HENRIK IBSEN; THE POET, PHILOSOPHER, DRAMATIST AND REVOLUTIONIST: BY AMELIA VON ENDE

The general characteristics of a poet are predestinated rather by heredity than evolved out of circumstance. But the relation of a poet to his people depends upon his relation towards that people's ideals, and this relation is a fruit of experience. His birth and the early impressions of his youth favored Ibsen in developing a personality standing apart from the great mass. Two strong emotions that play an important part in the life of the average youth, were ruled out of his adolescence. With Norwegian, Danish, German and Scotch forebears he was enabled to look beyond the barriers of national feeling and escape the pitfalls of patriotism. Loss of fortune and friends following his father's failure in business made him doubt the value of friendship. Many years later he wrote: "Friends are an expensive luxury; if one invests his capital in a profession or a mission in life, one has not the means to keep friends. The luxury is not in what is done for them, but in what is left undone out of consideration for them."

Ibsen's first attempts at poetry date back to the time when he was apprenticed to a druggist and in his spare moments prepared for the university. It was the year 1848 and his verses were directly traceable to the influence of the events of the time. For although it has become customary to speak depreciatingly of this revolutionary movement, yet the impulse it gave to unprejudiced views of the social and political conditions of life, was incalculable. Not what it accomplished, but what it indirectly inspired is its real achievement. Ibsen's first dramatic effort, "Catiline," was conceived in this spirit. To the imagination of the youth fired with the eloquence of the partisan literature of the period, Catiline appeared as the ideal radical reformer, who saw in the utter destruction of the old order of things at Rome the only possibility of making room for a new order of things. Throughout his life one can see in the Norse poet a strong resemblance to the old Roman conspirator: uncompromising, going straight towards his goal. "Catiline," though a juvenile effort, was Ibsen's first declaration of independence.

Up to the nineteenth century Norway had had no language or lit-
literature of its own; its writers had used Danish for all purposes of art. But the desire to establish a language and literature independent of the Danish, had been haunting the minds of intellectual leaders of the country and finally took shape. The stage being the best medium for reaching the masses, national theaters were founded. One of these owed its existence to the famous violinist Ole Bull, who had acquired a fortune and devoted a good share of it to the promotion of art in the country of his birth. He had founded a national theater at his birthplace, Bergen, and appointed his youthful countryman, the author of Catiline, playwright and manager. In accepting this position Ibsen entered upon his literary career. During the five years he spent in Bergen he wrote works of a romantic-national character, which were useful to him as studies in the technique of the drama, but show little of the later and real Ibsen.

When at the expiration of that period Ibsen was called in a similar capacity to the National Theater in Christiania, he expected to find a wider field for the growth of his powers. But it was not long before he discovered, that while he had continued to grow, his people had come to a stand-still. The audiences applauded what he had outgrown, and the more he developed his individuality, the cooler became the reception of his works. Norwegian national feeling had just reached the stage when patriotism becomes chauvinism, a change which did not escape the eye of the poet. The founding of a national literature had been a beautiful ideal, but in the measure as it was realized, it became an empty shell. Ibsen learned his first lesson in the mutability of ideals. While he saw much that needed improvement and dreamed of new ideals for his country, his people were satisfied with what they had achieved. The note of unrest which entered into his works, became a dissonance which jarred upon the nerves of the fatuously self-complacent generation. The breach between the poet and his people had opened.

At times, when the present holds forth little promise of a better future, it is natural to turn one’s thoughts towards the past; and Ibsen plunged into contemplation of a past as remote and as different from the present as possible. His imagination became absorbed in the Volsung Saga, a tale of great loves and great hates; and as his thoughts dwelt upon those traditions and kindled the creative instinct, he
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became more and more conscious of the great contrast between the past and the present. When “The Heroes of Helgeland” were completed, the work was so far beyond the comprehension of his generation, that his own theater rejected it. He had dreamed of the heroic past of his country, and the dwarfs of the present did not understand the dream. He had sung the great deeds of the forebears, and he saw the descendants contented with puny pretenses at action. The result was another change in the poet’s attitude towards the present. He no longer tried to escape from it, but decided to face it such as it was. He became the man who sees things as they are.

A great crime is this point of view; a great danger to the community is the man who holds such a view. When Ibsen roused himself to a new dramatic effort, he took delight in exposing the emptiness and the sham splendor of the ideals dearest to genteel society in Norway, dearest to philistinism in all countries. Georg Brandes, the Danish critic, says:

“The air about him was filled with strange words. People talked of eternal love, of deep seriousness, of strength of belief, of steadfastness of character, of Norwegian virtue. He looked about him, peered here and there, and found nothing in the real world which could justify such fine phrases.”

HE went about like the miner in one of his poems, anxious to discover a precious vein, and wherever the hammer fell he heard a hollow ring. All the little idols set up in the sacred pagodas of home, the Cupids and the Vestas with their train of lares and penates, crumbled into dust when he turned upon them the flashlight of his vision. Puny little creatures they were, pale and limp, artificial images of life, homunculi reared in the social tea-pot. It was a great slaughter of ideals, this “Comedy of Love,” which he flung into the face of Norwegian society. He had showed it in all the mendacity of its virtues, its shamming and fibbing in the name of love, marriage and home-ties. The effect was such as could be anticipated. Ibsen himself had married a few years before; and that society, indignant at his heretical attacks upon its cherished ideals, its traditional order, its conventional morality, turned against him and attacked his own private life and that of his friends.

Disgusted and embittered, the poet once more withdrew from the
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present and became absorbed in the past. “The Pretenders,” a historical and allegorical drama of intense moral significance, was the immediate product of this reaction. But Ibsen had in the meantime developed in a different direction. His historical interest had yielded to a human, a psychological interest. Although he personified in his characters aristocracy, royalty, the orthodox church, dissension, it was not so much the struggle of any one of these against the other, as the struggle in any one soul, that he studied and reflected and cared about. This point was again lost upon his audience. The traditional, the conventional, the commonplace they could have understood, if befittingly garbed in historical costumes; but the merely human in a complex phase was too much for them. The play was a failure, and the result of this failure was the poet’s departure from Norway.

The scars which he had carried away from his native country were soon healed in Rome. Two years after he had settled there he produced his “Brand,” a dramatic poem, typically northern, yet sufficiently remote from actuality to be accepted by his people. It is the tragedy of idealism, of an idealist who is the slave of his ideal and, by forcing it upon others, becomes their tyrant. It is the tragedy of a consistency, which says “all or nothing,” the tragedy of inexorable logic. “Brand” is a dissenting preacher, a religious reformer; an element of mysticism pervades the atmosphere of the play and relieves the severity of its moral tone; this and not the deeper meaning of the drama made the success of the book.

The productivity of Ibsen at this period was great. Ideas crowded upon him, and his exposition of these ideas was more panoramic than dramatic. Within a year after the publication of “Brand” appeared a work which is in many ways its counterpart: “Peer Gynt,” the most Scandinavian of his works. Brand had obeyed the voice of his ideal, Peer Gynt obeys the promptings of his ideas, and his ideas are fancies that have no relation whatever to actual life; he is a slave of his imagination, and swayed by every fantastic notion roves about zig-zag fashion, while Brand, relentlessly logical, follows a straight and narrow path towards his goal. Brand was ever making converts for his ideal; Peer Gynt wanted to be himself and sufficient unto himself. But the irony of his fate was, that his imagination made him see everything different from its actual state, and
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that he did not see himself as he really was. While he starts out at first with the intention of being always himself and proving this, as his errors overwhelm him and his fancies crumble about him, a change takes place in his soul—one of many soul-changes which the poet reflects in his works. The fantastic idealist becomes a matter-of-fact realist. This signifies the difference between Brand and Peer Gynt, and makes the latter more human through this very inconsistency. But in the end both prove their kinship; when all have fallen away from Brand and he has no one to preach to, he longs for the wife and the child he had once sacrificed. And Peer Gynt, too, when he comes to the conclusion,

"I no longer lay stress
   Upon my self; the evidence
   I can not bring —-",

returns to the girl he had deserted, now an old woman, and as she takes him into her arms and sings to him, as if he were a child, he enters the realm of that sleep which knows no awakening. Brand, in its complicated machinery, its mysticism and its allegory suggests memories of Faust; but Peter Gynt, in his wild course of strange adventures, seems a Northern Don Quixote; and, as Don Quixote was a satire which became popular through its romantic elements, so Peer Gynt found favor with the people of Norway, because the fanciful setting seemed to lift it out of the sphere of actuality into the realm of pure imagination. The poet was rehabilitated in his native land. His audiences read into the two works what they wanted to read. The grim humor of the situation was not lost upon the poet.

The philosophical didacticism of works like "Brand" and "Peer Gynt" suggests the questions: "What is the poet's view of life? How does he look upon religion? What is his philosophy?" And though "Emperor and Galilean" was not written immediately after these two works, but followed that splendid satire on political life "The League of Youth," this play properly belongs to the series begun with "Brand," for here the questions raised by a perusal of "Brand" and "Peer Gynt" are answered. It is the tragedy of eternal conflict between the flesh and the spirit. It is the tragedy of a beauty no longer beautiful, a truth no longer true. No character in the world's history could better impersonate this conflict than
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Julian the Apostate. He had dreamed of beauty, he had sought truth, and he had lived to see the degeneracy of a faith which had promised both; he who longed for harmony saw nothing but the shouting of shibboleths, the fight of factions, and a cruel intolerance towards those of another creed. Doubts tortured him. "Where is beauty? Where is truth? Where is the kingdom?" he asked, and there was no one to answer him but Maximos, the mystic, who said:

"There are three kingdoms. First the kingdom founded upon the tree of knowledge; then the kingdom founded upon the cross. . . . the third is the kingdom of mystery, which is to be founded upon the tree of knowledge and upon the stem of the cross, because it loves and hates both, and has its life-source in the garden of Adam and Golgotha."

Then Julian reinstates the ancient gods and in their temples celebrates feasts in honor of Dionysius. But he finds neither beauty nor truth, he finds not even peace. He asks Maximos: "Who will conquer, emperor or Galilean?" and the mystic says: "Both will be conquered, the emperor and the Galilean. Whether it will be in our time or in hundreds of years, I know it not; but it will happen, when the right man comes. . . . He, who will absorb both emperor and Galilean. . . . I say, they will both be conquered, but not destroyed. Is not the child followed by the youth, and the youth by the man? Yet neither child nor youth are destroyed. . . . You wanted to change the youth back to a child. The kingdom of the flesh has been absorbed in the kingdom of the spirit. But the kingdom of the spirit is not the final one, no more than youth is a final phase. Oh, the fool you have been, to raise the sword against what is growing—against the third kingdom where the twin-souled shall reign." The dual one—he who represents both the flesh and the spirit—the truly human, the ideal man, the man of the future; from him does Ibsen expect a solution of the everlasting conflict.

A mystic utters the prophecy; but it is not idle sooth-saying. The poet had to clothe his conviction in this form. But the man Ibsen took occasion more than once definitely to state his meaning. Many years later, at a banquet given in his honor at Stockholm, he said these memorable words: "I believe that the scientific doctrine of evolution can be applied also to the factors of intellectual life. I believe that there will soon come a time, when the political and the social
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idea in their present form will cease to exist, and from them both a unity will develop which for the present embraces the conditions of human happiness. I believe that poetry, philosophy and religion will be included in one category and one power of life, of which we, who live at the present time, have no conception. It has been said of me at various occasions, that I am a pessimist, and so I am, inasmuch as I do not believe in the permanence of human ideals. Indeed, I believe that the ideals of our time, as they perish, incline towards what I have called in 'Emperor and Galilean' the third kingdom. Allow me to drain my glass to what is to be—what is coming... I shall be satisfied with my life's work, if it has served to prepare the mood for to-morrow.” This is Henrik Ibsen's confession of faith; faith in a future, which will replace the existing forms of the church, of society, of the state, with something we know nothing of, must replace them by necessity, by the natural process of evolution. Because he is so thoroughly convinced of this which is to be, of the third kingdom which is coming, he cares so little about the several religious, social and political revolutions, which are enacted upon the stage of the world.

How he looked upon the state in its present form, and especially upon the machinery of politics, is amusingly heralded in "The League of Youth," a satirical comedy which he wrote while still under the impression of "Peer Gynt." For the egotist, who is a slave of his imagination and unconcernedly obeys the fancies of the moment, reappears in the world of to-day in the person of an aspiring parvenu, whose imagination fires his ambition and makes of him a schemer, unscrupulous in the pursuit of his plans; the type of a politician not limited to Norway. The development of the character of Steinhoff is admirable. He has a facile, pliable personality, an enthusiasm responding readily to every appeal to commonplace ideals. He has the gift of gab and the wit of a professional after-dinner speaker, eloquent with platitude about honor, virtue, liberty. Snubbed by a wealthy land-owner, he gives vent to his spite in a speech, rather radical of color, is taken seriously by the progressive party and becomes the leader of "The League of Youth." But when the same rich man invites him to his house, he immediately changes his base, for—in time he might get into Parliament, perhaps into the Cabinet and marry into a rich family. His noble schemes are exposed, but
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he will get there, for he is a "questionable character, and they are cut out of the wood, of which politicians are made," says one of the characters in the play, alluding to a word of Napoleon.

For a definite statement of what constitutes his freedom-idea one must turn to a letter to Brandes, for in these letters we catch a glimpse of the man Ibsen, forming an interesting commentary to the works of the poet. He writes, February 17th, 1871, a time pregnant with freedom-germs: "Struggle for freedom is nothing but the continual living appropriation of the freedom-idea. Whoever conceives freedom as something different than an aim to strive for, to him it is a dead and soulless possession; for it is peculiar to freedom, that while we strive to attain it, it expands more and more. If anybody stops during the struggle and exclaims: 'Now I have it!'—it is a proof, that he has lost it. This very tendency towards a dead standstill at a certain given standpoint of liberty is peculiar to our states; and that is why I fail to see the good of it. Of course it may be of benefit to have suffrage, to have the right of voting on questions of taxation, etc. But who is benefited by it? The citizen, not the individual. There is no absolute reasonable necessity for an individual to be a citizen. On the contrary. How has the national strength of Prussia been purchased? By the sinking of the individual in a political and geographical formula. . . . The state must go. That will be a revolution which will find me on its side. Undermine the idea of the state, set up in its place spontaneous action, and the idea that spiritual relationship is the only thing that makes for unity, and you will start the elements of a liberty, which will be something worth possessing. A change in the form of government is nothing but fussing with details. A little more, a little less—and wretched business all of it.

THE dread of a state and of a political life paralyzing individual effort, drove Ibsen from Rome to Dresden; and when the comparative quiet of this city was disturbed by the growing boastfulness of the new German empire, he decided to try Munich. He writes in 1875: "I must go. In April I shall flit to Munich, and see whether I can settle there for two or three years. I fancy that spiritual life breathes with greater fulness and comfort there, than here in Northern Germany, where the state and politics have drafted all the strength of the people into their service, and have arrested all
genuine interests.” The question of returning to his country was sometimes considered, but waved aside: “For me liberty is the first and highest condition of life. At home they do not care particularly for liberty, but for liberties, a few more or less, according to their partisan point of view.” It was eleven years before he went to Norway on a visit. A workingmen’s club sent a deputation to welcome him and in his reply he said among other things: “There is much to be done here, before it can be said of us, that we have really attained liberty. But I fear that our democracy of to-day cannot solve these problems. An element of nobility must be introduced into our state, our government, our representatives, our press. Of course I do not mean nobility of birth or money or knowledge or even of talent. What I mean is nobility of character, purpose, mental attitude.” This nobility belonged to his “third kingdom” to the future, for which he was preparing the coming generations by making the men and women of to-day see society and themselves as they are.

As in the “Comedy of Love” he had exposed the ideas of love, marriage and home-ties to the glare of daylight, so with “The Pillars of Society,” which appeared in 1877, he began a series of critical studies of society in its relation to the individual. They are, as Howells very aptly has called them, plays of motive and responsibility. “The League of Youth,” though essentially a satire on political life, properly belongs to this group, because it illustrates a certain phase of this life. There is a passage in it anticipating sentiments entering largely into “The Pillars of Society” and forming the very keynote of “Nora” and “The Lady of the Sea.” Selma, the wife of the young merchant, who has gambled away his fortune in speculation, protests against being excluded from all participation in the more serious problems of life, she wants responsibilities, but she will not be the last to be appealed to and in a passionate outburst forecasts Nora, still more a child than the dollwife of the Doll’s House. When the pedigree of Nora Helmer is traced, Selma Malsberg must not be omitted among her forebears.

The seriousness and the sincerity of the man Ibsen is equalled by the consciousness and the perseverance of the poet. “As a rule,” he once remarked, “I write my dramas three times, each version differing essentially from the others, not in the course of action
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but in the conception of the characters. In the first I know them as from a railway trip; the first acquaintance is made, some conversation about this or that topic has been exchanged. The second makes me see everything more distinctly; I know the people, as one knows people after four weeks spent in the same summer resort. I have grasped the fundamental traits of their character and their little peculiarities, but I may still be mistaken about some essential points. Finally I reach the limits of my knowledge; I know the people intimately, they are my friends, who can no longer disappoint me; as I see them now, I shall always see them.” These words referring to the creatures of the poet’s fancy are characteristic of the man’s justice. Throughout the whole work of that man can be felt the honest endeavor to do justice to the world about him; his very individualism excludes the tendency towards readymade conclusions and sweeping generalizations.

“The League of Youth” was followed by “The Pillars of Society,” like the first fashioned much after the cleverly constructed French plays of the period. The family life of an eminently respectable representative of conventional society is revealed: Konsul Bernick, a character doomed forever to stand as the impersonation of sham virtue, of all the sham ideals of his class. His reputation has been bought with the sacrifice of the good name of another member of his family, his wealth rests upon the rotten hulks of his vessels. He becomes aware of the wrong he has done, the misery he has caused in his own home, but not until his son runs away on the very ship which is a trap for all on board, does his self-complacency desert him. Lona, the first of Ibsen’s strong women, exacts the famous confession—a splendid climax. Carried away with emotion the consul exclaims: “Women are the pillars of society”; but she corrects him: “No, freedom and truth—they are the pillars of society,” and with these words is sounded a motive, which Ibsen treats in several of his succeeding works, even though the words “Truth” and “Freedom” may never be uttered.

The contrast between true and false morality, between the individual’s motive and society’s view of the act, between the individual’s duty towards himself and society’s claim to concessions for its sake, became after this one of the main themes of the poet. In none of his plays has he drawn this conflict more forcibly than in “Nora” or “The
Doll’s House,” where the woman stands for the right of the individual and is arraigned by society in the person of her husband. The whole contradictory attitude of society towards woman is personified in that man’s actions. He is responsible for her ignorance, yet he reproaches her with being unworthy of being the mother of his children. He treats her as if she had committed an unpardonable crime, yet as soon as the danger of publicity is over, he is ready to take her back into his arms as his darling. These contradictions bring maturity to the dollwife, who in her idealism had expected the strong and noble husband to take her guilt upon his shoulders. Then she sees him as he is, sees their marriage as it has been—dollplay every bit of it, even her relation to her children. It is then that she replies to all his remonstrances about her duties to her children with the famous declaration: “Before everything else I am a human being,” and tells him that she no longer contents herself with what most people say and what is written in the books, not even with what her pastor, said, when she was confirmed. “I must see whether what the Rev. Jacobi said is right, or rather, whether it is right for me... I must convince myself which is right, society or I.”

Yet the indignation which greeted “Nora” was as nothing compared with that created by “Ghosts,” the play in which the curse of the sins of the fathers was demonstrated by an example so simple, so typical, that the responsibility of fatherhood was brought home to us with a force, a truthfulness and a delicacy unprecedented in the treatment of such problems. In “Nora” already the vast difference between the methods of Ibsen and the French dramatists who have been teachers of the world in dramatical construction had become apparent—absolute independence from externals, from any episode intervening from without. The play was one organic growth from within. Simple and strong in outline and pure in sentiment like an antique tragedy is this drama of a woman, who had never known a wife’s happiness and hopes to be rewarded by a mother’s, and finds that the son upon whom she has founded her hopes is reaping the harvest of the father’s sins. Again it is the woman, who awakens to the realization of some wrong, some discrepancy between her own and the conventional ideas of morality. She says to the clerical friend who had advised her to sacrifice her life to the conven-
tions of the past: "Not alone what we have inherited from father and mother haunts us, but all sorts of dead opinions and all kinds of dead faiths and such things. They do not live in us, but they are rooted in us and we cannot get rid of them." She has gone some steps farther than Nora; she has investigated, reflected and come to conclusions.

The attacks which followed the appearance of "Ghosts" in 1881 were hardly less venomous than those that had caused Ibsen to leave his country after the appearance of "The Comedy of Love." The poet replied with "An Enemy of Society." In the hero of this play, Dr. Stockmann, the idealist, the optimist, the man who will say the truth, come what may, one can recognize a resemblance. This man, who is branded as an enemy of the people, a demagogue, because he will warn the community and its guests of the unsanitary condition of its mineral springs, is the poet himself. Returning to his family after the meeting in which he has been hooted down, he looks at his clothes, which were torn by the rabble on the street, and says: "It will never do to wear one's best trousers, when one goes fighting for liberty and truth"; and when he has gathered his family about him, he adds: "You see, the fact is, that the strongest man on the earth is he who stands alone." There is a Norse legend of a giant, who absorbs the strength of all the foes he conquers, and in this way with constantly renewed vigor steps into the arena. Such a giant is Ibsen.

With wonderful logical consistency he continued to work out the "leitmotiv" of truth, first struck in the final words of "The Pillars of Society." In "Rosmersholm" the claim of truth is presented by a woman, strong, primitive of passion, unscrupulous in her ambition: Rebecca West. As an apostle of freedom and truth she comes to the house of Rosmer, a parson with aspirations towards a larger and freer life and hopes of a nobler race to come, but withal bound up in the traditions of the Rosmer race. When the wife, whom Rebecca nurses, recognizes the strong affinity between the two and commits suicide, Rosmer, who had declared himself a freethinker, is caught in a tangle of conflicting ideals: the old Rosmer ideal of expiation by death and the new ideal of life, free, strong, and untrammelled, which he had dreamed of for the race to come. And the past conquers; for as Rebecca's passion exhausts itself and her power over Rosmer wanes, the Rosmer ideal takes hold of her, and when he asks whether she is
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ready to do as much for him as his wife had done, she consents. He takes her solemnly as wife, and unable to return to the old life and equally unable to begin a new one, he follows her to the mill-dam, where the wife had drowned herself.

WITH "Rosmersholm" the poet concluded the series of plays, founded upon the motive of truth, showing that what is true for one, need not be true for another, that the live truth of to-day may be a dead truth to-morrow; that the truth forced upon our soul from without may be as much a curse, as the truth which our soul grows up to from within, is a blessing. In the plays now following he treated in the same serious and sincere manner the problem of freedom. "The Lady of the Sea" gives a key to his conception of the "woman’s question." It may be regarded as an answer to Nora’s defamers, as "An Enemy of Society" was a reply to those who attacked "Ghosts." For the question raised by Nora’s leaving home, husband and children, was "What will she do? How will she find her way?"—and in this play there is a passage which silences all doubts, all questions. When Ellida, drawn by an irresistible attraction to the mysterious betrothed of her youth, yearning for the freedom she had enjoyed before she entered the philistine society of the provincial town as the young wife of the widowed physician, decides to leave her husband. Wangel, wiser, more human, than Helmer, respects her right as an individual and tells her she is free to go—in freedom and on her own responsibility. "Freedom—and on my own responsibility?" That is the miracle Nora had in vain waited for. The husband understands; and Ellida turns away from the stranger and says to Wangel: "Now I can come to you, Wangel. For now I can come in freedom and on my own responsibility." The woman, who, like Nora, had been taken in marriage, before she knew herself, on awakening to a consciousness of her womanhood, gives herself. Ibsen has confidence in his Noras and Ellidas—in woman, working out her own salvation.

But there is another side to the freedom-problem. Freedom-longing may be perverted, distorted, tainted with some of the dead ideas, dead faiths and dead truths, which we carry with us through life. Such freedom-longing Ibsen pictures in "Hedda Gabler," the woman who mistakes liberty for licentiousness and sees beauty in
dissipation. The daughter of a man whose military title had been taken far too seriously in the little provincial town, she had learned from him little more than riding horseback and target-shooting. She plays with freedom-ideas as he with a title entailing no responsibilities. She plays with the fate of others and with her own fate, for like a born gambler, she loves a high stake. Consistent in her inconsistency, her daring is balanced by her cowardice; she has a wild craving for freedom, but she dares not to assume its responsibilities. She cares neither for the rakish young genius Loevborg, nor for the clever old roué, Brack, and marries her ridiculous old bookworm simply for protection. But she is at heart painfully conscious of her spiritual sterility; and jealousy of the woman who through a love that dared everything has rescued Loevborg, tempts her to taunt him with his conversion. And again the tragedy of a futile misspent life comes to her, when he does not die “in beauty,” as she had expected; and when his death only threatens to bring the scandal upon her, which she has always avoided, she kills herself, remaining true to the conventions of her class and her race.

A JUDGE and a physician of modern man is Ibsen; a great diagnostician of the soul. He discards, however, what makes the average doctor a real doctor in the eyes of the average patient: the prescription. He was aware of the limitations of human nature, of his own nature; perhaps of his own genius. There are those who consider “The Master-BUILDER” a confession that he had not achieved what he had aspired to. But viewed in connection with the preceding plays, “The Master-BUILDER” is a logical member of the large and widely divergent Ibsen family. When Solness loses his children and turns away from the ambitions of his youth, building no more churches, but only homes—“where father and mother and a flock of children can live in the secure and serene feeling that it is a happy lot, merely to be in this world”—this is only apparently a denial of the claims of his ego. It shows that the ego is subjected to change. The master-builder whom Hilde Wangel had seen in her childhood climb the steeple of a church to fasten the wreath, which signifies completion, is not the same man to whom she comes as the spirit of youth and whom she tempts to climb the roof of his house and fasten the wreath. He has lived and suffered; he has no longer the assur-
ance which comes of inexperience and which is the privilege of youth, and youth alone. The doubts of Solness himself, the doubts of the young rivals, whom he has tyrannized so long as their master—the anxiety of the wife, who after all knows her Master-Builders limitations better than the young demon of ambition, Hilde—all this is marvelously true to life.

Those who rashly saw in the "Master-Builders" a confession of declining power, were wrong. For Ibsen has given us three more powerful soul-dramas related to that work in motive. "Little Eyolf," too, is a drama of the human ego, subject to change, to deviation from a prescribed path, when swayed by a new breath of life or by a memory of some dead life. Here, as in the "Master-Builders," the loss of a child is the turning-point in two lives. It kills the little passion which Allmers has had for the wife who had given him her love, wholly and unreservedly, and the means to devote himself to his work. Their marriage had been a mistake from the beginning; the mysterious rat-wife, who comes to the house, asking: "Are your worships troubled with any gnawing things about the house?" is symbolic; she knows what is gnawing at the soul of the man and of the woman. After Little Eyolfs death they cannot return to the old life; and here a significant change takes place; the woman, once selfish in the pursuit of her happiness, as the man was selfish in his ambition, finds an outlet for her unspent affection by becoming a mother to the children of poverty. This conclusion of "Little Eyolf" is one of the rare instances in which Ibsen seems to give an answer to the questions he raises.

Truth and freedom are no longer the motives of his last plays. He seems to have become absorbed in pondering about human responsibility, about the essence of happiness, in gauging human endurance and finding out just how far the wrong inflicted by selfishness can be repaired. In "John Gabriel Borkmann" he speaks of the "unpardonable sin, that of killing love-life in a human soul." Borkmann, like Allmers, lives but for his ambition; and when he returns from the prison, where his dishonesty had landed him and becomes a prisoner in his own house, he thinks only of the fortunes he might have won and he may still win—when his son joins him. Of the two women he had wronged—his wife and her sister—the one thinks only of rehabilitating the family name and brings up the boy with that
view; the other, wishing to have something to live for, wants to adopt the youth. A wonderful climax is the scene, when father, mother and aunt plead their cause—and the youth declares that he has already chosen. He wants to live his own life, and to escape the gloom of the Borkmann house, follows another woman, one who has initiated him into her sane and simple philosophy of life. As the tinkle of sleigh-bells announces the passing of the son out of the radius of the parental roof, Borkmann is overcome. Ibsen knows the heart of man, knows the power of the parental instinct.

Once more he has treated the deadly, the unpardonable sin of killing love-life in a human soul. The sculptor Rubek, like Allmers and Borkmann, made a woman’s love subservient to his ambition, to his work. When his master-piece is finished he dismisses lightly the model who had sacrificed home, friends, everything to help him, and she drifts out into the world, and disappears. He marries a girl who loves his fame, and disappoints her as lover and as artist, for he does not fulfill the promises of his youth.

He had called “When We Dead Awake” a dramatic epilogue; and perhaps it is his epilogue. As the sane and strong personality of Maja rises before one’s inner vision, her acceptance of things as they are seems like the fulfillment of an ideal of simple life, heralded in the words of the Master-Builder: “It is a happy lot, merely to be in this world,” and in the cheerful unconcern with which young Borkmann meets all remonstrances: “I want to live, live, live!” This is the wisdom Ibsen has gained during the many years, when he has been walking the earth, seeing things as they are, and going about from house to house, rapping and sounding and asking like his rat-wife: “Are your worships troubled with any gnawing things in the house?” One may resent his negative spirit and insist upon answers to the questions he raises. But the very fact that he leaves them open to discussion, to individual interpretation, shows the unlimited confidence he has in the law, which has so far governed the race in its upward struggle and will continue to do so—the law of evolution, of growth from within out.