

Introduction

ix

Breed"—the Norwegian word *Emne* signifying literally "subject-matter" or "material."

Pillars of Society (*Samfundets Støtter*) found a readier home on the stage, not only in Ibsen's own country but in others. From his retreat in Italy he had (in the years intervening between *The Pretenders* and this play) sent *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* to astonish and delight his fellow-countrymen and to lay the foundations of a wider fame. *Pillars of Society* was first produced in Copenhagen in 1877, and soon became an established favourite in the theatres of the other Scandinavian countries and of Germany. One or two isolated performances of it have been given in this country, also in America and in France. Mr. William Archer, in an interesting introduction to his version of the play, points out that the reason why, except in Scandinavia and Germany, it has nowhere taken a permanent hold upon the theatre, is easy to find; for, "by the time the English, American and French public had fully awakened to the existence of Ibsen, he himself had so far outgrown the phase of his development marked by *Pillars of Society*, that the play already seemed commonplace and old-fashioned."

However that may be, the play has great interest to the student of Ibsen from the fact of its being its author's first serious effort in the social drama, and his first experiment with methods which he subsequently perfected. It is an entertaining play, moreover, with a plot that is a model of ingenuity; and, though the "irony" of the drama may occasionally come a little too pat, it is at the same time undeniably effective. No doubt, too, the later Ibsen would not have allowed the guilty man to escape Nemesis to so great an extent, but would have let it swoop remorselessly upon him; but, at the time the play was written, such a thing would have irretrievably have ruined its chances of success—even if, indeed, it would have suggested itself to Ibsen at that stage of his development.

Nine years later, however, in *Rosmersholm*, remorselessness of logic and remorseless fidelity to the actual cruelties of life overshadow everything else. A *Doll's*