roles were Major Petkoff in the first production of *Arms and the Man* (1894) and the Waiter in *You Never Can Tell* (1900).

Widowers' Houses: IV

G. LOWES DICKINSON

From *The Autobiography of G. Lowes Dickinson and Other Unpublished Writings*, ed. Dennis Proctor (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1973) pp. 158–9.

In 1892 I tell how I went to see his first play *Widowers' Houses* at its first appearance; and I am a little surprised at my verdict.

It was a socialist tract against slum-landlords and possibly effective from that point of view: – as a play miserably dreary and unconvincing, all the personages unintelligible and repulsive caricatures, and even the dialogue not very clear. I don't like my powder and jam mixed in that inartistic way.

This sounds like the sort of criticism I am always hearing from intellectuals and lovers of the drama. I haven't read the play in question, or seen it, since, so I don't know what I should think now of my comments. I remember, however, one thing; that after the performance there was a great deal of noise and hissing,¹ and that after some time the manager appeared to say that Mr Shaw had left the theatre. Whereupon Mr Shaw appeared upon the stage, very pale, and began a speech: 'I hope,' he said, 'that the time is coming when a play like this will be impossible.' 'It's impossible now,' from the gallery. 'It's not impossible now, for it's just been performed,' from Shaw. And so on.

NOTE

1. In May 1921 Shaw told Lady Gregory, 'The first night of my *Widowers' Houses* I came in to see half the House applauding, half booing, but I didn't mind. And I have never felt nervous at the performance of my own plays. The only times in my life I felt really nervous was at the Opera in Dublin when my mother sang – though she always did well, yet I used to suffer from anxiety' (*Lady Gregory's Journals*, ed. Daniel J. Murphy, Coole Edition xiv [Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1978] p. 256).