

THE MEN OF THE NINETIES

illumination, the *débonnaire* masters of the eighteenth century, the English pre-Raphaelites' In Beardsley, so to speak, was inset all the influences that went to make the period what it was. And another reason why it is so convenient to begin with him is that he and not Oscar Wilde was in reality the great creative genius of the age. Besides his black-and-white work all the world knows, in which, as Father Gray says, 'His imaginative gifts never showed a sign of fatigue or exhaustion,'¹ Beardsley practised in other arts. While a youngster at Brighton he promised to become a musical prodigy, and in later days Symons describes him at a Wagner concert gripping the seat with nervous intensity. He wrote some charming poetry, and as picturesque a fairy tale for grown-ups as has ever been written in *Under the Hill*. In an interview he states, probably slyly, he was at work in 1895 on a modern novel²; while in 1897 he said, 'Cazotte has inspired me to make some small contes. I have one in hand now called *The Celestial Lover*.' He began once to write a play with the actor, Brandon Thomas. In

¹ *Last Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, with an Introduction by the Rev. John Gray, 1904.

² *The Sketch*, April 10, 1895.