

THE MEN OF THE NINETIES

PROLOGUE

THE day Beardsley left his stool and ledger in a London insurance office and betook himself seriously to the illustration of that strange comic world of Congreve, a new manifestation of English art blossomed. It had, no doubt, been a long time germinating in the minds of many men, and there had been numerous signs pointing the way on which the artistic tendencies of the nineties would travel. For example, just about the same time as Beardsley's eighteenth year, a coterie of young men, fresh from the Varsity in many cases, made their appearance in London openly proclaiming the doctrine of art for art's sake under the ægis of Oscar Wilde. So in the last age of hansom cabs and dying Victorian etiquette, these young men determined that the rather dull and literary world of London should flower like another Paris.

If, for the sake of making a beginning, one