

THE MEN OF THE NINETIES

lavishly, like Shakespeare, from any source that suits him. Beardsley's illustrations are generally critical decorations, although it must never be forgotten he did attempt on more than one occasion a series of illustration pure and simple in, for example, his early scenes for *Maïon Lescaut*, *La Dame aux Camélias*, and *Madame Bovary*, which are not altogether successful. He is perhaps at his best as the illustrating critic, which he is somewhat scornfully in *Salomé*, very happily in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, and triumphantly in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. It can be said of his work, rather sweepingly no doubt, but still truthfully, he began by decorating books with his *Le Morte d'Arthur*; he then tried illustrating them; but wound up in criticising them by his decorations. 'Have you noticed,' he once wrote to Father Gray, 'have you noticed that no book ever gets well illustrated once it becomes a classic? Contemporary illustrations are the only ones of any value or interest.' But Beardsley was always more than a mere illustrator, for where a learned Editor writes notes and annotations on Aristophanes, he decorates him; where Arthur Symonds would write an essay on *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Beardsley does a number of critical designs.