

## THE MEN OF THE NINETIES

It was, in fact, an age of the critical function ; but Beardsley's criticism is of that supreme kind Oscar Wilde called 'creative criticism.'

At one time it was customary for critics to plead that he was only a supreme imitator of the Japanese or somebody ; but, in reality, as has been pointed out by Robert Ross in his admirable essays on his work, he was as intensely original as an illustrator as Sandro Botticelli was in his designs for Dante's Divine Comedy, or William Blake for the drama of Job. None of them interpreted authors for dull people who could not understand what they read. Perhaps the very best way to appreciate his work of this kind is often to take it away from the text, and say this is the way Beardsley saw *The Rape of the Lock*. As for all the supposed influences he is pretended to have laboured under, it can be at once said, he was too restless a personality to accept merely one influence at a time. If he took from anywhere, he took from everywhere, and the result is a great and original draughtsman, the music of whose line has been the theme of many artists. With little stippled lines in the background, and masses of black in the foreground, the Wagnerites burgeon forth. Black and white in some of his drawings even tell us the colour