

GHOSTS &
TWO OTHER
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INTRODUCTION

The Warriors at Helgeland (*Hærmændene paa Helgeland*), the first of the three plays included in the present volume, was written in 1857, when Ibsen (who was then in his thirtieth year) was at Christiania. Both in conception and execution it is an enormous advance on the immature efforts which had preceded it; and, apart from its own very considerable merits, poetic and dramatic, it is noteworthy as foreshadowing two aspects of the later genius that could produce *Peer Gynt* and *The Wild Duck*. Judged as a poetic romance, it has great charm if approached in the necessary spirit of simplicity. As a piece of dramatic construction it is admirable, and already characteristic of the later Ibsen in its methods. A preface which Ibsen wrote in 1876 for a German translation of the play affords interesting evidence of his sane dramatic sense. After remarking that the Volsung Saga was the source of his inspiration for the play, he goes on to say that he was nevertheless convinced that "the idealised and, to a certain extent, impersonal figures in the Sagas" were unsuitable for representation on the stage of to-day, and that, apart from this, it had been his aim in this play to present "not mythical personages, but Scandinavian life in olden times." To realise the wisdom of this, one has only to compare the human interest possessed by the characters in *The Warriors at Helgeland* with the almost entire lack of it in the heroes and heroines of Wagner's *Ring der Nibelungen*.

Ibsen offered the play to the Royal Theatre at Copenhagen and to the Christiania Theatre, and both promptly rejected it as unsuitable to the tastes of the public. It was not until 1861, after a tentative performance at Bergen, that the play was produced at the Christiania Theatre. It was not seen in Copenhagen until some fourteen years later. The publication of the translation referred to above gave the play a footing in Germany

where it was fairly often played after that date. Its only production in London, so far, has been that at the Imperial Theatre in 1903, during Ellen Terry's management, when it was played under the title of *The Vikings*.

The remaining two plays here translated, *Ghosts* (*Gengangere*) and *An Enemy of the People* (*En Folkefiende*), are closely connected in their origin. *Ghosts* was written in 1881, when Ibsen was in Italy, and was published at the close of that year. Ibsen could not have expected—indeed did not expect—anything but a mixed reception for a play so aggressively daring in its defiance of all conventions. Thought has moved so quickly in the last thirty years, the boundary-posts (to use a favourite metaphor of Ibsen's) have been so often shifted in that time, that it requires a readjustment of one's point of view to realise fully how daring a thing it was to publish a play on such a theme as this and expect it to be performed. It is Ibsen's most remarkable polemical, and perhaps his most remarkable intellectual, effort; and, as a play, it grips the mind and extorts a close interest despite all repugnance to its subject. Softening of the brain as the result of disease inherited from a licentious father is a subject æsthetically repulsive, and must become especially so upon the boards of a theatre. No doubt the play teaches lessons that social teachers cannot emphasise too strongly; and in none of his plays has Ibsen diagnosed a social malady (a proceeding which he was fond of claiming as his aim in writing these plays) with more terrible skill. But it is a very open question whether the acted drama—which, after all, is a form of art distinguished by peculiar conditions—is a legitimate medium for the exposition of such truths. There is much virtue in the old artistic canon as to what may fitly be displayed *coram populo*.

Another criticism that may fairly be made upon *Ghosts*, judged as a play, is that it is too obviously a work with a didactic purpose. The dramatist is plainly more interested in his thesis than in his characters. The characterisation is weak, for a writer of Ibsen's rare

ability in that respect; his personages seem to be expounding the dramatist's views, rather than voicing thoughts that are the result of their own personality. And yet Ibsen wrote to a friend of his, at this time, that "in none of his plays did the author stand so entirely apart from the action as in *Ghosts*!"

However prepared he may have thought he was for the reception of the play, Ibsen was nevertheless considerably taken aback by the bitter storm of abuse it aroused in Norway. Björnson was the only public man who would say a word in his defence; and the "Liberal" press, on whose professions of broad-mindedness Ibsen had more or less relied, threw him over altogether. The result was the writing, at white heat, of *An Enemy of the People*, in which Ibsen sought to chastise his opponents with satire. Dr. Stockmann, the protagonist of the play, is not intended as a portrait of the author; but the picture of his relations to his fellow-townsmen, to the Liberal press, and to the "damned compact majority"—his account of himself as "fighting at the outposts of thought," and standing at a point which in ten years' time the majority would have reached, while he himself would be far ahead again—obviously depict Ibsen's own position towards his countrymen in the matter of *Ghosts*. Writing to his friend Brandes at this time about the controversy, Ibsen complains of the Liberal press prating of freedom of action and thought, and then letting themselves become merely the slaves of their subscribers' opinions and following the crowd instead of leading it; and, again, writes of himself as being always ten years ahead of the great mass of the people—expressions identical with those used by Dr. Stockmann.

Despite its satirical intention, *An Enemy of Society* is in many ways more genial than most of Ibsen's "social dramas," thanks to the leavening of humour which he has permitted himself to mix with his scorn. The result of this, and of the fact that the play contains some theatrically effective scenes, was that it became imme-

diately popular on the Scandinavian stage—the audience, wherever it was played, no doubt considering the satire peculiarly applicable to every other community but their own.

Ghosts was at first refused a hearing either in Norway, Denmark or Sweden; but in 1883 the Swedish actor August Lindberg was attracted by the play's possibilities, and toured with it—with the result that soon afterwards it was played at the Royal Theatre at Stockholm. It was a good many years, however, before it was seen in Norway or in Denmark. It was first performed (privately) in Germany in 1886; in Paris, by the Théâtre Libre, in 1890; and in London, by the Independent Theatre, in 1891. Since then it has been played in most European countries. The censor has always refused to remove his veto on its public performance in this country, probably on account of the fact that the plot of the play involves even uglier questions than hereditary disease.

An Enemy of the People was published in the winter of 1882, and performed early the following year in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, and since then has been widely played on the continent. It was first produced in England, in 1893, at the Haymarket Theatre, by Sir (then Mr.) Herbert Beerbohm Tree, who has more than once revived it.

For the verse translation of Örnulf's funeral chant over his dead sons in Act IV. of *The Warriors at Helgeland*, I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. Ernest Rhys.

R. FARQUHARSON SHARP.

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THE WARRIORS AT HELGELAND

A Play in Four Acts

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Örnulf of the Fjords, a chieftain in Iceland.

Thorolf, his youngest son.

Sigurd the Strong, a Viking.

Dagny, his wife (daughter of Örnulf).

Gunnar, a rich yeoman of Helgeland.

Hjördis, his wife (foster-sister to Dagny).

Egil, his son, four years old.

Kaare, a Helgeland yeoman.

Örnulf's six elder sons.

Örnulf's and Sigurd's Men, Guests, Servants, Waiting-Women, Outlaws, etc.

(The action takes place in the time of Eric Bloody-Axe; at, and in the neighbourhood of, Gunnar's house at Helgeland, in northern Norway.)

THE WARRIORS AT HELGELAND

ACT I

(SCENE.—*The top of a high cliff, which in the background drops sheer down into the sea. On the left is a boat-shed, on the right hills covered with pine woods. The masts of two ships of war can be seen down in the creek below; far out on the right, rocks and islands. The sea is very rough. It is winter, with storms of wind and snow.*

SIGURD comes up from the ships. He is dressed in a white tunic with silver belt, a blue cloak, loose hose, fur boots and a steel casque, with a short sword hanging at his side. A moment later, ÖRNULF comes into sight on the hill-side, dressed in a dark lambskin tunic, with breastplate, greaves worn over woollen hose, and fur boots; over his shoulders he wears a cloak of brown frieze, with the hood drawn over his casque in such a way as partly to conceal his face. He is tall and powerfully built, but has a long white beard, and is a little bent with age. He is armed with a round shield, a sword and a spear. SIGURD advances first, looks around and sees the boat-shed, goes quickly up to it and tries to burst open the door. ÖRNULF comes down from the higher ground, starts when he sees SIGURD, appears to recognise him, strides forward and calls out to him.)

Örnulf. Stand back, warrior!

Sigurd (turns, and lays his hand on his sword). If I did that, it would be the first time!

Örnulf. You must and shall! I need this boat-shed for a night's shelter for my men, who are half frozen.

Sigurd. And I need it for a weary woman.

Örnulf. My men are of more worth than your woman!

Sigurd. Outlaws must be of great value in Helgeland, then!

Örnulf (raising his spear). You shall pay dearly for those words!

Sigurd (drawing his sword). It shall go ill with you, old man!

ÖRNULF falls upon him; • SIGURD defends himself.

DAGNY and some of SIGURD's men come up from the shore; ÖRNULF's six sons appear on the higher ground on the right. DAGNY, who is dressed in a red kirtle, blue cape and fur cap, is a little in advance of the others.)

Dagny (calls down towards the ships). Up, all Sigurd's men! My husband is at blows with a stranger!

Örnulf's Sons. To our father's help! *(They come down.)*

Sigurd (to his men). Stay where you are. Surely I can deal with him alone!

Örnulf (to his sons). Let me fight in peace! *(Closing in upon SIGURD.)* I will draw your blood!

Sigurd. You shall see your own first!

(Wounds him in the arm, so that his spear falls from his hand.)

Örnulf. A good stroke, warrior!—

Swift the sword thou swingest,
Keen thy weapon's aim;
Sigurd's self, the Strong One,
It would put to shame!

Sigurd (with a smile). Then would he have shame and honour at the same time!

Örnulf's Sons (in tones of surprise). It is Sigurd himself! Sigurd the Strong!

Örnulf. But it was a keener stroke you dealt me the night you stole away Dagny, my daughter! *(Throws back the hood from his face.)*

Sigurd and his Men. Örnulf of the Fjords!

Dagny (happily, but with some signs of uneasiness). My father and my brothers!

Sigurd. Get behind me.

Örnulf. There is no need. *(Approaches SIGURD.)* I knew you as soon as I saw you, and that was why I provoked a quarrel; I wanted to try whether they speak truly who say of you that you are the best swordsman

in Norway. Now let there be peace and reconciliation between us!

Sigurd. I ask nothing better, if it may be arranged.

Örnulf. There is my hand. You are a doughty hero; such swashing blows has no one before exchanged with old Örnulf.

Sigurd (grasping his outstretched hand). Then may it be the last time we exchange blows! And therewith I beg you to give judgment on the matter that lies between us. Are you willing to name conditions on which we may be at one?

Örnulf. That I am, and the dispute shall forthwith be settled. *(To the others.)* Now shall you all know what is the matter in question. Five winters ago Sigurd and Gunnar, on a Vikings' quest, came to Iceland and received from me free hospitality for the winter. So it was that Gunnar, with craft and force, carried off my foster-daughter, Hjördis; but you, Sigurd, took Dagny, my own child, and sailed away with her. To atone for that you shall be sentenced to pay three hundred pieces of silver, and so shall you expiate your deed of violence.

Sigurd. The conditions you choose seem to me easy indeed. The three hundred pieces shall be paid, and to them I will add a broidered cloak of silk that was a gift to me from King Athelstan of England—such a cloak as no man in Iceland has ever worn.

Dagny. Well said, my brave husband; and my thanks, my father, to you; this is the first day I have known real happiness! *(She grasps her father's and brothers' hands and talks to them aside.)*

Örnulf. Now peace is fully established between us, and from to-day Dagny shall be in every way as honourably esteemed as if you and she had been wedded lawfully and with her kinsmen's consent.

Sigurd. And now can you depend upon me as upon one of your own blood.

Örnulf. Of that I am assured, and instantly mean to make trial of your goodwill.

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Sigurd. You shall find me ready. Say on—what do you require of me?

Örnulf. Your help in word and deed. I have steered hither to Helgeland in search of Gunnar, to demand of him reparation for the carrying-away of Hjördis.

Sigurd (in surprise). Gunnar!

Dagny. And Hjördis! Where are they to be found?

Örnulf. At home in Gunnar's house, I imagine.

Sigurd. And that is—?

Örnulf. Not many bow-shots away. Did you not know that?

Sigurd (repressing a movement). Not I! It is seldom that I have sought news of Gunnar since last we sailed from Iceland together. A Viking's life has led me afar and I have served many kings in foreign lands, while Gunnar has sat at home. Before the stress of the storm I came under the lee of this land at daybreak to-day; and though it is true I knew that Gunnar dwelt here in the north in the home of his fathers, still——

Dagny (to ÖRNULF). So that was the errand on which you set forth from home?

Örnulf. It was. (*To SIGURD.*) Our meeting has been the work of the Mighty Ones above; they have willed it so. Had I been minded to seek you, I should have had but little knowledge where I should find you.

Sigurd (thoughtfully). Very true, very true!—But now about Gunnar—tell me, Örnulf, are you resolved to press him to the uttermost, with all your power, by fair means or foul?

Örnulf. That I must do. Listen, Sigurd, to what I have to say. Last summer I rode to the meeting of the Thing, where many men of high honour sat with me in council. When that was over, I sat in the hall and drank with the men of my own Hundred, and it happened that our talk turned upon the carrying-off of women; and then was I reproached with scorn for having let my disgrace go so long unavenged. Thereupon my anger rose; and I swore to go to Norway and seek out Gunnar, and demand amends from him, or vengeance,

for his deed, and never to journey home again to Iceland till I had accomplished my purpose.

Sigurd. Ah, well—if that is how it stands, it is clear that the matter must be hotly pursued in whatever way is needful.

Örnulf. It must; but I shall not be unreasonable, and Gunnar is reputed an honourable man. I am glad, too, to have set out upon this journey; time has hung very heavily upon my hands in Iceland of late. It was on the blue waters that I had grown old and grey, and I yearned to be out upon them once more before I——. Ah, well!—Bergthora, my good wife, is long since dead; my eldest sons have left me every summer to go on Vikings' quests; and now, as Thorolf was growing up—

Dagny (happily). Is Thorolf with you? Where is he?

Örnulf. On board my ship, out there. (*Points to the background on the right.*) A fine lad—you shall see. He has grown big and strong and comely since you were at home. He will make a splendid man, Sigurd; he will be like you some day.

Dagny (with a smile). It is just as it always was, I see. Thorolf was ever the nearest to your heart.

Örnulf. He is the youngest, and like his mother; that is why it is.

Sigurd. But tell me, now—your errand with Gunnar—do you mean this very day—?

Örnulf. Rather to-day than to-morrow. I shall be well content with a reasonable sum paid as penalty; but if Gunnar refuse such an offer of reconciliation, then must he take the consequences that will follow.

(*KAARE enters hurriedly from the hillside. He is dressed in a coat of grey frieze and a felt hat, and carries a broken staff in his hand.*)

Kaare. Well met, warriors!

Örnulf. Warriors are seldom good to meet.

Kaare. If you are honourable men, let me find safety among you. Gunnar's men are after me and would kill me!

Örnulf. Gunnar's men!

Sigurd. Then you must have done him some harm!

Kaare. I did no more than I had a right. We had set our cattle to graze together on an island just off the shore. Gunnar's people drove off my best oxen, and one of his men abused me, calling me a thrall. For that I took my sword to him and slew him.

Örnulf. That you had the right to do.

Kaare. But now this morning his men came to make an attack on me. By good luck I was warned in time and got away; but I can look but for a short respite, for my enemies are seeking me.

Sigurd. I can put but little faith in your story, fellow! In days gone by I knew Gunnar as well as I know myself; and this I know, that never would he attack a peaceable man.

Kaare. Gunnar has no hand in the matter; he is away southwards. No, it is Hjördis, his wife—

Dagny. Hjördis!

Örnulf (*muttering*). Yes, it would be just like her!

Kaare. I offered to pay Gunnar a penalty for the killing of his thrall, and he was willing to accept it; but then came Hjördis and goaded her husband with scornful words, and prevented our peace-making; so Gunnar went away to the south, and this morning—

Sigurd (*looking out to the left*). Are those not men coming on the road northward?

Kaare. It is Gunnar himself!

Örnulf. Take comfort; I fancy I shall be able to make your peace with him.

(GUNNAR, with some of his men, enters from the left.

He is in home dress; brown tunic, woollen hose, a blue cloak and wide-brimmed hat; the only weapon he carries is a small axe.)

Gunnar (*stopping in wonder and uncertainty at the sight of the gathering*). Örnulf of the Fjords! Yes, in truth—!

Örnulf. Yes, it is he.

Gunnar (*approaching*). Then welcome to my land!—if you are come in peace.

Örnulf. If you be of the same mind as I, there shall be peace between us.

Sigurd (coming forward). Well met, Gunnar!

Gunnar. Sigurd—foster-brother! (*Grasps his hand.*) Nay, if you are with him, I know for certain that Örnulf is come in peace. (*To ÖRNULF.*) Give me your hand, old man! It is not difficult to guess what errand has brought you here in the north. It concerns Hjördis, your foster-daughter.

Örnulf. It is as you say. It was a great wrong you did me when you sailed away with her from Iceland without asking my consent.

Gunnar. You have right and custom on your side. A man must pay for his youth's wild deeds. I have expected you this many a day, Örnulf, for that deed of mine; and if paying a penalty can make peace between us, it shall soon be done.

Sigurd. That is what I think. Örnulf will be reasonable.

Gunnar (with warmth). That must you be, old man; for if you were to esteem her at her true worth, all that I have could not pay the price.

Örnulf. I shall go by law and custom, be assured of that. But now there is another matter. (*Points to KAARE.*) Do you see this man?

Gunnar. Kaare! (*To ÖRNULF.*) Do you not know there is enmity between us?

Örnulf. Your men have raided his cattle, and amends should be made for a raid.

Gunnar. And for killing also. He has killed my thrall.

Kaare. Because he insulted me.

Gunnar. I told you I was ready to arrange an agreement with you.

Kaare. But Hjördis was in no mind for that; and this morning, while you were away, she fell upon me, and seeks me now to take my life.

Gunnar (in an irritated tone). Are you speaking the truth? Did she—?

Kaare. Every word is true.

Örnulf. And for that it was that this fellow craved my help, and he shall surely have it.