

'spirter,' like the arrow of Lessing's giant which shot into the immeasurable heavens and rebounded on the unsuspecting shooter. The dramatic instinct of Ibsen is very strong: his sense of 'situations' is almost infallible; he has gone through a strange development from exquisite lyricist to adamant playwright; perhaps now he will take a 'turn' and become a 'bud' again, reconvert his intellectual life into that spell of lovely song and lyre-work in which his earlier poems abound, and let his old age sprout anew with the sympathies and charities of youth. It is to be hoped so!

Ibsen's "Prose Dramas" *

IBSEN pours from the press as his Scandinavian forebears did from their eyries. No contemporary dramatist has received so much 'attention with intention'; none is so drastic, purgative, trenchant. Whether his intellectual physic is what the age, so enervated yet so energetic, so refined yet so virile, demands, is a question for the next age; as yet we have not the correct perspective, the proper distance to judge. The roaring satire of Aristophanes was doubtless very 'contemporary,' very curative; but whether it was what Greece demanded in his frothy days has never been decided. It acted too much like rennet thrown into a mass which it curdles and congeals; society ever afterward was fixed in a condition of gelatinous indifference, held as in the grip of a compressing plaster-of-Paris mould. No wizard's spell could revolve it into the fluid elements of which it was composed before the Peloponnesian War. The war waged by the Norwegian is even fiercer than that which galled Athens and Sparta: it is a war on all the varieties of *lupus* and *tuberculosis* that scar the face and torment the lungs of society: malice, uncharitableness, hypocrisy, false enthusiasm, cant, sentimentality, are scored in these rugged dialogues as by a surgeon's scalpel or his fiery cup.

Four of the five-act prose-dramas are presented in this volume:—'The Lady from the Sea,' translated by Clara Bell, 'An Enemy of Society' (William Archer), 'The Wild Duck' (Eleanor Marx Aveling), and 'The Young Men's League' (Henry Carstarphen). Three of these deal with social or socialistic subjects: one only—'The Lady from the Sea'—is romantic. All have quick, nervous talk, vivid plot and interplay, suggestive outlines, interesting backgrounds: all are combs filled to the brim with bitter honey. 'The Lady from the Sea' is in its core the ancient mermaid myth come to life in modern frills and mismarriage,—that myth which has such deadly beauty in the Odyssean sirens, such poetic loveliness in Hans Andersen's 'Little Mermaid,' such sprite-like ramifications all through old Teutonic and doubtless still older Aryan mythologies. Archer's polished translation of 'An Enemy of Society' makes this play an English classic. Revolving on narrow Norwegian fjords, in grim Norwegian towns, under menacing fjelds, the plots of these plays, the evils which they attempt caustically to burn away, the social conditions to which they apply cupping-glass and moxa, the unstrung energies which they thrive to nerve up to manhood, have a universal significance. Vitriol is an admirable remedy if not thrown into people's faces: it even enters into the preparation of sugar; but perpetual spirits of it are apt to rebound on the

* The Prose Dramas of Henrik Ibsen: Vol. II. Translated by Clara Bell and others. Authorized edition. 50 cts. United States Book Co.