

**THE PILLARS OF  
SOCIETY: A PLAY  
IN FOUR ACTS**

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The Pillars of Society: A Play in Four Acts by Henrik Ibsen & William Archer

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**HENRIK IBSEN & WILLIAM ARCHER**

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THE  
PILLARS OF SOCIETY

*A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS*

By HENRIK IBSEN

TRANSLATED BY  
WILLIAM ARCHER

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## CHARACTERS.

CONSUL BERNICK.	RUMMEL.	} Merchants.
MRS. BERNICK, his wife.	VIGELAND.	
OLAF, their son, a boy of thirteen.	SANDSTAD.	} DINA DOBE, a young girl living in the Consul's house.
MISS BERNICK (MARTHA), the Consul's sister.		
JOHAN TUNNESEN, Mrs. Bernick's younger brother.	KRAP, the Consul's clerk.	
MISS HESSEL, her elder step-sister (LONA)	SHIPBUILDER AUNE.	
HILMAR TUNNESEN, Mrs. Bernick's cousin.	MRS. RUMMEL.	
RECTOR RÖRLUND.*	MRS. POSTMASTER HOLT.	
	MRS. DOCTOR LYNGE.	
	MISS RUMMEL.	
	MISS HOLT.	

*Townpeople and others, foreign sailors, steamboat passengers, etc.*

*The action takes place in Consul Bernick's house, in a small Norwegian coast-town.*

\* In the original, "Adjunkt" or Assistant-master. The word "Rektor" is used in the Scotch sense of a schoolmaster, not in the English sense of a clergyman.

[TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.—The title of the original is "Samfundets Støtte," literally "Society's Pillar." In the text the word "Samfund" has sometimes been translated "society," sometimes "community." The noun "Støtte," a pillar, has for its correlative the verb "at støtte," to support; so that the English phrase, "to support society," represents the Norwegian "at støtte Samfundet." The reader may bear in mind, then, that this phrase is, in the original, a direct allusion to the title of the play.]



# THE PILLARS OF SOCIETY :

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS.

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## ACT I.

[A large garden-room in CONSUL BERNICK'S house. In front, to the left, a door leads into the Consul's office ; farther back, in the same wall, a similar door. In the middle of the opposite wall is a large entrance door. The wall in the background is almost entirely composed of plate-glass, with an open door-way leading to a broad flight of steps, over which a sun-shade is let down. Beyond the steps a part of the garden can be seen, shut in by a trellis-fence with a little gate. On the other side of the fence is a street consisting of small, brightly-painted wooden houses. It is summer and the sun shines warmly. Now and then people pass along the street : they stop and speak to each other : customers come and go at the little corner shop, and so forth.

In the garden-room a number of ladies are gathered round a table. At the head of the table sits MRS. BERNICK. On her left sit MRS. HOLT and her daughter ; next to them, MRS. and MISS RUMMEL.

*On MRS. BERNICK'S right sit MRS. LYNGE, MISS BERNICK (MARTHA), and DINA DORF. All the ladies are busy sewing. On the table lie large heaps of half-finished and cut-out linen, and other articles of clothing. Farther back, at a little table on which are two flower-pots and a glass of eau sucré, sits RECTOR RÖBLUND, reading from a book with gilt edges, a word here and there being heard by the audience. Out in the garden OLAF BERNICK is running about, shooting at marks with a cross-bow.*

*Presently SHIPBUILDER AUNE enters quietly by the door on the right. The reading is stopped for a moment; MRS. BERNICK nods to him and points to the left-hand door. AUNE goes quietly to the Consul's door and knocks once or twice, softly. KRAP, the Consul's clerk, opens the door and comes out with his hat in his hand and papers under his arm.]*

KRAP. Oh, it's you that were knocking!

AUNE. The Consul sent for me.

KRAP. Yes; but he can't see you just now; he has commissioned me——

AUNE. You? I would much rather——

KRAP. Commissioned me to tell you this: You must stop these Saturday lectures to the workmen.

AUNE. Indeed? I thought I might use my leisure time——

KRAP. You must not use your leisure time to make the men useless in work-time. Last Saturday you must needs talk of the harm our new machines and new method of work will cause to the workmen. Why do you do so?



AUNE. I do it to support society.

KRAP. That's a strange idea! The Consul says it's undermining society.

AUNE. My "society" is not the Consul's "society," Mr. Krap! As foreman of the Industrial Society, I have to——

KRAP. Your first duty is as foreman of Consul Bernick's shipyard. Your first duty is to the society called Bernick & Co., for by it we all live.—Well, now you know what the Consul had to say to you.

AUNE. The Consul would have said it differently, Mr. Krap! But I know well enough what I have to thank for this. It's that cursed American that's put in for repairs. These people think work can be done here as they do it over there, and that——

KRAP. Yes, yes—I have no time to go into generalities. You now know the Consul's wishes, and that's enough. Now you'd better go down to the yard again; you're sure to be wanted; I shall be down myself presently.—I beg your pardon, ladies! (*He bows, and goes out through the garden and down the street. AUNE goes quietly out to the right. RECTOR RÖRLUND, who during the whole of the foregoing conversation has continued reading, presently closes the book with a bang.*)

RÖRLUND. There, my dear ladies, that is the end.

MRS. RUMMEL. Oh, what an instructive tale!

MRS. HOLT. And so moral!

MRS. BERNICK. Such a book really gives one a great deal to think over.

RÖRLUND. Yes—it forms a refreshing contrast to what we unhappily see every day, both in newspapers and magazines. The gilded and rouged outside, flaunted by

the great communities—what does it really conceal? Hollowness and rottenness, if I may say so. They have no moral foundation under their feet. In one one word—they are whited sepulchres, these great communities, nowadays.

MRS. HOLT. Too true! too true!

MRS. RUMMEL. We have only to look at the crew of the American ship which is lying here just now.

RÖRLUND. Oh, I won't speak of such scum of humanity. But even in the higher classes—how do matters stand there? Doubt and fermenting restlessness on every side; the mind unsettled, and insecurity in all relations of life. See how the family is undermined over there!—how a brazen spirit of destruction is attacking the most vital truths!

DINA (*without looking up*). But are not many great things done there too?

RÖRLUND. Great things?—I don't understand.

MRS. HOLT (*astonished*). Good heavens, Dina——!

MRS. RUMMEL (*at the same time*). Oh, Dina, how can you?

RÖRLUND. I don't think it would be for our good if such "great things" became common among us. No—we at home here ought to thank God that things are as they are with us. Of course a tare now and then springs up among the wheat, alas! but we honestly do our best to weed it out. What we have to do, ladies, is to keep society pure—to exclude from it all the untried elements which an impatient age would force upon us.

MRS. HOLT. And of these there are more than enough, unhappily.

MRS. RUMMEL. Yes, last year we only escaped by a

hair's-breadth having a railroad carried through the town.

MRS. BERNICK. Oh, Karsten managed to block the way.

RÖRLUND. Providentially, Mrs. Bernick! You may be sure that your husband was a tool in a higher hand when he refused to support that scheme.

MRS. BERNICK. And yet the papers said such horrid things about him! But we are quite forgetting to thank you, my dear Rector. It is really more than kind of you to sacrifice so much of your time to us.

RÖRLUND. Oh, not at all; now, in the holidays—

MRS. BERNICK. Yes, yes, but it is a sacrifice nevertheless.

RÖRLUND (*drawing his chair nearer*). Don't speak of it, my dear lady. Do not all of you make sacrifices for a good cause? And do you not make them willingly and gladly? The Lapsed and Lost, for whom we are working, are like wounded soldiers on a battle-field; you, ladies, are the Red Cross Guild, the sisters of mercy, who pick lint for these unhappy sufferers, tie the bandages gently round the wounds, dress, and heal them—

MRS. BERNICK. It must be a blessing to be able to see everything in such a beautiful light.

RÖRLUND. The gift is largely inborn; but it can also be acquired. The great point is to see things in the light of an earnest mission. What do *you* say, Miss Bernick? Do you not find that you have, as it were, firmer ground under your feet since you have given up your life to your school-work?

MARTHA. I scarcely know what to say. Often when I am in the school-room I wish I were far out upon the stormy sea.