

INTRODUCTION

THE three plays here translated are representative, in widely differing fashions, of an early stage in the development of Ibsen's genius. *Lady Inger of Ostraat* was written at Bergen in 1854,¹ when Ibsen was twenty-six and, like most young authors, attracted by big themes and full of big projects. To create "saga-dramas" based on Norway's history was his ambition at this time; and *Lady Inger*, which deals with one of the blackest periods in the fortunes of Norway, was the outcome. The chief characters in the play bear names that are historic; and if history is outraged in one or two points by the plot, this is not more than has been readily forgiven to many a dramatist in return for a moving situation. There is a considerable sense of bigness about the treatment of the subject, and a considerable sense of character shown in the delineation of the protagonists of the drama, Lady Inger and Nils Lykke. The weakness of the play lies in the complexity of its plot, a weakness very common in the work of young playwrights. The intrigue is skilfully devised, but would inevitably be puzzling in representation except to one who had previously read the play. *Lady Inger of Ostraat* was produced at the Bergen theatre, under Ibsen's direction, in January 1855, but the public was bewildered by its complexity and did not take very kindly to it. Two years later the play was printed in Christiania and offered to the theatre there; but it was not produced there at the time, owing to a disagreement between the author and the director of the theatre as to some alterations which the latter wished to make and the author would not agree to. In 1874 Ibsen published a revised edition of the play; it was eventually performed at Christiania in 1875, and remained in the repertory there till 1882. A Swedish

¹ For further details respecting Ibsen's life and writings, see the introductions to the three preceding volumes of Ibsen's plays in Everyman's Library.