

BRAND



HENRIK IBSEN

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INTRODUCTION

IN 1909 I wrote, at Mrs. Garrett's request, the following note for Mr. E. T. Cook's *Memoir of Edmund Garrett*:¹—

“Garrett's translation of *Brand* is, so far as the noblest and most vital portions of that great drama are concerned, a truly inspired piece of work. The “pity and terror” of the poem had entered into him and were part and parcel of his whole sense of human life. The central heart-beat of *Brand* was to him an ‘exchange of pulses’ with the universal throb of human passion and aspiration. It was one with the tragedy of victory in defeat, and defeat in victory, of which every heroic soul is in its turn the protagonist. It possessed him. There is a great passage in the first act, in which Agnes, after she and Einar have been interrupted in their sport by Brand, is wooed back by her lover to the light-hearted joy which the seer's visions and appeals had dissipated. She hardly hears his words, but in awed abstraction of mind asks him did he not see ‘how the man *grew* as he spoke.’ The reader of Garrett's translation, no less than of the original, knows well what she means. For he has already felt, once and again, a spiritual elevation and expansion entering into Brand's discourse which is as palpable as a physical phenomenon.

“Garrett professed no fine Norse scholarship. But there is something more vital to a translator than sensitiveness to philological minutiae. It is sensitiveness to the author's moods and insight into his experience. To have an instinctive sense of what the author means is better than pedantic scrupulosity as to what he says. But evidently Garrett under-estimated the delicacy of his own feeling for the language. He relied much on the judgment of his friends, and was generous in his acknowledgments, but no one could have turned out such work as his without a sound, if not a technical knowledge of the idiom from

¹ *Edmund Garrett: a Memoir*, by E. T. Cook. Edward Arnold, 1909.

which he was translating. In any case his mastery of English admits of no question. His resources seem to be almost boundless. He evidently believed that effective rhyme and rhythm could be and must be secured without any sacrifice of sense or phrasing. The English language always had the turn of expression that was not the best compromise between the two requirements, but the alliance by which each reached its maximum of realisation.

"In the great passages between Agnes and Brand, this ideal is infallibly embodied in Garrett's work. In the long passages in which we feel the almost unendurable jar between Brand's ideals and the common-places of his two principal foils—the Sheriff and the Dean—the translator himself evidently feels less secure, and is less firm in his tread. Here 'inspiration' can hardly be thought of, and resourceful skill is all that seems possible. And here, though Garrett is perpetually delighting the student of the original by his felicity and strength, his results have less of the sustained and sustaining quality than when the tension is higher. A discerning critic on reading his *Brand* would already have marked him out as the man chosen by the gods to translate Ibsen's lyrics."

To this note I have only to add that although Garrett is entirely right in his assertion that it is the "broad simplicity" of the central motive of *Brand* that "gives it its poignancy," there are nevertheless certain passages towards the end of the poem which must appear obscure, or at least wanting in definiteness and precision, unless it is borne in mind that the drama was written in 1865, the year after the Dano-Prussian War, in which Germany annexed the Schleswig-Holstein provinces. Feelings of shame and indignation overwhelmed Ibsen when the Scandinavian brethren of the Danes who had all but pledged themselves to make common cause with them allowed them to fight and fall alone. The iron entered into his soul. Three poems, of which Garrett's English versions are printed in his volume of translations,¹ give direct expression to the feelings with which he regarded this betrayal of Denmark by her northern brethren. And it was this mood that not only gives the specific interpretation of Brand's dismal

¹ *Lyrics and Poems from Ibsen*, translated by Fydell Edmund Garrett. J. M. Dent and Sons, 1912.

forebodings for his country when his own catastrophe is approaching, but also gives point and actuality to the passionate demand for action "up to the measure of accorded might," irrespective of the practical limitations on which prudence insists, that rings through the whole poem. And there can be no doubt either that the succeeding drama of *Peer Gynt* derives much of its intensity from the same source, and that many of its detailed references yield their secret to the same key.

PHILIP H. WICKSTEED.

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To
AGNES

FOR THOUSANDS OF READERS
THE AGNES OF IBSEN'S "BRAND"
LIKE THE
AGNES OF DICKENS IN "DAVID COPPERFIELD"
MUST HAVE IDEALISED A NAME
WHICH SURELY NO AUTHOR COULD WELL BESTOW
SAVE ON A PURE AND BEAUTIFUL CREATION
FOR ME
NOT EVEN NAMESAKES SUCH AS THESE
CAN ADD TO YOUR NAME
ONE NEW RAY
OF CONSECRATION OR OF LOVELINESS

F. E. G.



TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

A VAST deal has been written of late years about the methods and meanings of Henrik Ibsen. In the press, I have not been altogether innocent of swelling the stream myself. But in these pages I have determined to refrain from any lengthy epexegetics. If my work as translator be done decently, I think the reader can well dispense with my services as commentator. For there is a broad simplicity about the central motive of *Brand*; a simplicity which, amid so much that is romantic and so much that is realistic, almost recalls classic models. And after all, whatever else you may choose to see in the poem, it is this simple central motive which gives it its poignancy. In Brand's successive renunciations, in his sacrifice of ambition and career, his ordeal as a son, as a father, as a husband, the eternal struggle between life and ideals, between the absolute and the human, is represented with a naked force which renders some of the scenes, to me at least, among the most moving in literature. We are stirred as with a trumpet-blast when the weak and paltering side of human nature goes down before Brand's "All or Nothing"; when it is pure and tender love that is crushed by the inflexible demand, the pathos becomes too deep for tears. But that is because the pity and terror of it are the pity and terror of Life. Brand is a fanatical Norwegian minister of religion. But he is primarily a man—a man weeping "inwardly tears of blood." Brand's ideal is an impossible one. But every ideal that is worth anything is in some sense impossible, even to the dividing asunder of joint and marrow. Brand's God is a post-Christian version of the savage God of the Old Testament. But that only makes his religion a convenient dramatic embodiment of that ruthlessness of eternal law upon whose wheel struggling humanity is broken

to-day and will be broken to-morrow though it out-grow fifty religions. Brand's life ends in failure. But that, to Ibsen's mind at least (as to Browning's), is the goal at which one who is impelled to struggle towards the future, burdened with all the legacies of the past and hampered by the ties of the present, must be content to arrive. The riddle of the painful earth once more goes answerless; the balance between stern principle, which can abate no jot, and love which would soften all, is not adjusted. But it is natural that the chord of love should be left vibrating at the close, and not inconsistent to end upon a note of vague hope.

So much lies on the face of the poem, and requires no detailed commentary. Every work of art has as many meanings beside its central one as you care to look for; but I think Ibsen has sometimes suffered from the industry of commentators in tacking "to some useful end" every artistic detail of his pictures. Of course, there is an obvious parody of Brand's narrow "other-worldliness" in the converted Einar of the Fifth Act, and an equally obvious parody of other aspects of his character in the mad Gerd, with her mark that she never hits till the final crash, and her chilly "Ice-Church" which brings down death upon its worshippers. But her ravings throughout take their colour, with delicate poetic fitness, from the changing motives of the surrounding action, to which they are altogether ancillary. To torture a definite symbolism out of the "hawk" which haunts her crazed mind would be, to my thinking, prosaic and absurd. As well attempt the like (to take an illustration from another work of Ibsen's) with the "chimney-crack" which haunted the morbid imagination of the Master Builder. There were, if I am rightly informed, some enthusiastic country-women of Ibsen's who did not even stick at that. In ingenuous triumph they took their discovery to the Master and besought his imprimatur. Ibsen said that their interpretation was exceedingly pretty and ingenious. It had not, he added, occurred to himself.

Brand appeared in 1866, a year before *Peer Gynt*, and three years before the first of the prose "social dramas," so different in manner, which are to-day holding a European audience. *Brand* followed, therefore, hard upon the Dano-German war (1864), in which Ibsen's countrymen had bitterly disappointed him by leaving their Danish kinsfolk to struggle and fail alone against German aggressions. This gives the reader the clue to the only parts of *Brand's* denunciations of his fellow-Norsemen which are not equally applicable to other times and peoples. In *Brand's* long soliloquy in the Fifth Act, however, where he has visions of his countrymen refusing to rally to the defence of their highest principles, as well as to that of their kinsmen, and devoting themselves merely to industrial development and money-grubbing, there is one political passage which I have ventured to transfer, together with its explanation, to an Appendix. Its place in the text is marked by asterisks.

NOTE ON THE PRESENT TRANSLATION

THOSE who are interested in the elusive but fascinating art of verse-translation may expect a word or two about the methods of the present version. In most parts this errs, I think, on the side of literalness. Where it is at all loose, it is generally because I found a closer adherence to the letter of the original less faithful to its spirit. I have given a different turn to the phrasing of an allusion, here and there, to make it clear to the English reader, and so avoid the abomination of the footnote. An instance is my rendering of *fjaerhams laegg* (Act II. p. 117), which is in reality, I fancy, an obscure allusion to the feather-dress disguise so often resorted to by the gods of the old Norse mythology. A problem was presented by untranslatable terms like *vidde* and *bygden*, and by the recurrence of characteristic epithets such as "slack," where our more copious, if less sinewy, language naturally varies the phrase. In such matters I have held that Brand's fulminations against Compromise do not apply to translators. I have assumed the English forms of pronunciation of fjord, Brand, Gerd, Thor—it would have been grotesque to rhyme on such sounds as fyoor', Brahn', Gairrd, Toor. At the end of the play where a tag of doctor's Latin previously used by the Doctor is repeated by a supernatural Voice, I have translated that along with the Norwegian in which it is embedded.

Setting aside the airy little song of Einar and Agnes—the rhythm of which I have produced with more exactitude, I fear, than the charm—the metres of *Brand* are the iambic and trochaic varieties of the four-beat line, with an irregular rhyme-scheme. The trochaic form is used in the more emotional passages.

In these I have not indulged in as much freedom of accent-changing as a trained English ear requires; but I thought it better in many passages to keep as far as possible the severe cadence of the original. The Norwegian uses the feminine or double rhyme in both metres more richly than is possible in English except in comic or satiric passages, in which a *bizarre* rhyme rather helps than hinders the effect. In such Hudibrastic passages I have sometimes ventured on the Hudibrastic rhyme, for which there is occasional precedent even amid the copious resources of the Norwegian.

Brand contains difficulties of diction, and others, in which I have been much indebted to the kind aid of Fröken Margrethe Sang. I have no pretensions to such Norwegian scholarship as would have been equal to the task unaided. As it is, I have completed it under difficulties and interruptions which need not be entered into here, but which might serve to palliate some shortcomings were it not that "it is so easy *not* to " translate " a five-act tragedy."—F. E. G.

THE CHARACTERS

BRAND

HIS MOTHER

EINAR, AN ARTIST

AGNES

THE SHERIFF

THE DOCTOR

THE DEAN

THE SCHOOLMASTER

THE PARISH CLERK

GERD

A PEASANT

A LAD, HIS SON

ANOTHER PEASANT

A WOMAN

ANOTHER WOMAN

A CLERK

CLERGY AND OFFICIALS

PEASANTRY, MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN

THE TEMPTER IN THE WASTE

THE INVISIBLE CHOIR

A VOICE

(The action takes place at the present day in various parts of a fiord-district on the west coast of Norway.)

BRAND

FIRST ACT

Up amid the snow on the fells. The mist lies thick and heavy. A rainy half-light about dawn. BRAND, dressed in black, with long staff and wallet, picking his way westward. A PEASANT and a lad his SON, who have joined company with BRAND, are somewhat behind.

THE PEASANT (*calls after BRAND*).

Halloa, man, never go so quick!
Where are ye?

BRAND.

Here!

THE PEASANT.

You'll go astray!
The mist is closing in so thick,
A body's eyesight barely passes
Beyond the measure of his stick. . . .

THE SON.

Father, a crack!

THE PEASANT.

Hold there! Crevasses!

BRAND.

We've lost all traces of a track.

THE PEASANT (*screams*).

Stop! Here the ice is pie-crust-thin;
For God's sake do not tread it in!

BRAND (*listening*).

A waterfall sounds up, like thunder.

Brand

THE PEASANT.

Aye, 'tis a beck has worn it hollow,
 No man could fathom how deep under:
 'Twill take us all three at a swallow!

BRAND.

Onward I must, as I have said.

THE PEASANT

A giant's strength would be too little!
 It's hollow underfoot, and brittle:
 Stop, man! One step and you are dead.

BRAND.

I am a Great One's messenger.

THE PEASANT.

O! What's his name?

BRAND.

His name is God.

THE PEASANT

Indeed! And what might you be, sir?

BRAND.

A priest.

THE PEASANT.

May be. But if you trod
 This path a Dean to boot, or Bishop,
 By dawn there'd be a corpse to fish up—
 If you will on, 'gainst all advice,
 Along this overhanging ice.

[Approaching him warily and persuasively.]

A priest, for all his brains and learning,
 Can't turn a lane without a turning,
 Don't be so stubborn and so stiff!
 A man has but the single life,
 That gone, where shall he get a second?
 Next roof is seven miles off, close reckoned,
 And the mist thickens up, as if
 A man must cut it with his knife.

BRAND.

The less chance, so, of being beckoned
By jack-a-lantern down some cliff.

THE PEASANT.

But there are ice-tarns hereabout,
And once in those, you don't get out!

BRAND.

We'll cross them.

THE PEASANT.

On the water walk?
Your doing won't make good your talk.

BRAND.

Yet One has shown, with faith in God,
A man may pass across dry-shod.

THE PEASANT.

In *those* days!—Now, he wouldn't stop
Till he touched bottom, neck and crop.

BRAND.

Farewell!

[*Going.*]

THE PEASANT.

Be on your head your blood!

BRAND.

If of my life the Lord hath need
Then welcome precipice and flood!

THE PEASANT (*under his breath*).

Nay, but he's off his head indeed!

THE SON (*whispering*).

Father, let us turn back again!
It threatens blacker storm, and rain.