the fields, the corn already carted.
 But in the sun a summer's warmth, no cooling,
 and leafage hung there still on yellowed trees,
 and it was Saturday, a day off schooling,
 and hence the pair could lie there at their ease.

The one was fair in colouring, — one of those
 who view the world with eyes that sparkle brightly,
 deep-set, a trifle small, but bold and sprightly,
 sun-steeped and made for glee that plainly shows.
 Hat pushed askew for shade, hands linked as one
 to prop beneath his chin, he sprawled there lying
 stretched comfortably upon his belly, eyeing
 the city, fjord and landscape in the sun.

The other shunned the sunlight, back averted.
 His eyes turned north, to the constricted space,
 the smoke from charcoal-burning, streams that race,
 the tarn now black, by evening's shade converted.
 Heard from afar the foundry hammers roar,

with water-fall and mill-wheel clatter vying.
 A dinghy glided on with silent oar;
 across the lake one duck went swiftly flying.

The scene, though, scarcely seemed to give him pleasure,
 the view and he seemed scarcely to commune.
 He sat, one knee against his chest at leisure,
 and whistled random snatches from some tune.
 It was as though thoughts came and went unguided, —
 as though the tune had long since slipped his mind, —
 as though he saw *beyond* the view provided, —
 as though an *unseen* something lay behind.

Some children can look old, he not exempted, —
 those whom companions, boisterous, unrestrained,
 can't get to join their games, they won't be tempted,
 but silently look on quite self-contained.
 His hair was smooth, fine, straight but black as jet;
 his looks intense and taut and sharp of feature;
 and yet they bore the mark of something *set*.
 He seemed a wilful but tenacious creature.

But then beyond the town, white puffs of cloud
 rose one by one, with boom on boom of thunder,
 until both bay and town had vanished under
 their dragon-winged embrace as in a shroud.
 It made the youngster start, the fairer one;
 he lay and counted with the tally growing
 until at last the cannonade was done, —
 and then he shouted: "Look, the frigate's going!

"There's music on the poop-deck. Hear the singing!
 Look at the bows, the foam they're buffeting!
 Heigh, watch it go! Before the bells are ringing
 tomorrow it will lie in port, first thing.
 Imagine being home, then, and invited
 to join the others and to go on board.
 That's where the great big groves of beech are sited,
 and where the township flanks the open fjord.

"Way over there, and past the blue ridge showing
 beyond the fjord, my word, but it is grand.
 My father's farm is where the slopes are flowing
 southwards towards a bay with wooded strand.
 At home, and Sunday morning — like a fable.
 Especially in summer, you'll have guessed.
 The picture-bible laid out on the table,
 and everyone dressed up in Sunday best.

"Glass doors that open on the garden setting,
 the steps where sand and juniper are spread,

and from the fence-post there's a flag that's fretting,
 and there's a rose-hedge gleams intensely red:
 and doves feed on the peas with no restraining.
 There's one that's blue, the tamest of them all.
 It's them we're catering for and entertaining,
 the big veranda's their reception hall.

“A brig stands in the hall, mast, sails erected.
 It has a galley puffing smoke for show.
 That we must play with. Then there's Aunt expected
 from town, on visit, with the kids in tow.
 There is an old man, too, who does the driving;
 he has a yellow coach, so big and wide.
 You hear them well before they're seen arriving;
 and if we meet them, we can share the ride.

“We'd charge about the grounds all day in snatches,
 play chasing games around the great big rick.
 And Auntie has a daughter; she's a brick;
 Agnes she's called, whom no-one ever catches:
 then Sunday roast, with cranberry sauce to smother;
 we'd sit with all the grown-ups, eat the same; —
 but best was still to come: when Dad and Mother
 and Aunt all used to come and join the game.

“Late afternoon, the coach would reappear;
 there's no-one weary, no-one's for returning; —
 but town's a long way off; time's up, it's clear,
 and we're allowed to see them to the turning.
 We say goodnight there. They must go; light's failing.
 How still. How white the misted meadows spread.
 We hear the cornrake up the hillside, railing.
 Then mother calls us. We must go to bed.”

The lad who'd shunned the sun's light seemed to ponder.
 Half-twisted round towards his friend to say:
 “Now tell me all about such things back yonder,
 before you came for schooling up this way.
 Take care to tell me all that comes to mind.
 Don't leave out anything, some dream or other. —
 But tell me first, where *you* live, do you find
 it's usual to share games with one's own mother?”

The lad told freely just how things had been,
 at random, and as memory served unbidden.
 The other looked at him. His gaze was keen,
 As though he'd like to probe to depths well-hidden.
 And then a sudden laugh: “Now stop your chatter!
 I'd not believe it though the Parson swore.
 You've got your stories from your reading matter!
 Fie! Every word's a lie and nothing more!”

He settled back and brooded, counsel keeping; —
 his neck supported on his one cupped hand,
 he pushed his stick inside the chin-strap band
 and swung his hat in circles wide and sweeping.
 He gazed up in the air as he was playing.
 But in a while — as tiring of the game —
 he dropped his stick, half-turned, and with the same
 he pointed past the hills there northward straying.

“One’s home — it’s always in the distant North;”
 so he began, scarce noticing his hearer,
 then, picking up the argument, launched forth,
 his long, black hair brushed back, his forehead clearer; —
 “A Sabbath eve, — words tolling like a knell;
 a song, — the word where hints of pine-twigs linger;
 a lie, — the word like silk, for stroking finger;
 a home, — the word debars the South too well.

“It seems to me, now, that I see a home.
 It’s winter-time. Not snow but hoarfrost scattered.
 There on the beach, a dinghy lying, shattered.
 The mountain ridge gleams with the ice-cap’s dome.
 How grim, the sleeping fjord, how dark its gloss.
 The great big clouds stare at their own reflection. —
 To fly away from there, be free — o, what perfection —.
 But no-one’s there to ferry you across.

“The dreams one has at home, they are the danger!
 I know a boy had such a dream one day:
 His dream chased song and sunshine right away, —
 and he became, to all home means, a stranger.
 For dream-possessed he peered into his being,
 as whirlpools can possess those peering in; —
 the boy peered in, — and then there was no fleeing,
 round he was swept — —. Now hear the dream begin.

“It was a Christmas Eve, he, sick a-bed.
 His head — he felt a ring of iron squeezing;
 his temples throbbed, his arm felt limp and dead;
 his blood flowed now like fire, now water, freezing.
 And in the next room, Mother, twice as bad,
 and from the third there came a rasping rattle.
 There, crippled with arthritis, lay his Dad;
 for he had, of them all, the hardest battle.

“The farm had seen, that day, so much toward,
 the doctor and the priest had both attended.
 Now, as before a party, peace descended,
 the only sound, the bell across the fjord.
 It rang in Christmas, to the youngster’s hearing, —

eyes tightly closed, chilled through where sweat had dried.
A sound, then — someone in the doorway, peering; —
and presently — the sound of one who cried.

“It was an aged servant who’d come creeping.
She thought he slept there soundly in the night.
He heard her sighing deeply through her weeping:
‘Your father’s passed away, poor little mite!’
She padded to the bedside, left neglected
those several days, and lightly stroked his face,
she plumped the pillow up, the spread corrected,
and soundless as a breeze she left her place.

“He heard the bell while she was there beside him.
His mind was churning like a troubled stream.
He tried to work out, though it sorely tried him, —
what was reality and what was dream.
He slept. And then he dreamed that he lay waking, —
and it was dark. He called, — but no reply.
He dimly grasped, like light though mist-veils breaking,
the meaning of the servant’s whispered cry.

“He dreamed he raised himself, got out of bed.
He went to find why nobody had sought him.
His body shuddering, he groped ahead;
his ears were singing, knees would scarce support him.
He dreamed that it was dark, the hearth extinguished, —
that all were sleeping, — that the night was old.
But where his father lay a light distinguished; —
he went towards it, found the latch, took hold.

“He crept along the wall into a nook — .
Two bedside candles, head and foot, burned brightly.
His father lay stretched out there, with a book
clutched with both hands against his bosom, tightly.
His face seemed more a yellow shade than pale; —
his skin was tight, his wrist so small and tender;
his outstretched leg was sharp and bony-slender; —
and sheet-folds lay across him like a veil.

“Still as a church it was, as coldly numbing.
He recognised the smell of clammy sheet.
Then in the hall heard footsteps, soft, discreet; —
a fumbling in the doorway, someone coming.
He started, looked about him, terrified,
drew back into his inmost corner, shrinking; —
and at that moment thought he saw there glide
a woman in her nightdress, candle winking.

“She went towards the bed, her legs scarce bore her;
she faltered at each step, as he could tell;

her fingers screened the light she held before her,
 he even heard the way she breathed as well.
 Then suddenly she raised a stiff, straight arm, —
 and cried out in a strangled voice but roundly:
 ‘This is for having done my life such harm!’ — —
 At which she boxed the corpse’s ear right soundly.

“It seemed a long day’s work had reached conclusion
 with that one slap across the dead man’s cheek.
 She turned and left, — the candle’s light fell bleak
 upon a face allowing no confusion. —
 Resembling two things feared above all other
 before he had the words to phrase their dread:
 the eagle on the store-barn’s lintel spread,
 but most of all resembling his own mother.

“He woke as strong as steel, the third day’s dawning.
 His Dad was dead, though all the rest a dream.
 He kept his counsel, maids worked as a team,
 sewing at gowns of black — to trim for mourning.
 And before noon, the local made-to-measure;
 he’d come to rig the boy out, such a swell!
 Then came the ride to town. All went off well.
 They mourned, drank coffee, had a day of leisure.

“The coffin came one afternoon with sheathing
 of silver on its lid, as I recall.
 From town, a new-stitched, folded linen pall,
 and local-purchased green-stuff for the wreathing.
 And then the pine-twigs’ turn. When all was ended,
 the widow’s house reeked with so strong a breath
 from flowers, sprigs, some greenery, all blended,
 the lad henceforth thought summer smelt of death.

“The burial day at last. In past the reef
 folk rowed, boat after boat, for the occasion.
 Inside the mourning house, half-stifled grief;
 the parlour, with black bier in occupation.
 Procession formed, the priest made his addresses
 on suffering, death, grave’s peace — but used his craft
 most to depict the widow’s sore distresses,
 So that the women wept — the boy, though, laughed.

“He laughed for days — but laughed in isolation.
 But once he laughed to make the heavens shriek.
 The day he lighted on some information
 in city papers for the previous week.
 And there it was in print, black border, cross,
 the January issue number seven:
 ‘My husband, much beloved, to my great loss
 departed, on the twenty-fourth, for Heaven.’

“Recovered though, her pace proved not a slow one!
 From earliest morning until late at nights
 she set about to put the house to rights;
 she handled everything; she trusted no-one.
 And all done with an urgent, silent questing
 like some sick person in compulsion’s clutch;
 it was as though she were afraid of resting,
 of darkness and reflection and all such.

“Now, on the farm a brindled dog was staying;
 and this the boy adored with all his heart.
 Sometime towards the spring, the boy was playing
 with the small creature in a place apart.
 They sprawled on sand, against the wall — no clamour —
 the dog’s tail wagged, the boy’s hand stroked its coat; —
 and then some troll-force seized him by the throat;
 he rose and went and came back with a hammer.

“He swung; the small dog whined, the boy hit squarely;
 it fell and yelped, got up and fell again;
 it seemed to howl for mercy, dragged — though barely —
 its crippled self beneath the steps in pain.
 Just then, before he knew one way or other
 how to confront full-faced, what he had done,
 there in the nearby barn door stood his mother,
 tall, skinny, grey, demanding of her son:

“ ‘Why did you hit it?’ came her angry cry;
 he shrank, it froze the blood within him coursing;
 one stands in dread of Mother, one knows why, —
 but still he raised his head by dint of forcing;
 he stood there, hammer poised still, and in silence,
 hand clenched upon the haft, a stiff, straight arm,
 then answered with a stare that spoke defiance:
 ‘That was for having done my life such harm!’ “

Over the great mountain

In Norway there’s a region stands out clear;
 it rises eastward from the valley, gently,
 it plunges westward to the fjord-side, sheer,
 the region of bare heights preeminently.
 There russet ling usurps the place of tree.
 There midst rough boulders it is moss thrives only,
 the glacier there spreads wide its livery,
 there lives the reindeer, undisturbed and lonely.

Within this region run no beaten ways,
 wild country for both walking and reflection;
 now swirls the snow-field like a forest blaze,

now lies in linen folds of smooth perfection,
 now naked summits nod across the heather,
 now wrap themselves in mists that venture forth;
 there's but one post, one stone cairn altogether
 to mark the pass hemmed in to south and north.

A soft, still summer morning on the mountain.
 Close by the spot upon the moor's broad breast
 where, now reduced to one divided fountain,
 the stream seeps from the bog to east and west, —
 there a small knot of cheerful friends now settle,
 young girls contributing to the array;
 inside a trench ling burns beneath the kettle,
 and wine is sparkling to the gleam of day.

They must be gentry, those out there together;
 for they have guides with them, pack-horses, nags,
 and hats adorned with leaves and sticks with flags,
 and cloth spread out upon the cushioned heather.
 Amid the youngsters there is one sits singing;
 it is as though the song were bathed in sun;
 a girl's perched by him like a bird, like one
 that on a willow-spray sits bobbing, swinging.

Now jests resound and laughter, loud and hearty;
 now joy falls silent, ebbing from its swell;
 from words and faces it is plain to see our party
 is gathering to take a last farewell.
 A man, not really old, stands in the cluster;
 — nor young, indeed, though sturdy still and strong; —
 he turns towards a pair, the two whose lustre
 illuminates their faces in the throng.

He fills a glass and taps to make it sound,
 begins his speech with just a hint of laughter:
 "Our Lord knew splendidly what He was after
 when He had you two meet on my home ground.
 You, Agnes, sent from town because not thriving,
 advised to come for bracing mountain air,
 to drink the sun, the dew and pine-scent there —
 and then, out of the blue, his own arriving.

"He'd come, with rucksack full of painter's gear,
 back from a long trip south, at length returning
 so healthy and so strong, mind bold and clear,
 breast full of countless songs that he'd been learning.
 He sought, he said, for beauty on the mountain,
 amongst the forest streams, where pine-trees march,
 in flight of storm-clouds under heaven's arch, —
 then he met you, — found Beauty's source and fountain.

“And there his finest masterpiece was painted,
 he painted cheeks whereon health’s roses stole,
 two eyes that shone, their beaming joy untainted,
 and then a smile that sang within the soul;
 I soon saw I was surplus, a demotion
 for your old doctor faced with such a cure;
 his songs worked better far than any potion,
 than even God’s own Nature-bath, that’s sure.

“But surplus? No, not really. For I spotted
 and stopped him in his tracks one day, attired
 in travelling gear, with rucksack packed and knotted,
 reminded him of one thing still required, —
 the thing you two forgot while dream’s rampage meant
 that fun and games had left you comatose;
 what was that thing? Well, it was your engagement; —
 and why? He had forgotten to propose.

“Forgotten to propose and you to answer;
 the hour you needed, that was granted you;
 no doubt you thought it some extravaganza,
 a fête to last day-long the summer through.
 You *thought*? No, no you failed to think completely;
 about your future home thought least of all;
 your lips, your glances laughed, your souls sang sweetly, —
 the weeks went by in endless festival.

“So, it seemed up to me, then, as things stood;
 on his part I proposed, on yours accepted,
 and joined your hands together, paired for good,
 and thereby it was all arranged, effected.
 And then the party, three days long from starting,
 and then we saw the young pair on their way;
 now, friends, farewell’s stroke tolls the time of day;
 for here, from him and her, we must be parting.

“It will be calm again quite soon, our valley,
 only the stream will sing, its old refrain,
 the sun will sink, the swallow will not dally,
 mere echoes of our memories will remain.
 The hedge and hazel will turn gold, come fall,
 the mead and marsh grow stiff to winter’s whiteness, —
 one night, the leas and slopes will share one pall, —
 but you will enter bliss’s summer brightness.

“But first you’ve silent peaks here that need clearing,
 then steeply down to meet the fjord’s west bay.
 There waits your Egir’s steed, you’ll go careering
 full steam ahead for home and wedding day;
 it’s for the South together you’ll be headed,
 like youthful swans upon their maiden flight;

you'll live a blissful summer life once wedded,
as lovely as a dream, a legend bright.

“For happiness's zephyrs shall assist you
as you embark upon life's open sea;
it's under bliss's flag you must enlist you,
a dour campaign would slay you utterly.
You were created — hence all praise and duty
unto the hand that spins our Fate's long thread, —
to make your pilgrimage through realms of beauty
and on, with song, to paradise ahead.

“And that is why I shall, this Sabbath morrow,
a doctor merely, layman, not a priest,
pronounce you here exempt from want and sorrow,
and dedicate your life to Joy's glad feast.
In sun you'll thread life's turmoil, never straying,
for you the stars each night shall glitter fair,
your life shall be one game of tag to share,
till you find Heaven, still like children playing!”

He stopped there. But behind the rhetoric
showed, as behind a cloak, his real emotion.
He brushed a tear away with just a flick,
without more words he drained the cup's last potion.
But all the youngsters, in one great eruption,
pressed with their beakers full around the pair,
they banned each sorrow threatening disruption
to their abode's embowered, dainty lair.

They banished from the language each expression
that warned, by merest hint, of storms ahead,
they crowned their hair with leaves to make profession:
the pair were Joy's true children, born and bred.
And wild and wilder still the dancing courses
in circles where the fringe of heather lay,
they bid defiance to gloom's murky forces,
they conjure forth the fairies of the day.

And then — a taming weariness descended;
the last few drops of jubilation drained.
They firmly, gently grasped the hands extended,
and took a long farewell, sincere, restrained.
Then eastward for the dale the party drifted,
and off to westward, slowly, rode the guide; —
but in that mountain hall, their arms uplifted,
the artist stood, alone now, with his bride.

He swung his hat, she kept her veil a-fluttering
in thanks for each farewell they had been sent,
for each faint greeting that the group kept uttering

until it vanished in the steep descent.
 They looked then at each other for a while
 in parting's afterglow, both grave, not speaking;
 then on the mouth of each a quivering smile
 like quivering sunshine through the greenwood peeking.

And that smile spread until a world's begotten
 wherein youth's shining rapture seemed to lie.
 The flock of friends, the journeying forgotten
 as cloud's forgotten with its passing by.
 They did not look ahead, behind, — unseeing;
 they only saw the present's instant glow.
 They did not see the frightened sea birds fleeing
 on outstretched wing the sound and fjord below.

Like happy kin they bound, hand clasped in hand,
 westward across the moor's brown spread of heather.
 He was so slender, lithe as any wand,
 she barely skimmed the ground, light as a feather.
 She tore herself away, and off she came
 and laughed as swiftly he went chasing after, —
 the chase became a flight, the jest a game
 until they made a song from words and laughter.

“Agnes, my beautiful butterfly,
 I shall make sport of your taking!
 I'm weaving a net of finest mesh,
 the mesh is the songs I'm making!”

“If I'm a butterfly, tiny and pure
 let me drink at the tips of the heather;
 and if you're a lad that's fond of his fun,
 then *chase* me but *take* me never!”

“Agnes, my beautiful butterfly,
 I've finished the mesh that I'm knotting;
 your fluttering flight will not serve you at all, —
 you'll be trapped in the web of my plotting!”

“If I'm a butterfly, young and bright,
 I'm happy to play at this scampering;
 but if you should tangle me up in your web,
 don't damage my wing with your tampering!”

“No, I shall gather you up with such care
 and lock you away as heart's treasure;
 and there you can play your whole life long
 the game that you've learnt with most pleasure!”

“No, if I'm a butterfly gay and free,
 the cage, I am sure, would not suit me;

I can't know if life will be long or short,
but I'm sure of its butterfly-beauty."

Then suddenly they stopped — a gulf divided
the edge they stood on from their westward course.
Far down beneath their feet a goshawk glided,
and here the guide with care got off his horse.
"Go slowly here" — he told the pair — "Use caution,
and if you'd fend off evils you might meet
descending through the pass, use this precaution, —
drop two crossed twigs before you at your feet."

With that, he strode ahead. The youngsters followed
with hearts set pounding by a silent fear,
as now and then the misted depths, blown clear,
revealed themselves and then again were swallowed.
She clutched him like a child at dusk, in dread; —
she whispered: "Isn't this, now, like descending
out of both life and light's fond fountain-head,
to plumb the depths of death's dark realm that's pending?"

And then a cloud dispersed, one that had brooded
upon the mountain's bosom, swathed in storm, —
and far past the abyss-land, shade-secluded,
appeared a world that was alluring, warm.
It was a sight beyond a painter's cunning; —
there stretched the mighty and the boundless sea
beyond the furthest valleys, brightly sunning
as, past the grave, there gleams eternity.

On the expanse of waters sun-gold shimmers,
and white sails sever gleaming from the strand,
as, on the world's glad brow, a longing glimmers
on passage to Infinitude's far land.
And, framing this stupendous presentation,
the black walls of the gorge, the clouded height,
while in the foreground stretched the desolation
contrasting darkly with the distant light.

And then a wind blew up on the horizon
and whipped the waste of waters with a gale.
Mist curtained off all one had there set eyes on
and drew, on all that spacious world, a veil.
And steeper, straiter still the path descended;
and wilder leapt the stream against its brim;
and blacker now the crag stood and presented
a barrier, while the upland sun grew dim.

Like ruins of a shattered world unravelled,
rocks huge as any church aligned their road,
and on the rubble floor no grass-blade showed,

no living soul encountered as they travelled.
 Pale at his side she felt her spirits languish;
 he heard her heart-beat pounding loud and strong;
 she looked at him as looks a child in anguish;
 whereon he smiled and raised his voice in song.

“Agnes, my beautiful sister,
 say, why does your heart beat so?
 Don’t let the mountain dismay and distress you;
 it’s to mother’s house you go.

“Agnes, my nature’s lassie,
 we two have no cause to be daunted;
 well-behaved children may go at dusk
 in the room that’s dark and haunted.

“You’re here, in your mother’s haunted room,
 but don’t let the gloom infect you; —
 your brother’s beside you with a song,
 extending a hand to protect you.

“Whatever you hear, there’s no need to be scared, —
 of shrieks, or howls dogs may utter;
 this isn’t real dusk, this isn’t real night;
 it’s only the window-shutter.

“Outside there’s sunshine and light of day;
 once open the door and they’re flaunted;
 let’s simply pass through, with a resolute song,
 the room that is dark and haunted!”

And as his heartfelt song aloft went soaring,
 the veil was lifting from her face meanwhile.
 She walked no longer strained and self-deploring;
 her lips began to hum, to trace a smile.
 She seized upon two stones, threw one she’d chosen
 into the fall, one at the mountainside
 where stood a crag that menaced like a frozen
 and Moses-bearded giant, petrified.

She called out boldly “Spirit of the river,
 keep up your sighing, moaning as you please,
 you’ll not succeed, not chill us, make us shiver,
 we’ve only ears for joyous melodies.
 You wicked mountain troll, brow-furrowed minion,
 by all means stand and threaten as we go;
 but you’ll not bar our way, we, you shall know,
 must on, to life and laughter, joy’s dominion!”

And then a singer’s voice peals from the mountain,
 full as an organ rolling through the church,

it dulls the river's roar, the foss's fountain,
 and far and wide its spreading billows search.
 It stops joy's blessed offspring in their traces,
 where late, defying sprite and troll, they'd sped; —
 they start, they listen, scan the upland spaces
 whence rolls the voice intoning overhead.

“Lord, bestow on me wealth of pain;
 from Joy's wiles, be my defender.
 Scourge me into a self-disdain!
 Lord God, Father in Heaven's domain,
 teach me to pray and surrender!

Teach me to pass through the flesh-world's span
 blind to bright summer, I pray Thee.
 Teach me to will beyond what I can.
 Call me, Lord Saviour, o call on Thy man, —
 and bow so my mind, I obey Thee!

Earth resembles a winter night;
 each sorrow a constellation.
 They serve to give far-straying wayfarers light; —
 if that be quenched, I am lost outright,
 know not where to turn for salvation.

Sorrow sits like a queen in pride,
 in her Northern-light icy splendour.
 Come with me all to the night outside!
 Lord, God of Heaven where Thou dost abide,
 teach us to pray and surrender!”

The sound came from above, where, through the rocks,
 a curved track issued from a minor valley.
 It sounded like a solemn trump, to rally
 far over hill and dale, the wide world's flocks.
 Then both recalled, with private self-reproaches,
 the cross they had forgotten they should drop.
 Too late. No twiglet grew that they might crop,
 and now the mighty singer, look, approaches.

Dressed all in black, fine features pale and set,
 a little sharp, the hair somewhat receded; —
 with his right hand he wiped away the sweat,
 the other held his hat as he proceeded.
 His eye, a shadowed tarn amid the boulders,
 a secret something, deep, denied the light.
 He bore a well-laced knapsack on his shoulders,
 and held a staff beneath his arm clamped tight.

His way, like theirs, led to the place down under.
 He greeted them politely in his stride;

but just a hint of question was implied,
 as though he thought "Might we have met, I wonder?"
 And that same thought the artist found so pressing
 he stopped the man, though hesitantly too,
 and asked him: "Is it Brand that I'm addressing?"
 And he replied: "Yes. — Einar, is that you!"

They were two friends whose bonding school created,
 who stood, once, close as brothers and as dear,
 who had not met again since separated
 until their meeting as half-strangers here.
 The school and now — a distance so far-reaching!
 Each one had made his way in life meanwhile;
 each striven towards God in his own style, —
 one with the painter's palette, one by preaching.

But Einar was the first to find a voice
 for all the memories in his soul there sleeping.
 He seized his friend's hand like some prey for keeping
 unshared by any man on earth, for choice.
 And then he spoke, his joy at fever heat,
 about the bond he had, that summer, knotted, —
 about his hopes, — not doubting he had plotted
 the nearest course to friendship's heart and seat.

But Brand stood silent. Then he loosed, though gently,
 the hand held tightly in his friend's warm grip.
 A faint expression played about his lip;
 he struggled with himself there, evidently.
 He answered, half embarrassed, partly musing:
 "It's good to know one's honoured one's pursuit.
 You are a painter now, of good repute; —
 all roads are right, — if they're of one's own choosing.

"Two kinds of road require, though, will's selection;
 one like the navigable water-ways; —
 the passage smooth, a ball-room romp, perfection;
 the other one's the road *you* have to blaze.
 One, open wide for you and thousands yonder;
 the latter, *you* must boldly force with steel.
 On that you dare, and no man else, to wander,
 until the world perceives the goal is real.

"Two kinds of call, too, rouse up man's resources;
 one lures him on through impulse and desire; —
 and then there's spirit-baptism that forces
 its way deep in his breast with tongue of fire.
 Whereby he speaks the language of no nation,
 whereby it's his, the triumph and acclaim; —
 and if you've known the grace of such a flame, —
 then I'll accept that painting's your vocation.

“Then you can venture forth to heathen regions,
 interpret Light’s cause, form- and colour-wise,
 that souls set free may wing to God in legions,
 as from the burst cocoon swarm butterflies.
 For you and Heaven then being in conjunction,
 you’ll thereby melt the people’s glacial mind.
 But don’t forget, if this should prove your function,
 you may well be unique amongst your kind.”

He said this with an urgent, restless air,
 his voice subdued, his cheek all hot with flushes,
 his glowing eye was like the blood that blushes
 upon a arrow’s point to lightning’s glare.
 He seemed to writhe beneath the word as spoken,
 to struggle with some force in private fray,
 thoughts seemed to bore through barriers to be broken,
 seemed placed there, on his lips, for him to say.

The young girl was observing him intently,
 like someone spying out a hostile camp.
 She sought her loved-one’s eye, asked confidently,
 though mute, an answer bearing victory’s stamp.
 She was so certain, sure her cause was sound,
 as earnestly the painter started speaking:
 “Friend, for the second time today you’re seeking
 to bury our high spirits in the ground.

“First, you’ve cast gloom upon us with your dirge,
 and now your speech would make our brightness fainter;
 but call it what you will, the joyful urge
 that whispers to me: Life means — be a painter!
 I’m not in need of an annunciation;
 I don’t expect some angel from the blue;
 God doesn’t send to all His revelation;
 enough, to go the way I *must* pursue.

“And little have you grasped the crux of beauty, —
 what art achieves you poorly understand, —
 if you demand salvation’s laws do duty
 in colour-poesy’s blithe infant-land.
 Do you believe the flower’s right to dazzle
 is greater where medicinal forces flow
 within its stem-sap, in the leaf’s veined tassel,
 than when it has just scent and hue to show?

“Must bird sit silent in its forest nook
 unless its song can physic someone’s sorrow?
 Must all that lacks a lesson you can borrow
 have no significance in nature’s book?
 For soul’s own right to joy in life I’ve striven,

the voice's right to sing for singing's sake; —
 the self-same right anemones are given
 as elders and wild cherries in a brake.

“And tell me now, by way of termination,
 with hand on heart, lips truthful, honour bright, —
 have you had grace's call, clear intimation
 you're chosen standard-bearer of the Light?
 Have you, then, known God's Pentecostal morning?
 Have you, then, felt the dove swoop on your soul,
 have you, then, from high Heaven heard the warning
 to dedicate to it your whole life's role?”

It was a while before the priest could speak
 the answer in his breast that lay there seething;
 a fevered flush rose to suffuse his cheek;
 he gripped his comrade's arm and whispered, breathing:
 “I've had the call indeed; but fitful, straying;
 it waxes like the moon and then will wane;
 a ship at sea, I rise to fall again;
 I pray while striving and I strive while praying.

“But I shall conquer; first my inner vices,
 then all my brothers in the world's extent;
 I dare not haggle; I am not content
 with *some*; it must be *all*, no less suffices.
 The age's cancer, function's sub-division,
 eats into everything, destroys what's whole; —
 one caters for his belly, one his soul,
 one's for self-coddling, one for erudition.

“That's why it's sunk in mire, our generation.
 For though the slave *desires* the promised land,
 he jogs through life in limp disconsolation,
 and ends up in whatever port's to hand.
 Where is the man to *will*, *believe* and *see*, —
 to *fight* for that same goal he *craves* devoutly?
 I see no *men* now, universally;
 I see just *bellies*, *heads* and *hands* about me.

“But it was *men* the Lord God once created,
 it was to *men* that Christ came down of yore; —
 it was for fallen *men* He mediated,
 who needed ransoming from doom of law.
 That masterpiece now strews its scattered length; —
 look round you, man, from where the summit towers; —
 weep if you can, — and laugh if you've the strength, —
 then cry out loud: What waste of noble powers!

“And now you have the pointer to my soul.
 I sense the only purpose now surviving

to spur a man to choose a lifetime's striving:
 it is to make this generation *whole*.
 The age of miracles has passed forever.
 God shapes no Adam now on earth, perforce;
 the Lord requires Man's help in His endeavour
 to bring this generation back on course.

“Hence I shall go into the world abroad
 and gather up the limbs, the fragments scattered,
 restoring for the second time unshattered
 man truly whole, in likeness of our Lord.
 And hence my war with you, your fellow creatures,
 with those whose blindness has contrived our fall, —
 who worshipped truth but in its several features,
 where Truth abides in nothing if not all!”

Eyes like a bird, a bird ensnared and cowering,
 the girl was swept away on his mind's surge; —
 it seemed she yielded to her overpowering
 by his audaciousness, his will's wild urge.
 But Einar shook his golden mop, replying
 with just a hint of smile, a friendly nod:
 “I see you're still, now you're a man, applying
 your childhood vow to be the whole world's rod.

“I well remember many a time at school
 when we immersed ourselves in saga-study,
 its pain, injustice, violence raw and bloody,
 contributing more stories from our pool; —
 with solace, help, you made no contribution,
 you set no bar to progress evil made;
 you let the worst befall; the retribution
 came *after*, with your keen and vengeful blade.

“You're driven now, by that same thought you bruted,
 to turn the world, regardless, on its head; —
 but bear in mind, each seedling you've uprooted
 demands a better seedling in its stead.
 Don't quench the torch of pine, for all its reeking,
 before you've lit the lamp to guide the herd; —
 don't scrap the language's old way of speaking
 before new thought commands its own new word.

“Remember, too, one's call can often stand
 at odds with life. A curate on probation
 is hardly placed to lead a Reformation; —
 a voice can't carry in a rock-bound land.
 Make no mistake. Poor circumstance sent many
 a giant forth, I know, who faced the test; —
 but this folk has been minted as a penny; —
 don't falsify the stamp that God impressed.”

A chuckle from the priest, then, like a laughter
 that died away before it reached the lips;
 a hint on his fine mouth of scornful quips
 as he took up the argument thereafter:
 “O yes, this folk’s a double personage!
 A race of heroes when the toasts are ringing,
 when songs and speeches free the spirit’s winging
 and thought goes flying from its work-day cage.

“It is a folk of memories that are peerless;
 it is a folk so mighty, once, and strong;
 it is a folk of men and women fearless —
 when the bard has been commissioned for a song.
 It is a folk so stout, so undismayed;
 it is a folk defies an eastward nation;
 it is a folk that southward stands arrayed —
 in speeches uttered at the celebration.

“It is a folk where everyone’s so great
 that all the world can learn by emulation
 each noble trait deserving veneration, —
 as someone wrote once, truth’s own advocate.
 A folk convinced it’s no more than its due
 to lead the world from rock-bound isolation,
 that while the time’s soul flagged, *its* stature *grew*; —
 such is our folk — in its own estimation.

“But when it’s time to dress for storms and hazards,
 to hush the talk for action truly brave,
 when it’s a case of wielding sword, not stave,
 of left thighs wearing only emptied scabbards —
 what *is* this folk — men, women it relies on?
 A folk that has a flaw for every strength;
 a folk that’s made itself so small at length
 it almost sinks beneath its own horizon.

“The man then draws aside, the woman screeches;
 the ear’s then stopped to all demand, each call;
 we style ourselves the poor folk by the beaches,
 with, God be praised, God’s penny mark, that’s all.
 What’s our concern when mighty powers wrestle?
 What can it count for *there*, the hill-folk’s mite?
 Its task has been assigned it, wrong or right:
 to steer the plough-share and to sail its vessel.

“For what can we do if the foe advances?
 It is for others to make sacrifice.
 It was for show, mere visionary fancies,
 that Norway’s flag was slashed with tongued device.
 No, Great-World-Power cheeks can do the glowing

when hot blood swells the age's arteries; —
 we're made to plough the soil and plough the seas;
 with us it's sweat, not blood, that should be flowing.

“Ten years from now murk will beset the nation,
 the clammy half-night, fit for dwarfish chores,
 where between good and bad the will see-saws,
 each vision abject, heart, one desiccation.
 Then through the land shall clouds of coal-smoke lour,
 as ashes o'er that ancient city loomed,
 but no-one seems to see the region's doomed,
 and no-one thinks to flee the fatal hour.

“The contrary! Within the mine's cramped quarters
 the dwarf-folk in complacent toil combine,
 and hack the ore to songs of dripping waters,
 with hunched backs on their soul as on their spine.
 Each heart-beat will be muffled by the hammer,
 each soul-felt cry by saw-blades under file;
 a friend's distress will draw no heart-rent clamour,
 a kinsman's downfall will not quench a smile. —

“And were the sun of Norway's faith once threatened
 by Doubt's fell Fenris wolf-howl gruff and grim,
 the dwarf descendent will have merely reckoned
 it was thing for others, not for him.
 He's of a folk created not for strife
 or triumph, or renown, but altercation, —
 he's quite content to gain, in afterlife,
 a bit of bliss or else a small damnation.

“The nail-marks in the hands — to him, what matter?
 The Mount of Olives and the mortal dread?
 The thorn-fangs that made blood-red rubies scatter
 as at that hour they gashed the Lord's dear head?
 It was, of course, for others, Christ's last passion;
 for *them* He came as love's interpreter; —
 the thong-lash from the Wandering Jew's our ration,
 was all our Lord, for *this* folk, had to bear!”

No word in answer. Like scared children where,
 searching the hill-side for ripe-berried places,
 they came upon the savage mountain bear,
 those two stood mute and spellbound in their traces.
 Eyes fixed upon this furious apparition,
 their cold hands linked together, gripping fast,
 staring behind them, terrified, aghast,
 they stole away with soundless expedition.

They were soon out of eyeshot. Einar panted,
 like one who'd fought a hard and bitter fight;

he drew in breath like one who'd not been scanted
 the agony of terrors in the night.
 He tried to sing, but failed — a weak declaiming; —
 he tried to laugh but that rang hollow too; —
 he tried to jest, — the jest a bird that flew
 the moment that it sensed the hunter aiming.

And so he conjured — pines the south produces,
 the laurel-groves, the citron's golden wealth,
 the summer-life that vineyard warmth induces,
 the clustered grape refulgent in its health. —
 She gazed upon the fjord, half seeing barely;
 by ear alone took in the scenes he drew,
 and in reply she asked one question merely:
 "But did you see how, as he spoke, he grew!"

The way to church

A tale records a troll who ranged these quarters
 and had to cross a fjord where, if you please,
 he stepped too short and so was left in waters
 a hundred fathoms deep. Up to his knees.
 Designed for just his ilk, it seemed, was their way
 that led from mountain peaks to fjord terrain;
 two dales divided in a three-link chain, —
 from summit to the sea, a three-flight stairway.

Lift up your eyes when you've spent hours descending
 and you'll believe you've reached the mountain's base;
 but down there, where the valley's course goes wending,
 there is a new abyss for you to face.
 The upper dale is narrow, dark but snowless, —
 the streams of melted ice go racing by; —
 the lower's narrow, grey, trees make no progress,
 there people just like us are born and die.

But do not think you've reached the fjord you're seeking —
 for here but sparsely scattered souls divide
 life on the lea, death on the mountainside, —
 here sunlight's cold, rank poverty is reeking.
 You must climb further down by tracks unmetalled
 into a farmscape of a different type;
 there, on lush acres, corn grows golden-ripe;
 fruit mellows there; down there the rich have settled. —

The upper dale was where their meeting started.
 They sailed like thunder-clouds intent on war;
 they clashed; then came the lightning and the roar
 of stormy conflict, — whereupon they parted.
 The couple took the steep descent through boulders;

Brand skirted the abyss; he knew the lie.
 He set his knapsack higher on his shoulders;
 marched step by step with introverted eye.

His brow gleamed with crusading exaltation.
 He wallowed in the pleasure, pain-beset,
 a soul can suck out of the word 'regret' —
 midway between embrace and execration.
 He'd met the singer's sunny disposition,
 he had, by what he'd said, subdued his lay,
 had turned his gaze from sun to earthly clay, —
 his handiwork — he writhed now in contrition.

He took the wind into his wide embraces;
 arms thus outstretched he hastened on ahead;
 upon his cheek the salt tears burned their traces;
 he called on Einar's name as though in dread.
 It went unheard. And then the pain, the smarting
 within his blood was soothed; he eased his pace; —
 he walked out on the crag that marked the starting
 of where the track wound, to the mountain's base.

The pair were well ahead and far below;
 but horse and guide were out of sight already.
 She tried the plank that bridged the water's flow;
 he sounded scared that it might prove unsteady.
 But over it they went, each, like the other,
 skirting the drowned ravine with downcast eyes;
 she seemed as though she bore, like mankind's mother,
 her gain in knowledge, loss of paradise.

They were soon lost in scrubby growth and shale;
 but Brand remained to gaze and probe and ponder
 from high up where he stood, the sunken dale; —
 it was his native home that he saw yonder.
 He knew the dismal windings of the strait,
 the landslide scree with its few spindly birches,
 the rounded churchyard with its stone-roofed gate,
 the broken bridge, that tarred bulk there, the church's.

He recognised again each scattered plot;
 each curving of the road a memory kindled;
 the red marquee, still in its usual spot;
 and yet he fancied everything had dwindled.
 He saw the narrows where the fjord broke through;
 a sloop before the wind sailed up the reach;
 he saw a quay, white-painted farm-house too; —
 it was the factor-widow's, by the beach!

It was his mother's farm, his childhood home,
 he'd grown up in that stony desolation.

A host of memories began to roam,
 before, consigned to night by one occasion.
 He thrust them from him, put them all to flight
 but they returned there, grinning and tormenting;
 “Do you remember, Brand — ?” they asked him, tenting, —
 his breast, faced with home’s dreadfulness, clenched tight.

He felt the crushing pain that he should be
 kin to a thing distinct from his own being;
 it seemed half of his strength had left him, fleeing
 before the weight of shared heredity.
 His once-great plans estranged now, by that token;
 his powers weakened, nerves now prone to snap;
 here, close to home, it was as though he’d woken
 like Samson, shorn and in his harlot’s lap.

He flung down on a wayside slab of boulder
 and said, half in his thoughts, half voiced abroad:
 “It is as though ghouls wept beside the fjord,
 as though trolls shrieked from every mountain shoulder.
 Yes, yes, — you well might recognise me too,
 though I have grown since last you looked to meet me; —
 I’m sprung from the same kindred loins as you,
 we are related and you’d want to greet me.

“It’s cold for the encounter, murk increases;
 there’s ugly weather brewing; aptly cast!
 The rain out yonder’s falling thick and fast;
 the sloop’s been reefed; the foresail ripped to pieces.
 Smite storm, and sooth my cheek, my forehead ease;
 sweep clean the air of all foul recollection;
 therein lies plague from which there’s no protection
 that art provides save distance’s cool breeze.

“My mother’s farm —; and newly-painted, see?
 Green window-shutters, and it’s roofed with tiling, —
 but it’s exposed, it lacks a shelter-tree,
 gets little sun and never noon’s warm smiling.
 There, slave to restlessness’s constant itch,
 she goes her ways without one deviation,
 sees to her business, calculates, grows rich, —
 so rich the very thought’s abomination.”

Then all at once he laughed, but harsh with hurt,
 he scanned the slopes down which the hillside wandered; —
 his voice was low and sharp and wild and curt,
 as half-aloud, half in a dream he pondered:
 “Look, there’s the nut-wood. *There’s* a stimulation!
There I first saw Norwegian valour shown;
 had my first sight of blood that’s Norway’s own,
 the way it flows, too, in this generation.

“I well recall that autumn day’s clear glowing,
 the hazels rustling in their brown and gold;
 the rowan’s berry-clusters bravely showing, —
 such bird-song, such a swarming to behold.
 We were all homeward bound; I followed, trailing;
 it had been hard to reach, that bunch hung high; —
 I heard the snap as of a dry twig failing, —
 I heard a footstep; saw a man nearby.

“He had with him an axe beneath his jerkin;
 at every step he stole a glance behind;
 then he sat down, worn out it seemed, and lurking:
 soon rose again, and seemed confirmed of mind.
 He laid the axe upon a fallen spruce-tree
 and from his pocket drew a rag, a band, —
 looked around again and of a sudden, brusquely
 he hacked a finger from his own right hand.

“I saw blood spurt; that’s all I know. Must smother
 what I had seen while running on apace.
 But next day went along with many another
 to our appointed local `listing-place.
 Inside there, at a desk, the captain sat,
 with doctor, mayor, clerk, constable attending.
 The locals formed a group, exchanging chat;
 the whisper was that war could be impending.

“And there the lads were called out in succession,
 were measured and examined and enrolled;
 when that was done, with serious expression,
 each then returned to join the anxious fold.
 At last one came, with bandaged hand, for vetting.
 And as he crossed the floor, how deathly white!
 He kept his eyes down; I could see him sweating; —
 I recognised the fellow at first sight.

“Confronted with the board he seemed to linger,
 then showed his bandaged hand, but seemed abashed;
 he stammered something, how a hook had gashed
 both skin and bone and cut clean through his finger;
 some talk of ‘accident’ but broken, bitty,
 he stood, the picture of sheer misery,
 like one who lied but loathed the perjury, —
 the image of despair that begged for pity.

“The crowd of them pressed round him in a ring;
 they stood tip-toe, climbed stools for elevation;
 they glared, they gaped, broke off their conversation,
 and each glance pierced the youngster like a sting.
 Those on the board conferred a while, discreetly.

The captain rose, — an old man, white as snow; —
 began to speak, choked on his words completely — —
 then spat and pointed, saying merely ‘Go!’

“And go he did. The people formed a lane
 for him to slip away, made no objection; —
 red as his bleeding finger’s crimson stain
 the blood-red blush now of his cheek’s complexion.
 He left the farm, made off towards the height;
 They watched his progress from the yard and chattered;
 he climbed and climbed till he was out of sight; —
 he was at home there, where the mountains scattered.

“I’ve thought about that lad since, many a day; —
 most often May the seventeenth, with meetings
 in market square to march, in full array,
 to bear our liberator’s statue greetings.
 I first attended in a student gang;
 with eager youngsters, playfully carousing;
 I felt a sort of infinite arousing
 as that great flood of people marched and sang.

“The broad street was too narrow for parading.
 Each vantage point was crammed, no window free;
 fair ladies smiled upon us graciously;
 a flash of ribbon here, there flowers cascading.
 The cannon thundered; brandished flags were thrumming,
 and dust, as from a battlefield, rose forth,
 the national anthem sounded, lads were drumming,
 and hearts bore witness: ‘Why it’s grand, our North!’

“Around the monument our hordes collected,
 our country’s budding hope, the future’s pledge.
 All still, now; word that someone was expected.
 And then a man ascends the statue’s ledge.
 There came a surge of clapping and of cheering,
 shrill trumpets and ‘hurrahs’ that followed hard;
 ‘He’s there!’ rang through the flock then; we were hearing
 the folk’s collective greeting to its bard.

“For this man was the people’s favourite poet.
 Broad-shouldered, hatless, blond and big of bone
 he stood up by the lion, gripped the stone
 and fed the crowd the sight that great men owe it.
 And when he’d reaped the crop of approbation
 that cheers, repeated plaudits wide disperse,
 he took a breath, gave voice, and his oration
 proceeded first in prose and then in verse.

“He spoke first of the new dawn’s revelation
 at Eidsvoll’s grove, when thralldom’s night was done;

he spoke of Freedom's treasure, newly won,
 the vast importance of the celebration.
 His eyes shone moist and misted with emotion, —
 the crowd's sight, too, as shining as his glance; —
 it was the shine that comes from long devotion
 to punch-bowls, at some hectic, all-night dance.

“And then he spoke of linking generations
 from past to present time; his words impress;
 those who scorned folk-gods earned his comminations;
 then came this ringing, clarion-call address:
 ‘The blood that streams in veins of Nordic creatures
 is blood that in Jarl Haakon's streamed before;
 the blush that burns upon a Norseman's features
 once burned the cheek of thunder's god, great Thor!’

“Then I recalled the wood, the blood there streaming,
 the lad who at the board had stood and blushed; —
 through all my limbs an icy current rushed,
 I woke — a flash of lightning broke my dreaming.
 I looked around. No scoffing, no demurring?
 The contrary; they held their breath to hear;
 just murmurs, like a cat's contented purring
 when someone strokes its back and rubs its ear.

“He tickled up the crowd that loved the tickling; —
 on me alone truth's heavy burden lay;
 I knew why blood was likely to be trickling,
 why cheeks might well be glowing in our day.
 I ran, as though from demons I'd glimpsed pouring
 from myriad hells to share festivities;
 behind me, myriad-mouthed, a beast was roaring; —
 my people, who endorsed the poet's lies!

“Then to the lie the trumpet blared a pledge,
 the bard descended, finished with his rally;
 the seed, though, that he'd sown would sift and dredge
 in printed form through Norway's every valley.
 There it would send down roots and sprout and grow;
 what crop, then, in a hundred years or so?
 For when the Prince of Lies speaks through the preacher,
 what prospect for the rest with such a teacher?”

He leaped up from the rock; looked down, where under
 deep shadow lay the village, dank and dark;
 his face was like a sleeping threat of thunder;
 his gaze not merely stern but hard and stark.
 A second Moses, on his own behalf; —
 filled with Old Testamental wrath and passion
 he stood, God's eagle, viewing in what fashion
 his desert folk adored the golden calf.

But at a sunbeam's touch his brow unravels,
 shines clearer now, smoothed into peace anew.
 He saw a boat set out upon its travels;
 far past the point two more came into view.
 Soon he saw ten, all making for the spit,
 and on the paths a busy agitation;
 crowd upon crowd — there seemed no end to it —
 the ancient parish church their destination.

It was near time for church. He contemplated
 the strangely silent scene as it unrolls,
 his words burst from him, though the voice was bated;
 "What value have they for the Lord, those souls?
 Across the world this is the holy hour;
there steeples in their thousands point on high;
there swells the organ; bells ring in the tower;
there anthems summon to tranquillity.

"*There* all is sun; *there* lofty hangs the sky;
 out there soul rubs with soul until all's shining,
 thought's ore is made a handle, by refining,
 to raise the individual soul on high.
There mighty angels come, serenely sharing
 the proffer of their tidings with mankind; —
 the way to God's still there, for man to find.
 All that is needed is the will, the daring.

"But *here*. Observe the church's shingle skin.
 No tower, no pointing cross upon the steeple;
 no organ plays; no bells call to the people,
 and mountain upon mountain hems it in.
 The snowfield's pared the strip of sky remaining!
 The mists oppress the heights dark shades besmirch!
 But see the crowd of people, still maintaining
 its creeping, crawling climb towards the church.

"These quiet folk, they too would wish to try
 their voice in the world's chorus, sing beside them.
 What has God given them to raise them by?
 What dove, to bear the Word, did He provide them?
 What were they given but this life of dolour?
 What moves them then to thanks, doxology?
 He bade them, uttered forth His mighty 'Be!',
 the folk became — the sons of wretched squalour.

"Would I knew this. If humankind's creation
 had perished as redemption's hour drew near,
 and only these been spared, — would sin's purgation
 have been secured through blood, as was ours here?
 Would God have sent to such as these His son?

The Cross's strife been, for these few, so striven?
 Such vast atonement for so little given?
 My faith affirms, indeed He would have done!"

He hurried off to reach the nether parts;
 but at that moment came a small stone, hopping
 across the path, rolled, slid by fits and starts
 a long way down the hillside before stopping.
 He raised his eyes; a dog, its coat all rough,
 stood there observing him, ears cocked alertly,
 and just behind, a girl who, laughing pertly,
 held up before her mouth a scrap of stuff.

She seemed to be but half adult, half child,
 hot-blooded, lively, eager, plump and growing,
 uncertain of herself yet somehow knowing,
 though inexperienced, moved by impulse wild.
 She stood as though she mocked through inward weeping,
 she breathed as though enduring joys and pains;
 her skin was golden brown, plainly in keeping
 with blood of gypsies flowing in those veins.

She had her hair cut short, just like a lad.
 Deep-set beneath her brows black eyes were staring
 hard at the priest with that straight look she had,
 strangely attractive, and yet somewhat daring.
 The short skirt flapping round her legs entwined her,
 her feet were shod in hide, with tying-band;
 she had a ram's horn there in her right hand;
 she clutched the branches of a bush behind her.

As marvelling as a baby new-delivered
 she stared down at the priest, he up at her;
 thus height and trackway mutually confer,
 two questions, crossing midway, voiceless quivered.
 But soon the priest, recovering his tongue,
 bade her good day, asked "Where's your journey?", kindly.
 The girl though, screamed as if she had been stung,
 let go her branch and scrambled higher, blindly.

She simply climbed and climbed without replying;
 the heather creaked, stones rattled from their perch.
 She halted higher up, then coldly eyeing
 the priest below, called sullenly: "To church!"
 She climbed again, — climbed higher still, though sheer,
 climbed higher yet; — then paused again soon after,
 held hollowed hand to mouth, — "To church, you hear!"
 she shouted down, but this time there was laughter.

She climbed until she vanished round a tongue
 of over-hanging ice, all cold and gritted.

“To church!” was shouted as a screech, full-lung,
 but next time as a shout the horn emitted.
 “To church!” she shouted, now from here, now there,
 but always higher, further rang her whooping,
 now amidst snowfields, now black outcrops grouping
 scree-strewn and black, such as the uplands bear.

“To church!” the lass yelled out, by mouth once more,
 now through cupped hand, now horn, now both it sounded;
 the din spilled wide across the valley floor,
 and echoes from its northern wall rebounded.
 “To church!” rang out again, sometimes like singing,
 sometimes like laughter, or like chimes beguiled,
 sometimes a shriek, sometimes like far-off ringing
 enchantments from a palace in the wild.

Within the priest’s blood something froze it seemed.
 He stood a long while silent, listening, seeking,
 while on the fleeting, shifting voice kept shrieking
 behind, now to the side, ahead it screamed.
 She sought the church; but there the church lay, yonder,
 deep in the dale, yet it’s the height she seeks.
 How far? And where? Amongst the tops and peaks;
 the pillared mountain-hall is where she’d wander.

And yet, to church! To church? A name, that second,
 like flickered lightning flashed through memory’s night;
 it came, it went; it hissed at him and beckoned,
 slipped from his tongue; but then he seized it tight.
 At first it sounded to him strange and darkly;
 but more and more took on the well-known trait;
 at length the mists of time all rolled away
 and there, by light of home, the name stood, starkly.

A dale flashed through his mind, remote, deserted,
 where under frozen drifts the fells repose;
 a cleft midst peaks and mountain tops inserted,
 half-roofed and spanned by ice-cap and packed snows.
 In frost, in thaw, in blizzard, winter fashioned
 the gleaming vault hung from the valley wall; —
 and through the dale would rage a stream impassioned;
 and on a tarn would livid shadows fall.

The vault would often span one half the dale;
 extending so far out and yet so brittle;
 the cunning thaw would little carve by little;
 but year by year the snow-pack grew in scale.
 But in a summer warm from sun’s embracing,
 the wilderness’s structure would crash down;
 the stream would swell, the river would be racing,
 the snow-pack split across its soaring crown.

The crust that held it drips, melt-waters sally,
 and roars and cracks serve notice of its doom;
 a gust, a snow-squall — then a crash, a boom,
 then comes the avalanche that fills the valley.
 A thunder-clap, a rifle shot will do,
 when all that snow hangs by its flimsy binding, —
 then, over many years, the river's winding
 must, deep below the crust there, burrow through.

Then he recalled, from when he was but little,
 an eerie find brought to the light of day.
 Years back, a man came hunting out that way,
 and nothing seen or heard since, jot or tittle.
 Went after reindeer there in some direction;
 an avalanche caused by a rifle shot; —
 folk still discussed the time and place a lot,
 though well beyond all living recollection.

A century on, the hunter was discovered.
 The herd of reindeer crushed, the smitten deer,
 the huntsman's hide, gun, ball-pouch — all uncovered
 and brought to light beside the frozen mere.
 Then large and small must go to see the wonder;
 he with them, he recalled, though just a tot.
 Now he recalled, for all the years that sunder,
 what people called that strange, mysterious spot.

The ice-church it was called. A track wound high
 across a cliff-face that was wild, forsaken, —
 one that those entering must travel by; —
 but just that path the girl had lately taken.
 The ice-church was her goal. A hail storm started,
 a gust of glacial wind, a swirl of snow
 when she stood near him, or it struck him so.
 From snow she'd come and into snow departed.

It coloured all, the chill light she'd been shedding.
 He saw his birthplace life, its torpor, sweat,
 as through a veil of frozen mist, and yet
 there ran the road that he must soon be treading.
 He longed to have a horse, with speed to tackle
 one charge past all the farms — his mother's most, —
 to hear no other sound but sparks that crackle
 behind the hooves, — then forward, for the coast!

Aboard, aboard! What man accepts seclusion
 when there's a world ahead that's free and fair?
 Would break stones on a barren waste when there
 are ploughlands for the taking, in profusion?
 Who'd want to raise a crop from planted seed
 when there are many trees, young, close to mellowing?

Who'd shriek his throat sore with mere workday bellowing
when he had vision, thoughts that soar indeed?

Who'd sell his life's work for such grains of sand?
He thought of Einar's "curate on probation
who's hardly placed to lead a Reformation;
a voice can't carry in a rock-bound land".
Out into daylight then from that condition!
He rose and straightened up, his mind was set;
the Lord was waiting on his actions yet. —
To render mankind whole, that was the mission.

He did not see the folk swarm at his feet;
his vision seized on pathways more inspired;
he saw a progress, song- and flag-attired,
with triumph won from sacrifice, defeat.
With all the force of solitary passion
he yearned to be outside home's narrow bar;
he glimpsed *his* way to church, after *his* fashion,
like sunshine through a door that stands ajar.

Why his concern, that church-goer in the snow, —
the pair whose way to church would be through pleasure, —
the throng that crawled the dale of gloom past measure?
His mission was to cure the wide world's woe.
His voice was meant to sound for all creation.
As proud as one succeeding in his search,
he strode as if thorn-crowned, in exaltation.
Then he looked up. He stood before the church.

At the church

There's many a place by the Norwegian shore
where life means hunger until death by drowning,
whole generations slave and reap the crowning
disaster — rock-fall, flood — like sires of yore.
There's many a parish there would fit indeed
into some personage's servant-quarters;
there's many a house of God whose roof has brought us
to bend our backs, not just those bowed by need.

Just such this place was; and the church, which stood,
its tower torn away, storm-mutilated;
the rain had bleached the walls once decorated,
the weather had destroyed the once-carved wood.
The door-surround with snakes and tendrils flanking
could scarce be seen beneath the tar's thick proof,
the dragons that had once held up the roof
had been replaced by timber props and planking.

A ringed enclosure marked the slope, and there
 the parish young lay, and the wives and mothers.
 The corpses of the menfolk lay elsewhere,
 it's falling rock killed some, the sea killed others.
 It was ill-tended, was that holy ground;
 and yet the gate implied a thoughtful funder,
 for it was arched and amply planned all round,
 as though for the broad highway to pass under.

And there the midwife of the age desisted.
 He listened; grave-like silence, undisputed;
 no hymn, no sound of service being held;
 he seized hold of the latch; the lock resisted. —
 God's little house was shut; no lesson read
 by deacon in the choir or Word expounded;
 he climbed the hedge by which the yard was bounded;
 there too, deserted; — where had folk all fled?

He listened; torpid air scarce stirred in slumber;
 but something pierced the silence by and by;
 he heard a voice yell out and a reply;
 at times a name was called, at times a number.
 It came from past the church. His course was set.
 It sounded near; he climbed the hedge-partition;
 there he stood high and free; his eye was met
 below the hillside by an apparition.

The red marquee stood where the stream ran bending
 its course around a nearby spit of land.
 The parish — men and women, young attending —
 had gathered in a group and there they stand.
 They looked more like the dead than like the living;
 their temples hollow, eyes ringed round with grey;
 their voices' hoarseness cried that unforgiving
 starvation was the force there holding sway.

It was the old, old song that brooks no bridle;
 a bad year, then a winter without bread;
 a spring with empty mouths and hands kept idle, —
 then summertime, of sickness and the dead.
 Then an appeal that failed, a fruitless call,
 then poor-relief with niggard minds to stock it,
 a cautious fumble into purse and pocket —
 a meagre mite for those who lacked for all.

A man sat by the steps in city vesture,
 a meerschaum hanging from his mouth's left side;
 an old tobacco-pouch, gold braid applied,
 swung from his jacket button with each gesture.
 He seemed a man in charge of operations;
 wrote notes upon his knee, read, called aloud

one or another from the pallid crowd
and doled out corn and bread in scant donations.

For all the rush, he still found time meanwhile
for jokes and off-hand sallies with each suitor;
he looked about with a complacent smile,
he laughed with dull, blue eyes the shade of pewter;
his shining cheeks shone, pleasantly distended,
he talked to all as comrades, valued so,
had handshakes, nods for some, and condescended
to all the young — while keeping up the flow.

“Here, Nils — here’s corn and cash to get your hand on;
go home, keep dearth and devil from your door;
don’t waste it, my good chap, and do abandon
the penny nips of brandy, what is more!
Here, Aslak, this is yours; — be off with you,
tuck in, but feed the ones who’ve waited ages, —
but, Kari dear, — do burn his hymn-book, do — !
I mean the one with two and fifty pages.”

And so forth, without pause. Bread, morals, grain,
well-meant advice, an endless stream of chaffing;
a man run mad, it seemed, in golden chain,
who clutched his belly, fit to burst for laughing.
But from that pallid group came no reaction,
a brief, pinched smile was all they could display;
each, be it large or small, took up his fraction,
and then, without a ‘thank you’, slipped away.

It was as though their plight had seared the soul;
as though their spirit could survive no longer;
as though despair’s lead weight had proved the stronger,
had clogged their heels and taken heavy toll.
It was as though life were a punishment,
whose cruel lesson was to teach endurance;
as though each bargain struck failed of assurance,
each effort vain, and fruitless all dissent.

Brand stood there looking down on them, and saw
his friend, girl, guide with nag, all joining forces;
the emptied pack being loaded on once more;
the sharing of the food-bag’s last resources.
And next, their purses — coin on coin they dole
and those around them stare at the profusion,
snatch what is given, leave in some confusion, —
the man upon the steps nigh lost for role.

He soon recovered, though, and twinkled round
 as though he'd wrought that marvel in some measure;
 he called out to the pair: "Give at your leisure!
 Give to the hilt; you're welcome, I'll be bound!
 Dish out by finger-bowl or bucket and,
 the biggest as the least, we'll take all, flatly!" —
 And his eye glistened as he smiled there, fatly, —
 then he looked round, his gaze encountered Brand.

He nodded, laughed, and pointing with his pipe
 called out: "Turn round folk! Look, here's more arriving!
 I do believe the time I chose was ripe;
 more bounty I dare say, — you'll soon be thriving!
 You're welcome, sir! Come down! It's poor we are!
 You've heard about our floods, drought-stricken weather?
 We're all here in the wilderness together,
 and my five little fishes won't go far!"

But Brand stayed where he was, cold, pale and serious;
 the priest, that moment, had a noble air;
 and yet he seemed untouched at heart, imperious,
 for all the crowd's mute sighs and its despair.
 He shook his head, made for a while no stir,
 then answered: "Yes, I've bread, could play the giver,
 but rather than give *you* the merest sliver,
 I'd throw it all away to feed some cur.

"Where is the heart in you dares risk attaining?
 Where is, amongst you, strength to share abroad?
 Where is your spirit that would, uncomplaining,
 submit to castigation from the Lord?
 Join me! I can a better gift bestow you
 than recompense for pains lost past recall;
 but cast your burdens off and I shall show you
 the meaning of God's writing on the wall!"

It was as though a monarch stood amid them,
 they yielded so obedient to his voice,
 and as he left some bondage seemed to bid them
 walk in the stranger's steps, they had no choice.
 Without a sound they dropped what they'd been given,
 no matter whether less or whether more,
 and still they followed, to the church's door,
 in silence and by strange excitement driven.

The key was turned; Brand sought the pulpit; mounted;
 "This is a priest!" they whispered, much impressed.
 But he, that sunlike beamer, now discounted,
 skulked by the door, an uninvited guest.
 Within the gloom, dead silence; none dared utter
 as they filled up the benches row by row;

up in the pulpit Brand was heard to mutter,
though what his prayer was, nobody could know.

His prayer was brief, then he addressed them clearly:
“Remember, man lives not by bread alone;
but if your body’s needs are met, those merely,
you are provided not with bread but stone.
And if you can suppress your hunger solely
with gifts that can be put into your hands,
then you’ve no link with God, no bridge expands
connecting you with everything that’s holy.

“I stood this morning high up on the mountain
and watched you crowd all roads to church, below,
I thought then you had Him in mind, the fountain
of all that raises, frees us mid life’s woe.
I thought life here still went at its old speed
amongst you, with no mental stimulation;
and yet it raised me, that you felt the need
to clutch at Him, as life-raft of salvation.

“How swift, the fear one’s Maker has forgotten,
how easy to believe God’s turned away,
when neither sun nor stars rise re-begotten,
where there is neither night nor any day,
when all is grey on grey, all things unchanging,
the need today as yesterday, the same,
however far through time your eye goes ranging,
the same old picture in the same old frame.

“When there is nothing rising or declining,
when life weighs down like murky overcast,
when there’s no anger and there’s no repining,
when sentence is accepted just as passed,
when there’s no joy or terror to relieve it
and cast some light and shade on life’s dull pace,
the soul is tempted to collapse, believe it
has been struck out of God’s great book of grace.

[The manuscript breaks off here]

Ibsen struggled for nearly a year with the epic Brand and then in 1865, reported to his friend Bjørnson the remarkable progress he was making with ‘Brand’ in its dramatic form.

Ymir, the first living creature, a giant; the maggots that emerged from his rotting corpse were transformed by the gods into dwarfs destined to live and work underground; Earl/Jomsburg: Earl Haakon of Norway defeated at Ålesund a powerful invasion force of Vikings based, since 960 AD, on Jomsburg, at the mouth of the river Oder; Snefrid, the Finnish wife of King Harald Haarfagre; under-stringing, to resonate in sympathy with the plucked strings above; Egir, the sea-god; his steed a riddling reference to a ship; giant petrified i.e. when overtaken by sunlight; tongued device, the leading edge of a flag with two triangles removed, to resemble the jaws and tongue of a dragon; Fenris, the great wolf which devoured the sun thus inaugurating a winter, many years long, during which human society

degenerated into chaotic violence; hymn-book of two and fifty pages, a deck of cards for gambling.

IN A YOUNG COMPOSER'S ALBUM

Orpheus struck with purest treble
soul from beast and fire from pebble.

Stones our Norway has no lack of;
wild beasts too, we've many a pack of.

Play, that stones may spark in wonder!
Play, that hides may burst asunder!

Written in Edward Greig's album February 1866.

AN ALBUM-POEM

Joy's harbinger, my name for you;
The star of my existence.
And truth to God, 'twas such you grew,
Joy's harbinger that came — withdrew; —
A star — yes, shooting-star, it's true,
That died out in the distance.

Written 1868-9.

IN THE GALLERY

A lovely creature
sits there and graces
in easel-reach the
gallery's spaces.

What pure Castalia
works there upon her? —
She copies daily the
Murillo Madonna.

Her rapt, astigmatical
eye speaks mutely:
she builds ecstatical
realms of beauty.

Then I revisited
 eighteen years later;
 hailed times pure-spirited,
 old and greater.

A faded creature
 sits there and graces
 in easel-reach the
 gallery's spaces.

But? — words defeat me!
 The same punctilio!
 She copies neatly
 the same Murillo.

Time's passed — she still perches,
 survives, this purist,
 on props for churches
 and trash for the tourist.

And so she's been slaving
 for ages there,
 transfixed with craving
 and white of hair.

But her rapt, astigmatical
 eye speaks mutely:
 she builds ecstatical
 realms of beauty.

Written during the winter of 1868-9. See 'In The Picture Gallery' above.

TO MY FRIEND THE REVOLUTIONARY ORATOR

You say I've become a 'conservative'.
 I'm still what I've been every day I live.

I've really no time for fiddling with pieces.
 You knock the board over; I'm yours till hell freezes.

There's only the one revolution I treasure
 that wasn't a fudge, a half-hearted measure.

It brings to those later a halo of glory.
 Of course I refer to the Deluge story.

Though even *that* left Lucifer stranded;
 for Noah, as you know, took charge single-handed.

Let's try it again, but be more categorical;
that calls for real men, not just the rhetorical.

You fix me a flood to the high-tide mark,
 I'll gladly, myself, torpedo the Ark.

*Written in 1869 for a revolutionary, Adolf Hedin whom Ibsen had met at the Limmells' house
 (see 'Balloon Letter' below).*

BURDEN OF MAJESTY

For a knight beyond comparing
 this I send without a name.
 I know how the sword despairing
 sears the bound hands of the daring,
 know how savage teeth are tearing
 at a brow with thought a-flame.

Will attuned to triumph's manner, —
 will kept shackled, pent unheard;
 hand stretched for his forebears' banner,
 soul, a mighty exploit-planner, —
 wind-felled spruce confine a spanner
 of the skies, poor regal bird!

Daylight dawns and hunt-horns utter.
 Heigh, the whole world's in the chase!
 I know how clipped wings can flutter,
 beat against the bars and shutter;
 know how yearning goads when but a
 pygmy mans the sentry-place.

Horns fall mute now daylight's faded;
 unused weapons strew the ground.
 Name on name is serenaded
 round the hillside, greenwoods shaded; —
 I know how he feels degraded,
 he whose name no voices sound.

Creativity his dower,
 beauty's promise, larva-like, —
 poem-play his kind of power,
 bright with vying hues his flower; —
 sport of dire neglect, while sour
 deprivation's lightnings strike!

Forced to gainsay what's depicted
 on his candid forehead plain!
 Forced to have ideals restricted,
 just as Peter, lie-afflicted,

sank that night till the predicted
cock-crow raised him, whole again.

Grief — and silence! Pygmies, dare you
such a sacrifice assess?
Know you what it costs, to swear to
foreign swords your fealty, care to
risk your all as you prepare to
save an age from fecklessness?

Dream, you'll answer, an illusion,
all this magnanimity.
Good; spread shrewdness in profusion,
judgement's caused you no confusion,
you've not drained the cup — conclusion:
you've not known what dreams can be.

More than life, in my submission,
is a dream that's not set free.
Like my poetry's condition,
shackled by soul's inhibition;
snarling, clawing for remission,
lion-like it craves my "Be!"

You will quote the old bathetic:
"Greatest he who shuns extremes." —
Golden rule for the ascetic,
shelter for the apathetic!
Bells ring but for the athletic
in whose veins hot blood still streams.

Spare me "higher obligation"! —
Have you bought his unscathed heart?
Bought the poet's staunch vocation
to subvert his dedication?
Bought him, that with reprobation
he might view his noblest part?

For a knight beyond comparing
this my garland with no name.
I know how the sword despairing
sears the bound hands of the daring,
know how savage teeth are tearing; —
can you, wise men, feel the same?

Purpled martyrdom, his token, —
sore constraint, the silenced dream,
flowers mocked, for gloom bespoken, —
fruit-filled boughs untimely broken, —
dream, to life's vile crassness woken, —
hence the Cross provides my theme.

Hence this monument's erection
 to a masterpiece ill-starred;
 shrewdness fails, a botched confection, —
 I salute his *imperfection*,
 pen my knight this proud reflection:
he was all too great a bard.

Written in 1869 to King Charles XV, whom Ibsen had met that summer in Stockholm.

AT PORT SAID

Orient the day,
 and the harbour glittered;
 the whole world on display,
 the ensigns flittered.
 Music abounded,
 borne to those listening;
 massed cannon sounded
 the canal's christening.

Steam-ships on cruise
 passed the obelisked region.
 They brought me news
 from back home, in Norwegian.
 The play I had polished
 to mirror male misses,
 back home was demolished
 by stinking claque-hisses.

Gadfly had struck;
 a reminder, a cold one. —
 Stars, you've brought luck, —
 my home is the old one!
 Our river-boat hooted
 the frigate a greeting;
 hat raised I saluted
 the ensign, competing.

Relax, that's best,
 despite the snake-sting!
 An honoured guest
 on a Bitter Lakes fling!
 When day's unwound
 I'll dream here in clover
 of Pharaoh drowned
 while Moses passed over.

Ibsen was the Norwegian representative at the opening of the Suez Canal 17th November 1869. The play was 'The League of Youth'.

BALLOON LETTER

to a Swedish lady

Dresden, 1 December 1870

Yes, I'll chance my arm today,
 I who, silent for such ages
 in despite of many gages,
 fear I've thrown my case away, —
 I, who fared from Stockholm owing
 thanks — my thank-account is chronic —
 visiting realms Pharaonic,
 tweaking Isis' veil exotic,
 have to date, — in the demotic —
 welshed on promises o'er flowing
 which, on "Lyran's" last occasion,
 I had solemnly averred, —
 namely that I'd drop a word
 just by way of compensation.

Dare I? Have I still the right?
 Right? — Good Lord, what quaint precision!
 Now-a-days the right decision
 rests on, pure and simply, might!
 So then, short and sharp, I will;
 but in anti-Prussian fashion;
 with no claim upon compassion.
 Don't take my mute wandering ill!

Here I'm living in the way
 folk in Paris live today.
 Massive German knights (of phrases)
 who would whirl the world to blazes,
 fly the banner, brag and brawl —
Wacht am Rhein's their madrigal, —
 it's a siege that nothing raises.

Take my word, the circle's small,
 cramped and narrow, all in all.

Politics and beer-hall chatter's
 served up with my beef-steak platters,
 and the local paper's column —
 German verse, all lame and solemn —
 dishes up a fare as tasty
 as a French rat-stew or pasty.

Worse still, when reverberations
 from the North come echoing;
 when the vulgar peppering
 strafes my Spring-like expectations;
 when brash crudity's derision
 blows me sky-high to perdition

and I stand, arm in a sling,
mid the ruins of my vision.

So it's need (no point in lying)
prompts this long, long overdue
letter I now send to you, —
letting the balloon go flying.
I've no doves, you may assume; —
doves and hope, birds of a feather, —
and within this clammy tomb
only owls and ravens weather.
But a letter to a lady
via owl or raven's shady.

So — last year, as well you know,
with your Mælar sky gloom-shaded,
biting frost and foliage faded,
south and deltawards I go.
It was summer there, perfection.
Brightness with a strong reflection,
like our fjords that mirror glaciers.
Palm-groves, sycamores, acacias
casting blue-green shade-fantasias.
We saw Bedouin with missus
perched up on their camels, bumping
through the desert's wildernesses.
At the sight a Nordic bumpkin
(on his first excursion ever)
yelled: "An ostrich, well I never!"

On *Ferus* we shot up-stream
out of Cairo at full-steam.
Saw the pyramids at Gizeh
where Napoleon orated
while the Sphinx just meditated,
then, before and since — the teaser!

Beni Hassan's royal mummies'
tombs we crawled through on our tummies.
Centuries have badly crazed them:
all dates subject to correction;
this one *can* take on the nod, —
Egyptologists I instance, —
and of course I've well appraised them —
they were built far in the distance
(when the Pharaoh was a God)
under Potiphar's direction
with his son-in-law's assistance, —
Joseph, Jacob's offspring, raised them.

Memnon's statue, stone colossus, —
 he, you know, once sang a little —
 we approached, the day still young;
 but the old chap held his tongue.
 All that's now mere bardic tittle
 since Cambyses overhauled him,
 checked his seams for wear, and mauled him,
 and perhaps, who knows, reviewed the
 inner organs somewhat crudely.

Many a singer's felt such losses,
 frozen voice and epiglossis.

Still, a throne's fair compensation
 for his dawn song's deprivation.

So old Memnon's throned in glory
 on that loss-of-voice tall story,
 rakes in tribute worth a mint,
 holds court, dressed up, without stint,
 not just for the upper classes —
 even a Norwegian passes,
 like your humble, and Peer Gynt.

Who, though, could record the story
 of a six- or seven-week dream?
 So I beg you, be a sport
 and accept this scrawled report
 of my trip in blazing glory
 up the crocodilian stream.
 Mad, to waste one's verbal hoard
 on our pasha-life aboard
 our four Noah's-ark type of vessel; —
 we had four, you must remember,
 with four barques besides where nestle
 all the so-called weaker gender.

In the bows, then, setting forth
 sat three bears from the old North;
 eleven cocks from France, all mannish;
 four real stallions — they were Spanish —
 fiery colts quite hyperbolic,
 skilled in dances cabriolic,
 proud as El Olés they frolic.
 We shipped service-staff besides
 who, the common vote decides,
 came from where the ass was stabled.
 A Swiss buck of sorts moreover;
 one amphibian genus labelled
 “should be kept just half seas over,” —
 with, of course, a crowd of rough
 mast-fed (i.e. Old) Germanic
 wild-boars, tame by inclination;

two, by way of variation,
 predators of martial feature;
 one Brazilian-hispanic
 bookworm, and a gallimaufry
 known collectively as small fry —;
 item — no, that's quite enough!

Now imagine us all guided,
 dragomanned, now left now right
 till our caravan subsided
 at an old-style super-site.

O'er the tawny waste's dominions
 sped we as on nimble pinions,
 though our means of transportation
 was by ass or, (for the bold),
 camel, if the truth were told.
 What delight, what jubilation,
 childlike milling, highly vocal,
 from our flock. Alone that yokel
 ostrich-spotter raised objections,
 opting for a coach at least;
 shouting "Ass? Is that the beast
 for a man with Press connections!
 What I need's a horse with fire;
 aren't there thoroughbreds for hire?" —

Luxor, Dendera, Sakkara,
 Edfu, Assuam and Philae
 I'll pass over quickly while I
 pause en passant to compile my
 outline sketch of the Sahara.

You'll have heard that — one presumes, —
 when the caravan goes striding
 through the rolling desert ocean,
 sand-floods, lashed by fierce simooms,
 dredge up with their restless motion
 skeletons the sand's been hiding.

Or (more aptly) — when it's wading
 through the sand-dunes, it's invading
 living nature domiciled
 with mortality's inaction,
 turned, through time and petrification,
 architecture that's run wild.

Knuckle-bone, rib, spinal column
 show like plinths of pillars solemn;
 camel skulls profusely scattered
 are the capitals now shattered;
 yellow gaping teeth parading
 make a sort of balustrading;
 fingers twitching in the breezes

are like bits of broken friezes,
and, like tattered knightly pennants,
kaftans flap their ragged remnants.

Now imagine that whole setting
shimmers in these hot, still climes,
grows and swells, till awe-begetting,
it expands a thousand times; —
then conceive this tomb-world here
an old caravan that died
in mid-journey, petrified, —
and you've Egypt's long career.

Yes, it's true. A great procession
set forth one bright dawn of yore;
led by priests, in their possession
hieroglyphic books of lore;
god-kings, king-gods rode the billowed
waste where time seems never-ending; —
Isis and Osiris pillowed
on high saddles, condescending,
glorious but in silence wending.
Horus, Hathor, Thme and Phtah,
Ammon Re and Ammon Ra
casting radiance resplendent
stalk amid the throng attendant;
Apis golden-browed is guided
where the waters gently glided
by a train of slaves in legion,
and wherever camp was made,
sphinxes, pylons mark the region.
Obelisks and stones memorial
whisper of, in script pictorial,
death and victory-parade;
temple colonnades unnumbered
line the route this pageant lumbered;
pyramids in strict formation
mark its final camp's location.

Lo, then from the North a gust,
soon a gale, the desert battered,
lashed the caravan to dust; —
priests were toppled, kings were shattered,
all the gods declined and fell;
Pharaoh and his house as well
lay forgotten, buried, scattered.
Where the throng once flocked as bidden,
now a lifeless, silent crowd; —
for a thousand long years hidden,
deep-entombed, all light forbidden,
like a corpse in mummy-shroud,

that four-thousand-year doom-ridden
culture crumbled, disavowed.

It was relics of *that* blighted
pageant we Khedive-guests sighted
as we neared the Nubian border.

We saw fellahin in order
scud the dunes towards Abydos,
and a little south, beside us,
Karnak showed its groves of socles
like some primal giant's knuckles;
capitals at Rhamaseum
like a camel mausoleum;
Luxor's hundred-columned hall
like slaves' arms in fettered thrall,
witnessed to the storm's wild passion
in a mute "*sic transit*" fashion.

That same scene has stayed with me
as I travelled other quarters;
like God's spirit o'er the waters
made me sense profundity.

Thor in Yule-tide gallop thunders
foremost in the headlong rout;
Grecian gods, though toppled wonders,
to this very day hold out.
Jove lives on the Capitol,
here called "tonans", there called "stator".
Where is Egypt's sacred doll?
Where is Horus, where is Hathor?
No memorial, myth or story,
not one relic to their glory.

Well, the reason's pretty plain.
Where identity is lacking,
where the form does not contain
hatred, pleasure, joy and tension,
throbbing pulse and blood's bright stain, —
then the sum of high pretension
is mere skeleton-like clacking.
Doesn't Juno still ring true,
pale, yet in high dudgeon too,
when she catches hubby petting — ?
Isn't Mars real, through and through, —
snared beneath the golden netting?

What of Egypt's gods, though, solemn
lines of ciphers ranged by column?
What on earth was their life-mission?
Just to be, to stay the same,
painted, stiff with inanition,

stooled beside the altar-flame.
 One of them's hawk-billed of feature,
 one's an ostrich-feathered creature,
 god of day one, one of night,
 one of everything in sight; —
 not one felt life's urgent call,
 felt the call to sin, to stumble,
 raise himself despite the fall.
 Hence must Egypt lie and crumble
 like a crypted corpse that's nameless
 after four millennia's sameness.

You, dear lady, need no telling
 why, besieged and ringed so tight,
 I, withdrawn to my snug dwelling,
 live by introspection's light.
 Outdoors there's no consolation,
 faith's flown like a fall migration,
 but the inward eye's perception
 sees Hope's burgeoning inception.
 On those caravans, long dead,
 I construct our way ahead.

Every age of humankind
 climbs an endless spiral stairway;
 same tight circle, narrow fairway,
 route eternally confined;
 will yearns on, undeviating; —
 time keeps merely escalating.

Hence our generation's banding
 o'er the Pharaoh's head — next landing.
 Once more kings rate gods in standing,
 once more individuals form
 a morose and fickle swarm —
 discontent that's still expanding
 is the disaffected norm.
 Once more pyramid-creation
 occupies our generation.
 Once more veins must be distended,
 blood and tears must be expended,
 that the world may contemplate
 majesty entombed in state.

Modern caravan, old manner,
 with its Hathor, with its Horus,
 and, above all, with its chorus
 blindly swearing on the banner.
 What great works aren't raised today
 by the same triumphal way?
 What proof of the folk's affection!

How Egyptian — one and all
bring a little stone to fall
into place in their erection.
How precise, the formulation;
how exact the calculation!

Yes, it's great without a doubt,
so great that the world stands gaping; —
yet a quavering 'but' escaping
from the open mouth slips out.
Doubt takes over, asking gently:
Is it great, so evidently?
What gives work its quality? —
Mass-appeal is not the measure
but strong personality,
the inspired work's hidden treasure.

Right, but now that horde Germanic,
storming Paris in this way?
Who stands firm amid the panic,
who alone wins victory's bay?
When did one man's reputation
shine that thousands voiced his praises,
sang him home with anthems fair?
Squadron, regiment, formation,
H.Q. — viz: spy operation —
lazy hounds who hunt in braces
track the quarry to its lair.

Hence the halo's loss of glory. —
There's no poet tells that story;
and there's nought that lives for long
save what's dignified in song.

Think of Gustavus Adolfus —
tales of leadership engulf us;
think of Bender's hero, captured, —
of that thunder-bolt, Per Wessel
in his night-dispelling vessel,
Kongedyp's men, blithe and bold; —
memory spreads its canopies
o'er them like a choir enraptured
with its spate of harmonies,
to the plaudits thousand-fold
from Spring's festival marquees.

Then consider men today,
all those Fritzes, Blumenthalers,
and those Junker 'generalers',
count them, count their massed array!
Under Prussia's pestilential

flag in black-white funeral guise,
 woolly grubs of great potential
 can't hatch as song's butterflies.
 They can spin their silk, but shortly
 die in the cocoon, bound tautly. —
 In the hour of triumph, shipwreck.
 Prussian sword turns Prussian whip-crack.
 There's no kind of elevation
 in resolving an equation.
 No achievement worth the prizing
 since the time when the uprising
 of a people fine and free
 changed to staff-machinery,
 whittled down by shrewd devising, —
 since von Moltke's pragmatizing
 killed the struggle's poesy.

Thus demonic is the might
 pledged to worldly domination:
 sphinx-like, hoarding its own light,
 killed by its own obfuscation.

Cypher-triumph meets its fate.
 Modern winds have blown of late;
 they will, like the sand-storm's lashing,
 send the race of idols crashing.
 Bismarck and those other buffers
 will on history's throne look duffers,
 just like Memnon's stumps of column,
 songless when the sun shines on 'em.

But as we Khedive-invited
 guests, our trip through death's world ended,
 midst festivities well-lighted
 met the dawning age portended, —
 yes, as we, flag fluttering,
 hailed, to world-wide chorusing,
 the canal's inauguration,
 and as we from Suez strand
 caught a glimpse of promised land, —
 so the spirit's expectation
 of canals to be constructed
 shall, as on a world-wide tour,
 by chorales and hymns conducted,
 by the glow of Beauty's brand,
 set sail for the dawn's allure,
 steering for the Promised Land.

It's for Beauty that *we* hunger.
 Bismarck's just a science-monger.

Shall we join the fun together?
 Well, who knows, dear lady whether
 doves will bring the card? We'll see.
 Till then I wear gloves — kid-leather —
 in my chamber's privacy;
 till then I shall seek allayment
 as a poet garbed in vellum;
 that will stir the good-folk's venom,
 "heathen's" sure to be my payment;
 mobs are my abomination,
 I fear dregs, contamination,
 I shall bide time's slow rotation
 in my spotless wedding raiment.

And with these last words, goodbye!
 Fare you well, balloon! Now fly!
 Air's the poet's region, really; —
 steer due north and land as nearly
 as you can to Mælarstranden;
that's convenient to land on,
 Telemark is much too high!

In the basket struts Imp Swanker.
 Let me not have long to wait
 to be told he, with his freight —
 light-weight verse, light thoughts, no rancour —
 has, at Normalm, dropped his anchor!

During the summer of 1869 Ibsen had stayed with the Linnells, a Swedish couple, at their house "Lyran" on Lake Mælaren before he set out for Suez. He wrote en route from Dresden, where he felt "besieged" by German society as Paris was, at that date, by the German army; hence the conceit of sending out his letter by balloon — one such from Paris had landed in Telemark — and the linking of Egypt and Germany as states with no soul and no individuality; Ibsen is castigating the militaristic brutality of Prussian influence which had, in his view, perverted Germany's initial aspirations to achieve unity and a national identity — an influence manifested in the bombastic architectural re-planning of the capital; Peter Wessel, the Norwegian Nelson, later entitled Tordenskjold, destroyed with vastly inferior numbers a Swedish fleet in 1716; the prisoner at Bender, King Charles XII, put away in 1713 by his Turkish hosts, to whom his intriguing had become a nuisance; Kongsvinger, a frontier fort on the Swedish border; El Olé, a form of Spanish dance-mime. The desert tour took place before the opening ceremony of the Suez Canal.

TO FREDERIK HEGEL

(on the occasion of the centenary celebration of Gyldendal, the publishing company.

30th December 1870)

Take my handclasp, though far distant;
 take the thanks dead words afford!
 You've known well of my persistent
 wish to join the festive board.

Could mere wishes level pathways,

yours would lead without a bruise
to an evening's aftermath rays,
to life's porch where you could muse.

You, till then, toil on affording
help to build our northern keep; —
walls now rise behind the hoarding;
upward now the towers creep.

Modest mason, you who quarry
stone to make our home come true, —
fear not: there's a laudatory
statue-niche reserved for you!

JUDAS

An odd-bird disciple one can't put a tag on, —
quite literally, the twelfth wheel on the wagon.

What drove him to it stays confidential;
all history reports is the mere evidential.

A conscience that slept, that's what caused his behaviour,
as we know, when he ventured to kiss the Saviour.

Both Heaven and Hell won their game; — how fulfilling!
But what, now, if Judas hadn't been *willing*?

RHYME LETTER TO FRU HEIBERG

Dresden, Easter week 1871

If I'd sent you, in one go,
all my little thank-you letters
penned in sleepless winter's fetters,
as one thesis
torn in pieces,
they'd have, like a cloud of snow,
caused a flurry,
one great scurry, —
strips that hurry,
filled with writing
to convey my feeble thanks,
would have formed a prose-drift blighting
Rosenvæng's bright-flowered banks.

If I'd sent you, without stint,
unconfined by text or print,
every thought-bird as it struggled,

I'd have smuggled
 them where silence reigns imperious
 under Rosenvæng's calm roof,
 there where soul presides aloof,
 there where Beauty's charms mysterious
 yearn for their elucidation,
 like a bud Spring puts to proof,
 opening in a revelation.

Peace would have succumbed to shock
 at the landing of my flock;
 children would have hearkened for us
 as for hunt-horns far afield; —
 birds invisibly concealed
 would have trilled in swirling ranks
 in a rapt, expectant chorus,
 hymns of thanks,
 would have circled, brushed with lightness
 the great sage's sculptured likeness.

Letters boring,
 random fancies
 will not serve; my choice is verse.
 High above day's deck-planks soaring,
 from the cross-trees
 I must scan the universe.
 Prose is for ideas and notions,
 verse for visions.
 Mind's delights and mind's distresses,
 grief that's whitened my own tresses,
 wrath's emissions, —
 I portray life's richness better
 in strict verse-form's fetter.

But the thanks I now find shaming,
 thus declaiming, —
 is it just my play-success's
 patroness's
 part I'm faming,
 weaving praises
 in these small verse-chains of daisies?

No, a great resplendent memory
 loads my tongue with terms sublime, —
 memories of a lovely, glowing
 festive time,
 memories of events still chiming,
 every glorious,
 when I saw you sweep victorious,
 splendid, graceful, true of heart,
 through the wonderland of art.

That was when my thanks were owing;
 that's my reason now for rhyming.
 Last year's visit I just squandered,
 I stayed dumb;
 Beauty's debt, the whole round sum
 still heart-hoarded, I just wandered
 off again.
 And since then
 daily interest keeps growing,
 and for all that's in this letter
 I shall, like a welshing debtor,
 never pay the sum that's owing. —

The mind's eye will always see you
 wondrous, merged with Denmark's reaches,
 with a day, a lovely sea-view
 by the Sound mid lofty beeches.
 Sun-warmed vessels, sun-warmed breezes,
 fairway rippling
 with a blue and limpid stippling;
 summer's wafting,
 "Greenwood's" offspring,
 breathes a poem that appeases.
 It is Sunday; laughter ringing,
 gay throngs singing,
 boats a-swinging
 where the steep banks overlean.
 Dresses dashing,
 flirting, flashing
 where the chimes and fiddles clashing
 set the backcloth to the scene.

But out yonder, —
 north where Kronberg's throned in power,
 southward where the Three Crowns tower
 gasconading,
 what a show of swans parading,
 what elation,
 what white canvas pageantry;
 vessels keeping close formation;
 sunlight on the sails' curvation,
 pennants legion,
 heaven's region
 preen them in the glassy sea.

One contender,
 dream-fraught maiden slim and slender,
 now floats past me under sail.
 She is like some legend hiding
 wrapped within a trembling veil;

she is like a vision gliding,
 never biding,
 on some secret, mystic trail.
 Sea-elves sporting
 swirl cavorting
 in the bow-spray at their game;
 fairies hurry
 in the scurry;
 but within the pennant's flurry
 lurks "Agnete's" name.

Look — another apparition,
 such a dancer, wild and fearless!
 Grace, caprice in coalition,
 talent peerless.
 Half familiar, half far distant,
 half a mermaid, half meek infant
 fell-exploring,
 "Dina" rides upon her mooring.
 As though blindly,
 guided by the zephyr kindly,
 as though dreaming
 cradled on the tide's soft streaming, —
 the felucca!
 Every dip, her every rising
 tells Provence gave vital succour;
 deep sighs quiver,
 love's faint zither
 from the deck soul's Spring prevising,
 wafted hither;
 songs descending
 on the mute throng there attending,
 as beside the strand's green pillows
 "Iolanthe" charms the billows.

Who'd not wonder
 at the vessels
 following in sun her courses,
 to a fair wind making foam?
 "Ragnhild" wrestles
 heeling under
 as the sea's dark hidden forces
 lure her home; —
 lotus-like the current riding
 see the fair "Ophelia" cutter
 seem to flutter,
 veering, gliding —
 frigates after,
 an armada
 seeking harbour
 to the land's applause and laughter. —

Thus it is mind's eye will see you
wondrous, merged with Denmark's reaches, —
with a day, a lovely sea-view
by the Sound mid lofty beeches. —

But one question must be faced:
will the nation
ever, in its agitation
and negation,
sink this wealth by genius graced
in oblivion's purgatory?
Will some alienated age then blunder,
like an English pirate plunder
this armada, Denmark's glory?

See, we brothers,
colour-, form- and word-compilers,
dabs at building,
or however else we style us,
we, who for our craft of beauty
felt the need for heavier duty
timbers for our keels, less yielding,
we can't blame our fate on others
if our navy
is sub-standard sometimes maybe.
Many clippers, showy cusses,
rigged out as sublime personas
can at last
end up classed
with the ship-Jeronimuses.
Many a hull rigged out and splendid —
under-written by coevals, —
overwhelmed at sea and rock-scarred,
have, wrecked by marine upheavals,
sometimes ended
being towed back to the dockyard,
minus guns and gear, o'er blown as
all the other Magdelonas.
We shall think our luck ne'er ceases
if caprice is
kind to laid-up masterpieces,
stores them gently
for the antiquarian gentry.

Scenic art, so it's assented,
borne to flower
for an hour,
must like soapy bubbles scented,
must like meteors of the night,
blaze, then shatter,
traceless scatter,

lost to sight, —
mortal handiwork's sad plight.

Soar aloft in bird-like cadence,
rise above this warped objection!

Verily,
your art is the child of fragrance,
inspiration,
fervent senses,
character and fantasy, —
not a plank- or stone-erection,
brain-confection
firmly set in black and white,
but an elf that haunts perfection,
beauty's vineyard, airy, light, —
just *because* it lacks a firm
figuration
hands can grasp, it builds defences
that repel Time's gnawing worm.

All men's minds henceforth shall see you
wondrous, merged with Denmark's regions, —
with a night, the Sound, the sea-view
under memory's starry legions.

What a legendary muster!

Fleet of splendours,
frigates foaming,
modest tenders,
I see homing
through the gloaming,
in the shore's snug lee they cluster;
mist envelops sail and masting;
twilight casting
swan-like shapes on yards and stays
cheats the gaze;
distance, thwarting close attention,
breeds invention;
women on the shore-line ponder,
men see yonder
as their fancies choose to stray,
generations, those that settle
wood and bay, —
all interpret beauty's fettle
each in his own way.

That's the life, you see, to trust,
recollected
in the people's mind,
protected
from time's moth, corrosive rust, —
that is truly life, the turning

of *your* substance, rich and free,
 to the form the folk's eye yearning
 seeks for its own poesy;
 that is living —
 myth-begetting,
 fairy-like in presentation,
 one with current aspiration,
 one with current needs and setting, —
 and behold the praise you're getting
 while still living.

In an age that's starved for charm
 I was soothed to be observer
 of your passage in full fervour
 to fair winds, the sun's bright balm, —
 soothed to gaze upon the calm
 where in night's cool-shining glory
 saga wove your journey's story.

For the vision granted me,
 hear my grateful prophecy.
 You shall live for generations
 wondrous, merged with Denmark's reaches, —
 with a night, the Sound's tall beeches
 under Memory's constellations.

Johanne Louise Heiberg, widow of J. L. Heiberg — the "sage" — had had a distinguished career as actress, producer and director at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. The letter was prompted by the great success, shortly before, of her production of 'The Pretenders'. Her house, Rosenvænget, where Ibsen had visited her the previous year, stood on the Øresund. Geronimus and Magdalena are middle-aged characters from Holberg's comedies. Felucca, a small Mediterranean two-master.

THANKS

Her distress showed when sorrows
 impeded my way, —
 her delight was the morrow's
 creative display.

Her home is far yonder,
 on freedom's high seas,
 where poet-craft wander
 sea-mirrored, at ease.

Her kin, my creations
 whose varying throng
 in bannered formations
 stride forth in my song.

Her aim was inspiring
 my vision's glow,
 but who helped the firing
 there's none she'd have know.

Written in Rome spring 1871 to his wife.

THE BURNT SHIP

He brought his craft facing
 away from the north;
 sought more cheerful gods, tracing
 their sport back and forth.

Beacons of snowland
 quenched in the seas;
 fauns of the glow-strand
 answered his pleas.

He set light to his vessel; —
 smoke billowed blue,
 like a slender bridge-trestle
 northwards it flew.

For huts of the Norsemen
 from scrub bathed in light,
 there rides forth a horseman
 unfailing, each night.

Written at the conclusion of work on the 1871 volume of Poems.

THE CHANGE IN DIRECTION

1872

In Vienna, a battle with diplomats vying,
 on North Schleswig's frontier, corpses were lying.

Bravest of soldiers, flower of the nation,
 those men and those women in bloody formation.

Two hundred thousand breast-wounded heroes;
 two hundred thousand massed in their death-throes.

And so they must lie there, with death still impending,
 an eight-year-long night that will ne'er have an ending.

An eight-year-long night of a people unfriended,
 They lie out there still and still they're not tended.

Where were Denmark's champions in that long night?

They flocked to a flag that showed red and white.

It wasn't the Dannebrog tempest-fanner.
They mustered beneath the Red Cross banner.

They mustered with weapons of hate discarded.
The right flank was swordless, the left unguarded.

The way though was barred, for a bayonet cordon
stretching east and west served as front-line warden.

That cross of red on its snow-white strip
failed to moisten the casualty's lip.

The gaping wounds lacked the soothing needed; —
the signal for help, that was flown unheeded.

And yet Denmark's champions held out, proved steady,
enduring, each one of them wide-awake, ready.

Then came the order as stiff as starch:
"Field Service, retreat; to the North — quick march!

"All flags in your rucksacks, — stow! — and forget them!
The black eagles are circling, you mustn't upset them.

"The lions rampant, — wag tails in subjection!
The men on watch, — signal 'Change of direction!'"

It's not in dispute; a bard has declaimed it, —
and dear old Grundtvig and God have ordained it.

Right! Beat the retreat. To rapprochement's feast!
On the platform stands Pan-Germania's priest.

The new bosom friends, new brother with brother,
stand chinking their glasses, embrace one another.

All the lamps have been kindled; our eight-year-long dream
goes floating away on a speech-making stream.

The smell of tobacco smoke, music is swirling.
In everyone's mind a great future's unfurling.

What's muddling the music? A death-rattle shriek.
What's fouling the smoke? It's a corpse-like reek.

A breeze swept the fug — soft sou'westerly weather.
It brought us the reek and the death-cry together.

Just step up the volume to drown out the seeping!
A dying man's seemliest when he is sleeping.

His shrieking will stop, neglect's a great curer.
One gust from the North and the air's made purer. —

There's a change in the offing! Talk on, no objection!
The weather-vane's signalled the change in direction.

The eight-year-long night refers back to Denmark's defeat by Germany in 1864. The poem was occasioned by speeches and articles in which Bjørnson, shortly after the death of Grundtvig, who supported the concept of a unified Scandinavia, urged the Danes to come to terms with Germany — a change of direction that Ibsen abominated.

AT THE MILLENNIAL CELEBRATIONS

18th July 1872

My folk, who poured for me a deep potation,
that bitter-cordial draught wherewith to save
me, as a poet, from the very grave,
whence I drew strength to fight in dawn's elation, —
my folk who gave me exile's staff, who gave
grief's loaded pack, swift shoes of desolation,
the heavy gear to furnish my retreating, —
I from abroad send home to you my greeting!

I send with it my thanks for all you've given,
my thanks for every hour's pain-purging toil.
Each growth in my vocation's plot that's thriven
has owed its rooting to yon sometime soil; —
that there they grandly sprout with lush persistence
is due to grey-sky winds from yonder distance;
what sun's warmth loosened, overcast firmed bravely; —
my country, thanks; that best of gifts *you* gave me.

Yes, thither where the mountain mists are swirling,
where grey-sky winds invade the upland calm,
where both within and out the din keeps skirling,
where wasteland isolates each lonely farm, —
I, like a pilot at the rail, peer yonder.
In night, in poetry, I homeward wander.
And mostly in that enigmatic hour
when ambiguity invests the nation:
a folk self-riven as dissensions lour —
yet drawn to memories of co-operation.
But as I view these festive days, my vision
scans a millennium — longer — for revision.

And there I see, from saga's mist emerging,
the tree that sprouted in Queen Ragnhild's dream.
I see it spread to Lindesness, diverging

round North Cape's wall, east over Glommen's stream.
 I witness its red trunk, its verdant bunching,
 I see its twigs that gleam as white as snow; —
 but there's a scattered nation dwells below,
 men sick with envy, self-engrossed, sit hunching
 on every headland, fjord and corrie-side.
 One only stands undaunted mid the welter.
 He casts his dice of fate, all caution spurning,
 for he has faith and hope, is justified,
 his call, to feed a universal yearning, —
 the canopy his mighty dream's green shelter.

Things fall apart! The young with elders grumble;
 the novel vision challenges old ways.
 Round Trondhjem I behold eight kingdoms crumble;
 eight battles set eight kings beneath the harrow,
 great Rollaug, from his throne of mightier days,
 must occupy an earl-stool, beaten, humble; —
 in Naumdal Herlaug, downing sword and arrow,
 descends with all his heroes to the barrow.

Then they united, those who sought division;
 they join who once for separation vied;
 they found a use then for King Harald's vision:
 the warrior's strongest who fights side by side.
 They flock from Agder, Telemark, each quarter;
 the spread sails gleam alongside Lister's strand;
 flags flying, ships' prows foam the water,
 and as they speed round Jeder's reef to slaughter,
 hoarse battle-cries are borne back to the land.
 They seek King Harald's host. Time now to see
 if any dare hack down the hallowed tree.
 Two concepts clad in steel are now debating,
 two ages will exchange harsh words in wrath;
 upon his poop-deck Roald Rygg stares north,
 King Kjötve whets his sword, his shield-rim grating.
 The time is short. The man's at Hafsford, waiting.

See you the hundreds of warships riding
 anchored, tarred longships drawn up in their ranking?
 See you where Harald's armed warriors are biding,
 swarming and striding
 over the benches, the gunwale's stout planking?

Hear you not Hafsford, the din they're maintaining?
 Hornklove's threnody lasts to this day.
 Fighters for twilight and dawn are campaigning,
 fighters for waxing meet fighters for waning; —
 longships, tall carriers
 swirl in the haven,

wheel, snarl like harriers,
 gulls against raven;
 arrow-clouds darken the fjord on their way.
 The Queen's mighty dream-tree — the onslaught broadens!
 Telemark-, Agder-men menace with ardour
 its canopy. Fear not — Haarfager's wardens
 circle its root with their nimble axe-cordons,
 ward off the whistling broad-axe to guard a
 life for the future's thousand-year saga.

Daylight fades, the long shadows are falling.
 Roald and Sote and Tore are sleeping;
 sun-set is creeping.
 With it an age sets that outlived its brawling; —
 the new age is calling. —
 King Kjøtve flees in disgrace from the battle
 though he can never escape from time's tattle.
 Still, as Hornklove tells us, he skelters
 homeward-bound, yearning
 for mead and soused herring.

But Harald rigs shelters
 on warships and carriers.
 They venture forth turning
 dawn-ward, those harriers,
 those ranks of high derring.

So passed a thousand years. Some harsh, some kind
 the Norns between them span upon fate's spindle.
 The dream-tree flourished in the people's mind,
 its canopy, fruit-laden boughs, ne'er dwindle.
 For *now* the folk can pause, scan unconfined
 astern. Now rears the boulder-stone to kindle
 the whole land's silent pæan, granite-shrined. —
 On guard, my folk! Shun party, sport and revel; —
 there stirs within the murk a baleful devil.

I see my home where mountain mists are swirling, —
 my home where gales disturb the moorland calm,
 where both within and out the din keeps skirling,
 where isolation severs farm from farm.
 What is it lurks at dusk, for byways questing?
 Who is that shadow, one I've seen before?
 He frees the latch upon the peasant's door,
 glides stocking-foot towards the man who's resting; —
 he whispers in the sleeper's ear, beguiling, —
 then to the nearest neighbour — silent, smiling.
 And I see more than one such apparition,
 and it is more than words that claims attention; —
 I sense a kind of dirge of inanition,

a cloudy torpor that frustrates ambition,
 a droning hush that stifles dream-invention.
 Who are you, shadows? And where dwell you then?
 Hafsfjord's descendants! Rise, time-present's men!
 Fight Harald's cause! The dead would walk again!

Yes, Roald, Sote, Tore are still lurking
 to play their midnight ghoul- or spectre-role; —
 and Rollaud stirs himself; Herlaug's still working,
 that ancient moldwarp, in his burrowed hole.
 Such are the foxes round the parish creeping,
 that bear the muster-staff now here, now there;
 such are the visitants to peasants sleeping
 who urge that secret strife should once more flare. —
 Rise, daytime's warrior, slay night's murky faction.
 Defend the dream-tree in a ring of trust!
 King Harald claims a monument of action; —
 one that today shall soar aloft, august, —
 one that in Norway's soil we'll gladly thrust
 to pierce *his* foes, the forces of reaction.

For life is *our* cause, death their chosen bourn; —
 theirs is King Kjøtve's goal, ours, blushing dawn.
 Survey the world! There Hafsfjord's day has broken
 o'er all the earth's high places, clear, wide-woken.
 The sun that blazed on Solferino's plain,
 the sun that coloured Lissa's deep blue waters, —
 that bronzed the Porta Pia's blood-red stain
 and chased the papal snake to cellar quarters, —
 the sun that slumbered on Sadowa's walls
 was Hafsfjord's sun on our new enterprise;
 it was the sun that shone for those that ventured
 when statehood was mid barren holms indentured,
 that turned to flint the self-same trollish thralls
 and steamed the venom from the self-same lies.
 Mark where you stand, today's Norwegian brother!
 Heed time's intent; *your* pact's with that alone.
 Today lays but one poor foundation-stone
 to mightier pillars for our strength, no other.
 Observe time's law! It may not be denied.
 Cavour and Bismarck wrote it as *our* guide, —
 and many a ghost he quelled, no spectre-sparer,
 that hero and that dreamer of Caprera.

Yes, through the ages runs King Harald's vision,
 and Hafsfjord's fight is fought this very day;
 for clash of concepts fuels our division,
 King Harald's concept of one sovereign sway
 fronts petty concepts flaunting disarray.
 If you, my folk, desert reunion's host,
 then fell the column on your chieftain's grave!

Let not the stone speak falsely o'er the wave
 and point like some gross insult at our coast.
 But if you've mettle, show *determination*,
 then I foresee you blithe, your triumph sure!
 Then shall our union's pillar stand secure
 for our successors' joyful celebration;
 but it shall rise above our alienation,
 above the country, city feuds that smoulder; —
 its place is chosen: there on Dovre's shoulder.

Queen Ragnild's dream shall prove then not deluded.
 At last, my land, you'll shelter the sublime.
 Past greatness shall revive in this our time,
 dark prophecies be happily concluded.
 And then, my folk, I see you staunchly keeping
 vows made when union-fervour was abroad, —
 I see you follow time's track onward sweeping
 towards a mighty North of one accord;
 I see a nation sleeping as though dead
 yet waking to the call to watch and ward;
 a generation, *will* and *faith* unflawed, —
 with strength for more than toil on land and fjord, —
 with aspiration's universal sword,
 the great dream's canopy above your head.

The occasion celebrated at Haugesund by the erection of a memorial stone over his grave, marked the achievements of Harald Haarfagre as first unifier of Norway; he defeated at Hafsford a confederacy of petty rulers in the year 872. Hornklove chronicled his victory. Ibsen celebrates places, events and people who had figured in the recent struggles for freedom in other European countries. "The Dreamer of Caprera" is Garibaldi who retired to the island at one stage in his revolutionary career; muster-staff, in the early middle ages an individual could, in his own cause, summon a meeting of the Thing by sending an arrow round from farm to farm.

AT A WEDDING

9th October 1874

Leaves are rustling, foliage falling;
 Nordic autumn's near;
 through the forest ruins calling
 Farewell's voice rings clear.
 Therefore Nordic strength retires
 to the home affection fires,
 cherishes within the dwelling
 out-door thoughts, sweet-smelling.

Partners in a pledge eternal,
 youthful, loving pair, —
 enter your abode with vernal
 garlands in your hair.
 Outdoor let October's starkness

spread abroad its shroud of darkness;
 let your home become an harbour
 for youth's noble ardour.

This is life's true art: to cherish
 through both joy and ruth
 minds as fresh as Spring, to relish
 heart's undying youth;
this, — when evening sun's declining,
 to hoist morn's ideals bright-shining
 high aloft, undaunted, glorious.
 Then you'll be victorious.

Plumbing wedlock's deep resources
 is true wedlock's crown;
 cunning cannot set your courses,
 nor can wisdom's frown.
 When the path is lost, benighted,
love can sense the way unsighted.
 Let your vigil never weaken
 o'er home's trusty beacon.

He who keeps this inspiration
 as his altar-light,
 has a lamp for navigation,
 torch in sorrow's night.
 And one day, as leaves are falling
 round you at late Autumn's calling; —
 gaze, by *this* bright light assigned you,
 on the Spring behind you!

Written for the wedding of Jacob, son of Frederick Hegel, Ibsen's publisher.

A VERSE LETTER

My dear good friend,
 you write and somewhat anxiously enquire
 the reason why our people's so depressed,
 whom neither grief nor rapture seems to fire,
 they seem to brood on fear that's unexpressed, —

why they are unresponsive to successes,
 why no-one blames himself for tribulation,
 why all fate's favours and all fate's distresses
 are met with apathy and resignation.

Don't press me, friend, to act the necromancer;
 I'd rather ask; it's not my job to answer.

But seeing that you have now dipped your pen,
 I shall ensure no waste of jot or tittle, —
 so long as what you seek's a noncommittal
 reply along the lines of this one then.
 In short my answer questions you again;
 and pardon — since the hand that rigs the thimble
 is mine, a poet's — if it's asked in symbol.

So tell me then if you by chance have ever
 observed along our coast-line, in full sight,
 a vessel put to sea in lively weather
 and set its course directly and dead right.
 You must have done, and noticed the ungrudging
 alacrity and joy on every hand,
 the quiet confidence that speeds the drudging,
 the firm authority, the clear command,
 as though it were a world of regulation,
 with firm-set ways like those we have on land,
 with laws, as there, for travel, transportation.

The ship is often bound for distant places;
 seeks many ports in far-off lands for trading,
 discharging cargoes, loading bales and cases,
 new freight with foreign names on bills of lading;
 both fore and aft, holds near to overflowing
 with numberless great bundles, sacks untallied,
 nor crew nor skipper have the means of knowing
 exactly what the cargo is that's carried;
 it's all piled in, all's taken on as valid.
 Then off again for the wide-open waters;
 the bows cut through the salt spray jauntily:
 it is as though it were too cramped, the sea,
 as though the surge supplied too narrow quarters
 for that ineffable life-bouyancy,
 which storms could only foster, making true men
 of passengers, the skipper and the crew-men.

Quite natural. Is not the vessel tight?
 Is not the cargo stowed and trimmed, made steady?
 Are not the compass, sextant, quadrant ready,
 all ship-shape to ensure the course is right?
 Is it not fine, the skill that's omnipresent,
 that stimulates and keeps one's fears quiescent?

Yet one fine day, despite all, there are changes
 for no apparent cause that one can find,
 on every mouth aboard, through every mind
 a gloomy, strange oppressiveness now ranges.
 At first it seems few yield to the depression,
 then more, then several till it's universal,
 slack sail-change, slack rope-handling's the impression;

slack orders slackly piped — complete reversal.
 The slightest things are taken quite awry.
 The calm's effulgence, even favouring breezes
 portend no good; even a fulmar's cry,
 a leaping porpoise even — each heart freezes.
 They've lost their nerve, one secret plague assails them,
 though no-one tells and no-one asks what ails them.

What's happened then on board? What has occurred?
 What's the mysterious cause of all this glooming
 that numbs the mind and will, the arm and word?
 Is someone in distress, — is danger looming?
 No, not at all. Things merely jog along, —
 but hopeless, nerveless, and without a song.
 And why? Because a surreptitious doubt,
 sly rumours restlessly keep sneaking out
 from after-deck and fo'c'stle, a farrago:
 they think they're sailing with a corpse for cargo.
 These sailor superstitions show a trend;
 fill all men's thoughts once they begin exploring.
 Just how they match the facts though must depend
 on the arrival and the journey's end,
 if, spite of perils, reefs and breakers roaring,
 the ship rides safe in port upon its mooring. —

Look, my dear friend, "Europa" puts to sea
 full steam ahead for some new destination,
 and we've bought tickets, booked for you and me
 a space up on the poop-deck's privacy.
 Out here the coolth soothes brow and agitation;
 up here we can breathe deeply and breathe free; —
 the baggage is all stowed and well secured
 and catering's in the hands of cook and steward.

What more is needed for a jaunt abroad?
 The engine does its job, the boilers bubble;
 the pistons shrug their shoulders at the double;
 the screw cleaves through the water like a sword; —
 the stay-sail saves the ship undue commotion;
 the helmsman sways to every slightest motion;
 there's ample sea-room; on his bridge the captain
 deserves the confidence of all on board;
 the set of sail, the cordage, trim he's rapt in; —
 what more is needed for a jaunt abroad?

And yet, way out here on the open sea,
 half-way between our home and destination,
 our speed falls off, it seems, in some degree,
 and confidence gives way to perturbation.
 Both crew and passengers of both the sexes
 drift round with sunken cheeks and dulled reflexes;

they go to pieces, listen, brood, create gloom
in steerage quarters and in first-class stateroom.

You seek the reason, my good friend, of me!
Have you not noticed some upheaval's pending?
Did you not see a period was ending
that blew away secure complacency?
The reason is obscured in obfuscation;
now you shall hear my own interpretation.

I sat on deck alone once — all was dimmed,
a star-lit, sultry night, completely soundless;
the atmosphere was soft, the calm was boundless,
the evening breeze's wings were clipped and trimmed.
Each passenger had sought his bunk by number,
the lamps that shone below were dim, sedating;
the heat the cabin vented, nauseating,
it trapped the weary in a semi-slumber.
Their doze was restless, I could see, and thwarted; —
I could observe them through the half-closed cowlings, —
there lay a statesman with his mouth contorted
so that a smile would finish as grim scowling;
a learned don nearby was twisting, turning,
at odds, it seemed, with his own line of learning;
a theologian hid beneath the cover;
the next man hugged his pillow, fit to smother;
and artists, writers, lay there in formation
like dreamers racked with hope and perturbation; —
but over all that half-sleep dominating,
a reddish reek hung foul and nauseating.

I turned my eyes from that lethargic flailing,
I peered ahead in the refreshing night;
I sought the east where dawn's faint, early light
began to shroud the starlight in its veiling.

Then, propped against the mast, I heard a wailing:
words sounded from below-decks, a farrago.
A voice that cried out loud and sounded such
as comes from unsound sleep or nightmare's clutch;
"I think we're sailing with a corpse for cargo!"

Written 1875, one of two contributions made to Georg Brandes's critical periodical "The Nineteen Hundreds"; the other was "Far Distant" below.

AT AMALIE HOLCK'S BIER

All that's best of what the world possesses,
works of art in colour and in sound,
beauty's work such as the word expresses,

she has loved through life, a love profound.

Everything the lovely world embraces, —
dew, the shade's soft balminess, the sun,
gentle valley airs, the stream that races,
she has loved, sought out and dwelt among.

Everything in spirit's realm that urges, —
love of truth and faith that's full and whole,
love of candour wherefrom light emerges,
these she loved deep down within her soul.

Then upon her brow a veil descended,
darkening her mind in year-long night,
here, in clay's beclouded realms she wended,
lost, her treasured clarity of sight.

But through days of grief, through nights of weeping,
I perceive that little home aglow;
visitors sit silent, vigil keeping;
from their presence light and beauty flow.

All that's best of what our life possesses,
tender care, the solace love can breed,
sacrifice that no mere word expresses,
brought her comfort in her time of need.

All that's lovely on this earth and relished,
kindliness's sun, devotion's calm,
all that as a woman, she has cherished,
proved throughout her suffering, a balm.

Thus a beauty halos the departed,
festive beams illumine the coffin's crape,
brighten loss and memories down-hearted, —
seek the light, trapped soul, and thus escape!

During his stay in Dresden (1863-75) Ibsen saw a good deal of a lady from Bergen, Elise Holck; he was much impressed by her self-sacrificing care of her invalid sister, Amalie.

SONG OF GREETING TO SWEDEN

At the student congress in Uppsala, 1875

Thanks for your assembly's bidding
to your ancient town!
The ridge is smoothed now, the forbidding
craggs are levelled down;
beetling heights that line the border
have not barred our way;

Norway's forests now afford a
route to you without delay.

Forthright as the road let singing
echo forth steel-strung;
songs, like sighs through pine-crests, winging
Sweden's mother-tongue.
These, our own Norwegian voices,
bear our greeting hence;
To the west our land rejoices
in your eloquence.

Far too long we've sung divided
in the world-wide choir;
There where Sweden's voice presided,
Norway's would retire;
Where we longed to gain a hearing,
craved supporting sound,
Sweden's choir kept disappearing,
would not join our round.

Pæons 'neath Jerusalem's palm-throng,
lays in Britain's strait,
Narva's storm-song, Lützen's psalm-song
half-choirs celebrate.
Let our fathers' flags then moulder
in their bleached display;
younger spirits must now shoulder
fresh demands today.

Spring-songs, newly turned and cheering
through our times now wend; —
singers must be keen of hearing,
heed what they portend.
Our blithe song-birds are the youngsters;
in the people's view
it's the singer's task amongst us
to sing in the new.

Hark with us for future wonders,
heed the murmuring dawn;
should you catch one chord that thunders,
that's of lightning born, —
sound the horn then, bid Norwegians
leave their woods that day!
We shall come! Our frontier regions
do not bar our way.

Gustavus Adolfus was killed at the Battle of Lützen in 1632; Charles XII won a great victory over Russia at Narva in 1701.

FAR DISTANT

Our youth will soon throng to Uppsala's meeting:
speeches will flow, songs ring with a greeting.

I've written a poem myself on youth's mingling,
have felt my soul and my body tingling.

I seized on a moment of faith amid doubting,
and stood poised and ready to join the outing.

Now that is past. I've locked the resistant
gates of decision, stay lonely, far distant.

Here's to you all in that carefree array!
Here's to you all who are happy to play!

Overcast, yield to the summertime's fire!
Forests, breath sweetly on souls that aspire!

Let it be fine, that the chorus be lofted!
Sun-warmed, your minds, your banners breeze-wafted!

Glittering daytimes and nights clear glowing
wherever you travel, wherever you're going!

Far distant I watch as you speed on your way;
I hark to the tune known for many a day.

And yet it seems strangely remote and repelling,
that joyous procession that sweeps through my dwelling.

Ghosts of dead ages and ghosts of dead men
walk in our congress of youth once again.

From clouds of high rhetoric, fumes of festivity
spectres take shape of historic proclivity.

Such rousing excursions as those in the North
have swept over Italy back and forth.

Youth's Apennine-march aroused a whole nation
out of its torpor of ruination.

That was the century's cloud-misted dawning.
Now Englesborg's flag flies to greet our morning.

Such rousing excursions as those in the North
have swept over Germany back and forth.

They dreamt of an end to their fragmentation;
they dreamt of a flag's red and gold decoration.

And then came the serious business, less pleasant.
Youth had its guests, grey-haired elders were present.

Unshakeable, though, in the cause that had fired
their fervour they hoisted their flag, still inspired.

They bore it before them through storms they endured;
they built their own house, and their homestead secured.

They *willed* their dream true; and won by that token.
For Europe's grown-up now, the age has awoken.

And that's why it seems so remote and repelling,
that joyous procession that sweeps through my dwelling.

Ghosts of dead ages and ghosts of dead men
walk in our congress of youth once again.

From clouds of high rhetoric, fumes of festivity,
spirits take shape of historic proclivity.

Why mute, the sole voice of command, that could sweep
delusion away and arouse us from sleep?

I shall tell you just why. It fell silent as soon
as a folk unprepared obtained freedom's boon.

It's a dangerous thing to accept as a gift;
a ship can capsize if that ballast should shift.

They thrust in our hands a good enough blade,
but the worth of such weapons? — no mention made.

And hence our fate totters its lurching way,
like the knife in the hands of a child at play.

We listen to pundits and experts and linger
to dabble in causes with silk-gloved finger.

We live in a dream, know not how to proceed
to a shattering or constructive deed.

When will it shake us until we are woken,
the century's spirit, the century's slogan?

Munich, 2nd June 1875

The poem was occasioned by the Uppsala rally (above). The place names refer to the endeavours, by Garibaldi and others to achieve independence and unification for their countries.

TO MISS EMMA KLINGENFELD

(with a copy of 'Lady Inger of Østråt')

The play I composed in the Nordic tongue
came back from the south like an echo rung.

It echoed but spoke with a tone less strong
yet its echo was still my Norwegian song.

No echo that snow-clad heights achieve
but a woodland echo one summer's eve.

How just, that the poet's interpreter spoke
a tongue that blazed trails amid foreign folk.

Take then, as thanks, a second play
of a time less violent, less far away.

It opens up visions, a night in the fall,
without a sun to sound morning's call.

It figures women of strength and fire,
takes place in grim darkness, its ending dire.

Allow it, young lady, to waft you — roam
in your mind to the North again, leaving home.

Let it lead you this way where the dark clouds drape
the fjord up at Trondhjem like funeral crape.

Let Elina's shade reappear at night,
and her mother's too. But forget the sight.

And turn again, back to the Isar's stream —
as though you awoke from a dolorous dream.

In 1876, while in Munich, Ibsen decided to put in hand a German edition of his plays. He enlisted the help of Emma to translate 'The Vikings a Helgeland' and 'Lady Inger of Østråt', the first plays to come out in the series. Isar, the river on which Munich stands.

A VERSE

To live is — to fight possession
of heart and brain by the troll.
To write is — to sit in session
judging one's very soul.

Written, originally in German, to a German lady in 1877.

STARS IN NEBULA

As I, just like some comet from afar,
set course to find a home, who'd been a ranger,
there, out in space, revealed itself a stranger,
a guest unwonted in Andromeda.

A message to our ancient earth it bore,
that in the solemn stillness of the distance
there chaos had evolved a star-existence
once it discovered gravitation's law.

A different chaos hemmed me in, I found,
of wills at variance and of paths contested,
reluctance to accept the middle ground,
to follow any change of route suggested.

But once I had resumed my isolation,
I could divine what that event might mean, —
interpret what I had, in person, seen:
a nebula turned star through gravitation.

The nebula, though formless, I believe in,
chaotic though the weltering North may be;
believe it is on course for unity, —
a brilliant star in process of conceiving.

Ibsen returned to Norway in 1885 for a short visit before returning to live in Munich; a new star had been observed in Andromeda in that year.

THEY SAT THERE, THOSE TWO —

They sat there, those two, in so snug a home
through autumns and chill Decembers.
Then fire destroyed it. Mere rubble to roam.
The pair have to rake the embers.

For under it all lies a hidden gem,
a gem that's impervious to burning.
And if they keep looking, either of them

might find it by raking and turning.

But even if the blaze-ravaged pair should find
that priceless, fire-proof jewel,
she'll not recover her peace of mind,
nor *he* his bright joy's renewal.

Ibsen described the poem as the first preliminary work for 'The Master Builder' 16th March 1892.

MY FATHERLAND

Where minds take fire from my poem's brand,
there runs the frontier of my fatherland.

Written probably in 1894.

WITH *BRAND* TO A ONE-YEAR-OLD BABY GIRL

28 April 1896

To Little Eldrid!

May your life conform to a poem of beauty
on the great reconciliation of pleasure and duty.

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