

**POETRY & THE
DRAMA,
BRAND, NO. 716**

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Poetry & The Drama, Brand, No. 716 by Henrik Ibsen & F. E Garrett

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HENRIK IBSEN & F. E GARRETT

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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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POETRY & THE DRAMA

BRAND BY IBSEN
TRANSLATED BY F. E. GARRETT
INTRODUCTION BY P. H. WICKSTEED

HENRIK IBSEN, born at Skien, Norway, on 20th March 1828. Became connected with the stage in Bergen and Christiania. Left Norway in 1864 and lived abroad—mostly in Germany—returning to Norway in 1901.
Died at Oslo on 23rd May 1906.

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 Fydel 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.