

IBSEN ON HIS MERITS

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Ibsen on his merits by Sir Edward R. Russell & Percy Cross Standing

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SIR EDWARD R. RUSSELL & PERCY CROSS STANDING

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BY

SIR EDWARD R. RUSSELL

AND

PERCY CROSS STANDING.

"I have boldly dared to plan
The re-fashioning of Man,"

LONDON: CHAPMAN & HALL, LD.

1897.

PREFATORY.



THE "excuse" for this volume is partly to be found in the recently revived interest of English people in the vogue of Ibsen; and partly in the fact that, with the exception of Mr. Bernard Shaw, practically no one in this country has had courage or encouragement sufficient to issue in permanent form any lengthy appreciation or criticism of Dr. Ibsen's works. A portion of Sir Edward Russell's contribution was originally delivered in the form of a public lecture, but is now carefully revised and brought up to date. Much has been said and written for and against the Ibsen

formula; and if the present writers have occasionally delivered themselves in terms of almost unrestrained enthusiasm, they have not done so without having first sought to reconcile the unqualified condemnation of some critics with the facts as they are. It will be observed that the concluding chapter, dealing with the play of *John Gabriel Borkman*, is jointly written.

PART I.

BY

SIR EDWARD RUSSELL.

IBSEN ON HIS MERITS.

IF the contributions of human spirits to each other's enlightenment and delight are to fructify to the utmost, it is much more important for critics to recognize the merits than to signalize the defects of great authors. And when a high place has been conquered in letters or art, there are few critics who are entitled to pronounce positively against the work by which such a position has been attained. You would not suppose this from much that you read. Nothing is easier than to dispose of the claims of a new great man. Shakespeare, Beethoven, Garrick, Darwin, Wagner, Whitman, and many others have with great facility been shown to be worthy

4 Ibsen on his Merits.

of extinction; but somehow they have not gone out. Ibsen will not go out either.

In what I shall try to say about him I shall try to appreciate rather than depreciate. It is a significant benevolence of language that "appreciate" in its transitive sense means to appraise with some degree of gusto. I shall hope to assist you in admiring Ibsen, without exaggerating what is good and great in his works—without even ignoring his defects or faults. Whatever else Ibsen is, he certainly is not perfect.

But by what standard are we to judge him? He is a playwright. All his plays—even the unlikeliest—have been acted. Yet among us several must be considered unactable, and none are truly popular. As a beginning we must recognize that British taste, or even British classification of plays unsuitable for representation, is not of absolute authority. For this man has caught