

**THE COLLECTED WORKS OF
HENRIK IBSEN**

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VOLUME VIII

**AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE
THE WILD DUCK**

**WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY
WILLIAM ARCHER**



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AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE.

INTRODUCTION.*

FROM *Pillars of Society* to *John Gabriel Borkman*, all Ibsen's plays, with one exception, succeeded each other at intervals of two years. The single exception was *An Enemy of the People*. The storm of obloquy which greeted *Ghosts* stirred him to unwonted rapidity of production. *Ghosts* had appeared in December 1881; already, in the spring of 1882, Ibsen, then living in Rome, was at work upon its successor; and he finished it at Gossensass, in the Tyrol, in the early autumn. It appeared in Copenhagen at the end of November.

John Paulsen¹ relates an anecdote of the poet's extreme secretiveness during the process of composition, which may find a place here: "One summer he was travelling by rail with his wife and son. He was engaged upon a new play at the time; but neither Fru Ibsen nor Sigurd had any idea as to what it was about. Of course they were both very curious. It happened that, at a station, Ibsen left the carriage for a few moments. As he did so he dropped a

¹ *Samliv med Ibsen*, p. 173.

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scrap of paper. His wife picked it up, and read on it only the words, 'The doctor says. . .'. Nothing more. Fru Ibsen showed it laughingly to Sigurd, and said, 'Now we will tease your father a little when he comes back. He will be horrified to find that we know anything of his play.' When Ibsen entered his carriage his wife looked at him roguishly, and said, 'What doctor is it that figures in your new piece? I am sure he must have many interesting things to say.' But if she could have foreseen the effect of her innocent jest, Fru Ibsen would certainly have held her tongue. For Ibsen was speechless with surprise and rage. When at last he recovered his speech, it was to utter a torrent of reproaches. What did this mean? Was he not safe in his own house? Was he surrounded with spies? Had his locks been tampered with, his desk rifled? And so forth, and so forth. His wife, who had listened with a quiet smile to the rising tempest of his wrath, at last handed him the scrap of paper. 'We know nothing more than what is written upon this slip which you let fall. Allow me to return it to you.' There stood Ibsen crestfallen. All his suspicions had vanished into thin air. The play on which he was occupied proved to be *An Enemy of the People*, and the doctor was none other than our old friend Stockmann, the good-hearted and muddleheaded reformer, for whom Jonas Lie partly served as a model."

The indignation which glows in *An Enemy of the People* was kindled, in the main, by the attitude adopted towards *Ghosts* by the Norwegian Liberal press and the "compact majority" it

represented. But the image on which the play rings the changes was present to the poet's mind before *Ghosts* was written. On December 19, 1879—a fortnight after the publication of *A Doll's House*—Ibsen wrote to Professor Dietrichson: "It appears to me doubtful whether better artistic conditions can be attained in Norway before the intellectual soil has been thoroughly turned up and cleansed, and all the swamps drained off." Here we have clearly the germ of *An Enemy of the People*. The image so took hold of Ibsen that after applying it to social life in this play, he recurred to it in *The Wild Duck*, in relation to the individual life.

The mood to which we definitely owe *An Enemy of the People* appears very clearly in a letter to George Brandes, dated January 3, 1882, in which Ibsen thanks him for his criticism of *Ghosts*. "What are we to say," he proceeds, "of the attitude taken up by the so-called Liberal press—by those leaders who speak and write about freedom of action and thought, and at the same time make themselves the slaves of the supposed opinions of their subscribers? I am more and more confirmed in my belief that there is something demoralising in engaging in politics and joining parties. I, at any rate, shall never be able to join a party which has the majority on its side. Björnson says, 'The majority is always right'; and as a practical politician he is bound, I suppose, to say so. I on the contrary, of necessity say, 'The minority is always right.' Naturally I am not thinking of that minority of stagnationists who are left behind by the great middle party, which with us is called

Liberal; I mean that minority which leads the van, and pushes on to points which the majority has not yet reached. I hold that that man is in the right who is most closely in league with the future."

The same letter closes with a passage which foreshadows not only *An Enemy of the People*, but *Rosmersholm*: "When I think how slow and heavy and dull the general intelligence is at home, when I notice the low standard by which everything is judged, a deep despondency comes over me, and it often seems to me that I might just as well end my literary activity at once. They really do not need poetry at home; they get along so well with the *Parliamentary News* and the *Lutheran Weekly*. And then they have their party papers. I have not the gifts that go to make a good citizen, nor yet the gift of orthodoxy; and what I possess no gift for I keep out of. Liberty is the first and highest condition for me. At home they do not trouble much about liberty, but only about liberties, a few more or a few less, according to the standpoint of their party. I feel, too, most painfully affected by the crudity, the plebeian element, in all our public discussion. The very praiseworthy attempt to make of our people a democratic community has inadvertently gone a good way towards making us a plebeian community. Distinction of soul seems to be on the decline at home."

So early as March 16, 1882, Ibsen announces to his publisher that he is "fully occupied with preparations for a new play." "This time," he says, "it will be a peaceable production which can be read by Ministers of State and whole-

sale merchants and their ladies, and from which the theatres will not be obliged to recoil. Its execution will come very easy to me, and I shall do my best to have it ready pretty early in the autumn." In this he was successful. From Gossensass on September 9, he wrote to Hegel: "I have the pleasure of sending you herewith the remainder of the manuscript of my new play. I have enjoyed writing this piece, and I feel quite lost and lonely now that it is out of hand. Dr. Stockmann and I got on excellently together; we agree on so many subjects. But the Doctor is a more muddleheaded person than I am, and he has, moreover, several other characteristics because of which people will stand hearing a good many things from him which they might perhaps not have taken in such very good part had they been said by me."

A letter to Brandes, written six months after the appearance of the play (June 12, 1883), answers some objection which the critic seems to have made—of what nature we can only guess: "As to *An Enemy of the People*, if we had a chance to discuss it I think we should come to a tolerable agreement. You are, of course, right in urging that we *must* all work for the spread of our opinions. But I maintain that a fighter at the intellectual outposts can never gather a majority around him. In ten years, perhaps, the majority may occupy the standpoint which Dr. Stockmann held at the public meeting. But during these ten years the Doctor will not have been standing still; he will still be at least ten years ahead of the majority. The majority, the mass, the multitude, can never overtake him; he

can never have the majority with him. As for myself, at all events, I am conscious of this incessant progression. At the point where I stood when I wrote each of my books, there now stands a fairly compact multitude; but I myself am there no longer; I am elsewhere, and, I hope, further ahead." This is a fine saying, and as just as it is fine, with respect to the series of social plays, down to, and including, *Rosmersholm*. To the psychological series, which begins with *The Lady from the Sea*, this law of progression scarcely applies. The standpoint in each is different; but the movement is not so much one of intellectual advance as of deepening spiritual insight.

As Ibsen predicted, the Scandinavian theatres seized with avidity upon *An Enemy of the People*. Between January and March 1883 it was produced in Christiania, Bergen, Stockholm, and Copenhagen. It has always been very popular on the stage, and was the play chosen to represent Ibsen in the series of festival performances which inaugurated the National Theatre at Christiania. The first evening, September 1, 1899, was devoted to Holberg, the great founder of Norwegian-Danish drama; *An Enemy of the People* followed on September 2; and on September 3 Björnson held the stage, with *Sigurd Jorsalfar*. Oddly enough, *Ein Volksfeind* was four years old before it found its way to the German stage. It was first produced in Berlin, March 5, 1887, and has since then been very popular throughout Germany. It has even been presented at the Court Theatres of Berlin and Vienna—a fact which seems remarkable when we

note that in France and Spain it has been pressed into the service of anarchism as a revolutionary manifesto. When first produced in Paris in 1895, and again in 1899, it was made the occasion of anarchist demonstrations. It was the play chosen for representation in Paris on Ibsen's seventieth birthday, March 29, 1898. In England it was first produced by Mr. Beerbohm Tree at the Haymarket Theatre on the afternoon of June 14, 1893. Mr. Tree has repeated his performance of Stockmann a good many times in London, the provinces, and America. He revived the play at His Majesty's Theatre in 1905. Mr. Louis Calvert played Stockmann at the Gentleman's Concert Hall in Manchester, January 27, 1894. I can find no record of any performances of the play in America, save German performances and those given by Mr. Tree; but it seems incredible that no American actor should have been attracted by the part of Stockmann. *Een Vijand des Volks* was produced in Holland in 1884, before it had even been seen in Germany and in Italy. *Un Nemico del Popolo* holds a place in the repertory of the distinguished actor Ermete Novelli.

Of all Ibsen's plays, *An Enemy of the People* is the least poetical, the least imaginative, the one which makes least appeal to our sensibilities. Even in *The League of Youth* there is a touch of poetic fancy in the character of Selmer; while *Pillars of Society* is sentimentally conceived throughout, and possesses in Martha a figure of great, though somewhat conventional, pathos. In this play, on the other hand, there is no appeal either to the imagination or to the tender emo-

tions. It is a straightforward satiric comedy, dealing exclusively with the everyday prose of life. We have only to compare it with its immediate predecessor, *Ghosts*, and its immediate successor, *The Wild Duck*, to feel how absolutely different is the imaginative effort involved in it. Realising this, we no longer wonder that the poet should have thrown it off in half the time he usually required to mature and execute one of his creations.

Yet *An Enemy of the People* takes a high place in the second rank of the Ibsen works, in virtue of its buoyant vitality, its great technical excellence, and the geniality of its humour. It seems odd, at first sight, that a distinctly polemical play, which took its rise in a mood of exasperation, should be perhaps the most amiable of all the poet's productions. But the reason is fairly obvious. Ibsen's nature was far too complex, and far too specifically dramatic, to permit of his giving anything like direct expression to a personal mood. The very fact that Dr. Stockmann was to utter much of his own indignation and many of his own ideas forced him to make the worthy Doctor in temperament and manner as unlike himself as possible. Now boisterous geniality, loquacity, irrepressible rashness of utterance, and a total absence of self-criticism and self-irony were the very contradiction of the poet's own characteristics—at any rate, after he had entered upon middle life. He doubtless looked round for models who should be his own antipodes in these respects. John Paulsen, as we have seen, thinks that he took many traits

from Jonas Lie; others say¹ that one of his chief models was an old friend named Harald Thaulow, the father of the great painter. Be this as it may, the very effort to disguise himself naturally led him to attribute to his protagonist and mouthpiece a great superficial amiability. I am far from implying that Ibsen's own character was essentially unamiable; it would ill become one whom he always treated with the utmost kindness to say or think anything of the kind. But his amiability was not superficial, effusive, exuberant; it seldom reached that boiling-point which we call geniality; and for that very reason Thomas Stockmann became the most genial of his characters. He may be called Ibsen's Colonel Newcome. We have seen from the letter to Hegel (p. xi) that the poet regarded him with much the same ironic affection which Thackeray must have felt for that other Thomas who, amid many differences, had the same simple-minded, large-hearted, child-like nature.

In technical quality, *An Enemy of the People* is wholly admirable. We have only to compare it with *Pillars of Society*, the last play in which Ibsen had painted a broad satiric picture of the life of a Norwegian town, to feel how great an advance he had made in the intervening five years. In naturalness of exposition, suppleness of development, and what may be called general untheatricality of treatment the later play has every possible advantage over the earlier. In one point only can it be said that Ibsen has

¹ See article by Julius Elias in *Die neue Rundschau*, December 1906, p. 1461.

allowed a touch of artificiality to creep in. In order to render the peripetia of the third act more striking, he has made Hovstad, Billing, and Aslaksen, in the earlier scenes, unnaturally inapprehensive of the sacrifices implied in Stockmann's scheme of reform. It is scarcely credible that they should be so free and emphatic in their offers of support to the Doctor's agitation, before they have made the smallest inquiry as to what it is likely to cost the town. They think, it may be said, that the shareholders of the Baths will have to bear the whole expense; but surely some misgivings could not but cross their minds as to whether the shareholders would be prepared to do so.

THE WILD DUCK.

INTRODUCTION.*

THE first mention of *The Wild Duck* (as yet unnamed) occurs in a letter from Ibsen to George Brandes, dated Rome, June 12, 1883, some six months after the appearance of *An Enemy of the People*. "I am revolving in my mind just now," he says, "the plan of a new dramatic work in four acts. From time to time a variety of whimsies gathers in one's mind, and one wants to find an outlet for them. But as the play will neither deal with the Supreme Court nor with the Absolute Veto, nor even with the Pure Flag, it can hardly count upon attracting much attention in Norway. Let us hope, however, that it may find a hearing elsewhere." The allusion in this passage is to the great constitutional struggle of 1880-84, of which some account will have to be given in the Introduction to *Rosmersholm*. The "Pure Flag" agitation aimed at, and obtained, the exclusion from the Norwegian flag of the mark of union with Sweden, and was thus a preliminary step towards the severance of the two kingdoms. The word which

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I have translated "whimsies" is in the original *galskaber*, which might be literally rendered "mad fancies" or "crazy notions." This word, or *galskab* in the singular, was Ibsen's favourite term for his conceptions as they grew up in his mind. I well remember his saying to me, while he was engaged on *The Lady from the Sea*, "I hope to have some tomfoolery [*galskab*] ready for next year." Sometimes he would vary the expression and say *djævelskab*, or "devilry."

Of this particular "tomfoolery" we hear no more for a full year. Then, at the end of June, 1884, he writes in almost identical terms to Brandes and to Theodor Caspari, announcing its completion in the rough. His letter to Caspari is dated Rome, June 27. "All last winter," he says, "I have been pondering over some new whimsies, and have wrestled with them till at last they took dramatic form in a five-act play which I have just completed. That is to say, I have completed the rough draft of it. Now comes the more delicate elaboration, the more energetic individualisation of the characters and their methods of expression. In order to find the requisite quiet and solitude for this work, I am going in a few days to Gossensass, in the Tyrol." This little glimpse into his workshop is particularly interesting.

From Gossensass he wrote to Hegel on September 2: "Herewith I send you the manuscript of my new play, *The Wild Duck*, which has occupied me daily for the past four months, and from which I cannot part without a sense of regret. The characters in this play, despite their many frailties, have, in the course of our long daily

association, endeared themselves to me. However, I hope they will also find good and kind friends among the great reading public, and not least among the player-folk, to whom they all, without exception, offer problems worth the solving. But the study and presentation of these personages will not be easy. . . . This new play in some ways occupies a place apart among my dramatic productions; its method of development [literally, of advance] is in many respects divergent from that of its predecessors. But for the present I shall say no more on this subject. The critics will no doubt discover the points in question; at all events, they will find a good deal to wrangle about, a good deal to interpret. Moreover, I think *The Wild Duck* may perhaps lure some of our younger dramatists into new paths, and this I hold to be desirable."

The play was published on November 11, 1884, and was acted at all the leading theatres of Scandinavia in January or February, 1885. Ibsen's estimate of its acting value was fully justified. It everywhere proved itself immensely effective on the stage, and Hjalmar, Gina, and Hedvig have made, or greatly enhanced, the reputation of many an actor and actress. Hjalmar was one of the chief successes of Emil Poulsen, the leading Danish actor of his day, who placed the second act of *The Wild Duck* in the programme of his farewell performance. It took more than three years for the play to reach the German stage. It was first acted in Berlin in March 1888; but thereafter it rapidly spread throughout Germany and Austria, and everywhere took firm hold. It was on several occasions, and in

various cities, selected for performance in Ibsen's presence, as representing the best that the local theatre could do. In Paris it was produced at the Théâtre Libre in 1891, and was pronounced by Francisque Sarcey to be "obscure, incoherent, insupportable," but nevertheless to leave "a profound impression." In London it was first produced by the Independent Theatre Society on May 4, 1894, Mr. W. L. Abingdon playing Hialmar, and Miss Winifred Fraser giving a delightful performance of Hedvig. The late Clement Scott's pronouncement on it was that "to make a fuss about so feeble a production was to insult dramatic literature and to outrage common sense." It was repeated at the Globe Theatre in May, 1897, with Mr. Laurence Irving as Hialmar and Miss Fraser again as Hedvig. In October 1905 it was revived at the Court Theatre, with Mr. Granville Barker as Hialmar and Miss Dorothy Minto as Hedvig. Of American performances I find no record. It has been acted in Italy and in Greece, I know not with what success. The fact that it has no part for a "leading lady" has rendered it less of an international stock-piece than *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler*, or even *Rosmersholm*.

There can be no doubt that *The Wild Duck* marks a reaction in the poet's mood, following upon the eager vivacity wherewith, in *An Enemy of the People*, he had flung his defiance at the "compact Liberal majority," which, as the reception of *Ghosts* had proved, could not endure to be told the truth. Having said his say and liberated his soul, he now began to ask himself whether human nature was, after all, capable of

assimilating the strong meat of truth—whether illusion might not be, for the average man, the only thing that could make life livable. It would be too much to say that the play gives a generally affirmative answer to this question. On the contrary, its last lines express pretty clearly the poet's firm conviction that if life cannot reconcile itself with truth, then life may as well go to the wall. Nevertheless his very devotion to truth forces him to realise and admit that it is an antitoxin which, rashly injected at wrong times or in wrong doses, may produce disastrous results. It ought not to be indiscriminately administered by "quacksalvers."

Gregers Werle is unquestionably a piece of ironic self-portraiture. In his habit of "pestering people, in their poverty, with the claim of the ideal," the poet adumbrates his own conduct from *Brand* onwards, but especially in *Ghosts* and *An Enemy of the People*. Relling, again, is an embodiment of the mood which was dominant during the conception of the play—the mood of pitying contempt for that poor thing human nature, as embodied in Hialmar. An actor who, in playing the part of Relling made up as Ibsen himself, has been blamed for having committed a fault not only of taste, but of interpretation, since Gregers (it is maintained) is the true Ibsen. But the fact is that both characters represent the poet. They embody the struggle in his mind between idealism and cynical despondency. There can be no doubt, however, that in some measure he consciously identified himself with Gregers. In a letter to

Mr. Gosse, written in 1872, he had employed in his own person the very phrase, *den ideale fordring*—"the claim of the ideal"—which is Gregers's watchword. The use of this sufficiently obvious phrase, however, does not mean much. Far stronger evidence of identification is afforded by John Paulsen¹ in some anecdotes he relates of Ibsen's habits of "self-help"—evidence which we may all the more safely accept, as Herr Paulsen seems to have been unconscious of its bearing upon the character of Gregers. "Ibsen," he says, "was always bent upon doing things himself, so as not to give trouble to servants. His ideal was 'the self-made man.'² Thus, if a button came off one of his garments he would retire to his own room, lock the door, and after many comical and unnecessary preliminaries proceed to sew on the button himself, with the same care with which he wrote the fair copy of a new play. Such an important task he could not possibly entrust to any one else, not even to his wife. One of his paradoxes was that 'a woman never knew how to sew on a button so that it would hold.' But if he himself sewed it on, it held to all eternity. Fru Ibsen smiled roguishly and subtly when the creator of Nora came out with such anti-feminist sentiments. Afterwards she told me in confidence, 'It is true that Ibsen himself sews on his vagrant buttons; but the fact that they hold so well is *my* doing, for, without his knowledge, I always "finish them off," which

¹ *Samliv med Ibsen*, p. 33.

² Herr Paulsen uses the English words; but it will appear from the sequel that Ibsen's ideal was not so much the self-made as the self-mended man.