

The play is a remarkably fine example of historical drama, and, both in conception and execution, is an astonishing advance on *The Warriors at Helgeland*,¹ which preceded it by only five years. Every character in *The Pretenders* is alive and well individualised; the whole play is full of movement; many passages in the dialogue show a subtlety of thought well worthy of the later Ibsen; and—besides the two contrasted figures of Haakon and Skule, and the sweet womanliness of Margrete, torn by her divided emotions as wife of the one combatant and daughter of the other—the play contains, in the sinister figure of Bishop Nicholas and the ingenuity of his malicious intrigue, a study of character of which any dramatist might be proud. Moreover, the gradual revelation, as the play proceeds, of the train of intrigue laid by the Bishop is a significant foreshadowing of Ibsen's later method in that respect, a method seen at its fullest use in *Rosmersholm*. Skule's personality, too, is not unlike that of an early and more rudimentary Rosmer. The ill-judged lapse into the supernatural in the second scene of the last act, with the Bishop's reappearance as a phantom monk and his outburst of prophetic rhetoric, is the only blot on the play.

The Pretenders was written in a few months, and was produced in Christiania early in 1864, with complete success. So little, however, was Ibsen's name known at the time, that it was seven years before the play was seen in Denmark, and eight more before it reached Stockholm, though it had been played in Germany in 1875. It had never been acted in this country until February of the present year, when an interesting production of it, though necessarily somewhat reduced in its proportions, took place at the Haymarket theatre. The play's name in the original, *Kongs-Emnerne*, is difficult to translate. *The Pretenders*, a title first adopted by Mr. William Archer in his translation, is a useful equivalent; but the original name has more the sense of "Heirs to the Crown," or "Men of Royal

¹ Published in the volume of Ibsen's plays entitled *Ghosts, and Two Other Plays*, in "Everyman's Library."