

THE PRETENDERS  
PILLARS OF SOCIETY  
ROSMERSHOLM



HENRIK IBSEN

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Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy guide,  
In thy most need to go by thy side.

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## THE DRAMA

THE PRETENDERS, PILLARS OF  
SOCIETY, *and* ROSMERSHOLM  
BY HENRIK IBSEN · TRANSLATED  
BY R. FARQUHARSON SHARP

HENRIK IBSEN, born at Skien, Norway, on 20th March 1828. Obtained work in connection with theatres in Bergen and Christiania. Left Norway in 1864 and lived abroad—mostly in Germany—returning to Norway in 1901. Died at Christiania on 23rd May 1906.

## INTRODUCTION

THE three plays translated in the present volume illustrate three very different and characteristic phases of Ibsen's genius. The stirring historical drama, *The Pretenders*, which appeared in 1864 and was his first really great achievement, was written at white heat when Ibsen was five-and-thirty and his intellectual powers were just touching their full development. *Pillars of Society*, which was completed in 1877, was the earliest of the "social dramas" on which his fame will always mainly rest, and betrays some signs of experiment. In it the dramatist has not yet quite found his feet on the ground which he trod with the triumphant assurance of a master by the time *Rosmersholm*, which is typical of his intellectual power at its highest, appeared in 1886.

*The Pretenders* was written while Ibsen was still in Christiania, previous to his long voluntary exile from Norway. He had, some years before, been attracted by the subject of the historical struggle between Haakon and Skule for the crown; and circumstances now seemed to conspire (or, at least, Ibsen seems to have thought so) to give him a clearer insight into the conflict of character between the two heroes. The rough handling which his countrymen had accorded to his last play, *Love's Comedy*, and the small advance he had been able (in spite of the growth of his powers) to make in popular estimation, contrasted cruelly in his eyes with the rapidly increasing popularity of his friend and rival, Björnson, who was advancing from success to success with serene confidence. These were the circumstances that enabled Ibsen to portray so vividly in *The Pretenders* Skule's anxious craving for success, and the conflict between his torturing lack of self-confidence and his uneasy consciousness that Haakon's success, though easier, was deserved.

The play is a remarkably fine example of historical drama, and, both in conception and execution, is an astonishing advance on *The Warriors at Helgeland*,<sup>1</sup> which preceded it by only five years. Every character in *The Pretenders* is alive and well individualised; the whole play is full of movement; many passages in the dialogue show a subtlety of thought well worthy of the later Ibsen; and—besides the two contrasted figures of Haakon and Skule, and the sweet womanliness of Margrete, torn by her divided emotions as wife of the one combatant and daughter of the other—the play contains, in the sinister figure of Bishop Nicholas and the ingenuity of his malicious intrigue, a study of character of which any dramatist might be proud. Moreover, the gradual revelation, as the play proceeds, of the train of intrigue laid by the Bishop is a significant foreshadowing of Ibsen's later method in that respect, a method seen at its fullest use in *Rosmersholm*. Skule's personality, too, is not unlike that of an early and more rudimentary Rosmer. The ill-judged lapse into the supernatural in the second scene of the last act, with the Bishop's reappearance as a phantom monk and his outburst of prophetic rhetoric, is the only blot on the play.

*The Pretenders* was written in a few months, and was produced in Christiania early in 1864, with complete success. So little, however, was Ibsen's name known at the time, that it was seven years before the play was seen in Denmark, and eight more before it reached Stockholm, though it had been played in Germany in 1875. It had never been acted in this country until February of the present year, when an interesting production of it, though necessarily somewhat reduced in its proportions, took place at the Haymarket theatre. The play's name in the original, *Kongs-Emnerne*, is difficult to translate. *The Pretenders*, a title first adopted by Mr. William Archer in his translation, is a useful equivalent; but the original name has more the sense of "Heirs to the Crown," or "Men of Royal

<sup>1</sup> Published in the volume of Ibsen's plays entitled *Ghosts, and Two Other Plays*, in "Everyman's Library."



Breed"—the Norwegian word *Emne* signifying literally "subject-matter" or "material."

*Pillars of Society* (*Samfundets Støtter*) found a readier home on the stage, not only in Ibsen's own country but in others. From his retreat in Italy he had (in the years intervening between *The Pretenders* and this play) sent *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* to astonish and delight his fellow-countrymen and to lay the foundations of a wider fame. *Pillars of Society* was first produced in Copenhagen in 1877, and soon became an established favourite in the theatres of the other Scandinavian countries and of Germany. One or two isolated performances of it have been given in this country, also in America and in France. Mr. William Archer, in an interesting introduction to his version of the play, points out that the reason why, except in Scandinavia and Germany, it has nowhere taken a permanent hold upon the theatre, is easy to find; for, "by the time the English, American and French public had fully awakened to the existence of Ibsen, he himself had so far outgrown the phase of his development marked by *Pillars of Society*, that the play already seemed commonplace and old-fashioned."

However that may be, the play has great interest to the student of Ibsen from the fact of its being its author's first serious effort in the social drama, and his first experiment with methods which he subsequently perfected. It is an entertaining play, moreover, with a plot that is a model of ingenuity; and, though the "irony" of the drama may occasionally come a little too pat, it is at the same time undeniably effective. No doubt, too, the later Ibsen would not have allowed the guilty man to escape Nemesis to so great an extent, but would have let it swoop remorselessly upon him; but, at the time the play was written, such a thing would have irretrievably have ruined its chances of success—even if, indeed, it would have suggested itself to Ibsen at that stage of his development.

Nine years later, however, in *Rosmersholm*, remorselessness of logic and remorseless fidelity to the actual cruelties of life overshadow everything else. *A Doll's*

*House, Ghosts, An Enemy of the People* and *The Wild Duck*<sup>1</sup> had appeared since *Pillars of Society*. Ibsen's fame was assured, and his self-confidence established upon good grounds; his methods were perfected and his touch certain. But anything approaching gaiety of mind seems to have been ground out of him by the pitiless wheels of life and experience; *Rosmersholm* is surely one of the grimmest dramas ever penned.

The genesis of the idea of the play seems to have been to some extent political—Ibsen's disgust with the Norwegian democracy of the time, and with the personalities and animosities which were allowed to obscure the actual political issues of the day, impelling him to a plea for the recovery of "some elements of nobility" (as he himself put it) in national life. This accounts for the mission which Rosmer, in the play, imagines to be his. The interest of this, however, is local. What is far more absorbing in the play is the development and conflict of character; the astonishing cleverness with which, gradually, veil after veil is lifted that has concealed Rebecca's true nature and the extent of her machinations; the pitiless veracity of the self-analysis with which she and Rosmer torture themselves; the master-hand evident in the structure of the play.

It was first performed in Bergen, early in 1887, and soon took a firm hold on the Scandinavian and German stages. It has been at various times played here, as well as in France and Italy. From the interesting posthumous volume of notes and memoranda of Ibsen's (translated lately into English with the title of *From Ibsen's Workshop*), we learn that *Rosmersholm* was at first to have been called *White Horses*; also that, in an early draft of the play, Rebecca was governess to two daughters of Rosmer's, who, however, eventually disappeared from the play and reappeared as Boletta and Hilda Wangel in *The Lady from the Sea*.

R. FARQUHARSON SHARP.

March 1913.

<sup>1</sup> All translated in the volumes of Ibsen's plays in "Everyman's Library."

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**THE PRETENDERS**  
***AN HISTORICAL DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS***

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Haakon, elected King of Norway by the "Birchlegs."<sup>1</sup>  
Inga, his mother.  
Dagfinn, his marshal.  
Ivar Bodde, his chaplain.  
Earl Skule.  
Ragnhild, his wife.  
Sigrid, his sister.  
Margrete, his daughter.  
Nicholas, Bishop of Oslo.  
Sira Viljam, his chaplain.  
Guthorm Ingesson.  
Sigurd the Ribbung.  
Vegard Væradal, one of Haakon's body-guard.  
Gregorius Jonsson, } vassals.  
Paul Flida, }  
Ingebjörg, wife of Andres Skjalderband.  
Peter, her son, a young priest.  
Sigard, of Brabant, a physician.  
Jatgeir, an Icelandic bard.  
Bratte, a bard and chieftain from the Trondhjem district.  
People and Citizens of Bergen, Oslo and Nidaros;  
Crusaders, Priests, Monks and Nuns; Guests,  
Guards, Women, Men-at-Arms, etc., etc.

(The action takes place in the first half of the thirteenth century.)

<sup>1</sup> One of the numerous political factions which existed in Norway at this period. They owed their name to the fact of their wearing leggings of birch-bark.

# THE PRETENDERS

## ACT I

### SCENE I

(SCENE.—The churchyard of Christ Church in Bergen. In the background the main entrance of the church faces the audience. In the foreground, on the left, are standing HAAKON, DAGFINN, VEGARD VÆRADAL, IVAR BODDE and other vassals and chieftains; opposite them, on the right, SKULE, GREGORIUS JONSSON, PAUL FLIDA, and others of SKULE'S men. Farther back on the same side are seen SIGURD THE RIBBUNG and his followers, and, standing apart from them, GUTHORM INGESSON with other chieftains. The approach to the church is guarded by armed men; the churchyard is crowded with people, and many are perched on the trees and church walls. Every one seems to be in the greatest suspense, as if waiting for something to happen. Bells are ringing in all the church steeples in the town, far and near.)

Skule (to GREGORIUS JONSSON, in a low voice full of impatience). Why are they so slow in there?

Gregorius. Hush!—I hear the psalm beginning. (The sound of trumpets is heard through the closed doors of the church; then the choir of monks and nuns, chanting the "Domine cœli." Meanwhile the doors of the church are thrown open from within, and BISHOP NICHOLAS appears in the porch, surrounded by priests and friars.)

Bishop Nicholas (stepping forward and raising his crozier). Now is Inga of Varteig submitting to the Ordeal of the Iron on behalf of Haakon, heir to the crown! (The church doors are shut again; the chanting is still heard from within.)

Gregorius Jonsson (in a low voice, to SKULE). Pray to St. Olaf to defend the right.

Skule (hastily and with a gesture of refusal). Not now. It were best not to put him in mind of me.

*Ivar Bodde (gripping HAAKON by the arm.)* Pray to the Lord your God, Haakon.

*Haakon.* There is no need. I am sure of Him. (*The sound of chanting grows louder from within the church. All bare their heads; many fall on their knees and pray.*)

*Gregorius Jonsson (to SKULE).* This is a fateful hour for you and for many.

*Skule (looking anxiously towards the church).* A fateful hour for Norway.

*Paul Flida (standing beside SKULE).* Now she is holding the Iron.

*Dagfinn (beside HAAKON).* They are coming down the nave.

*Ivar Bodde.* Christ protect thy innocent hands, Inga, mother of the King!

*Haakon.* All my days I will surely repay her for this hour.

*Skule (who has been listening anxiously, exclaims suddenly):* Did she scream? Did she let the Iron drop?

*Paul Flida (going towards the church).* I do not know what it was.

*Gregorius Jonsson.* The women are weeping loudly in the porch.

(*A triumphant chant from the choir breaks in upon their voices: Gloria in excelsis Deo! The doors of the church are thrown open; INGA comes out, followed by nuns, priests and monks.*)

*Inga (standing on the steps of the church).* God has judged! Behold these hands; in them I have held the Iron!

*Voices from the Crowd.* They are as pure and white as before!

*Other Voices.* And still fairer!

*The whole Crowd.* He is indeed the son of Haakon, who was Sverre's son!

*Haakon (embracing INGA).* Thanks, thanks, most blessed among women!

*Bishop Nicholas (as he brushes past SKULE).* It was a stupid thing to insist on the Ordeal of the Iron.



*Skule.* No, Bishop Nicholas; in this matter we needed the voice of God.

*Haakon* (*deeply moved, and holding INGA by the hand*). So now the deed is done against which every fibre in my being cried out aloud—the thought of which wrung my heart with anguish—

*Dagfinn* (*to the crowd*). Yes, look upon this woman and then think well, all you who are here! Who was there that doubted her word until certain men found it to their interest that it should be doubted?

*Paul Flida.* The doubt has been whispered in every corner since the hour when Haakon, heir to the crown, was carried as a child into King Inge's halls.

*Gregorius Jonsson.* And last winter the whisper grew into a clamour and resounded throughout the land, from north to south. To that I think every man can bear witness.

*Haakon.* I myself best of all. And it was for that reason that I gave way to the counsel of many faithful friends, and humbled myself as no other king-elect has done for many a day. By the Ordeal of the Iron I have proved my birth, and proved my right, as the son of Haakon, son of Sverre, to inherit the kingship of this land. It is not my purpose now to inquire more closely who was the begetter of this doubt and proclaimed it with so loud a voice as Earl Skule's friends say; but this I do know, that bitterly have I suffered under it. King-elect I have been ever since I was a child; but little has been the kingly honour that I have received, even at the hands of those from whom one would think I could most surely expect it. I will only remind you of what took place last Palm Sunday at Nidaros,<sup>1</sup> when I went up to the altar to make my offering and the Archbishop turned away and made as though he had not seen me, so as to avoid saluting me as men are wont to salute kings. Still, it would have been easy to put up with such slights as that, had it not been that the country was on the brink of an outbreak of civil war, and my duty was to prevent that.

*Dagfinn.* No doubt it is well for kings to listen to

<sup>1</sup> The ancient name of Trondhjem.