

CHAPTER V.

SEPTEMBER, 1876-1878.

Plays Hamlet in the provinces—Address from the Undergraduates of Trinity College, Dublin—The Lyceum Theatre reopens with “Macbeth”—Acts Richard III.—Is presented with Edmund Kean’s sword, and the same actor’s Order of St. George—The Baroness Burdett-Coutts gives him a ring which formerly belonged to David Garrick—Appears as Lesurques and Duboscq—Plays Louis XI.—“Vanderdecken.”

IN the autumn of this year (1876), Mr. Irving went on a tour in the provinces, where his reception was most enthusiastic. In critical Manchester alone, nearly eighteen thousand people visited the theatre where he was playing. He acted also at Birmingham, Liverpool, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow, Belfast, and Dublin. In the latter city he was accorded a very gratifying honour. On December 9th, the graduates and undergraduates of Trinity College assembled in the historic dining-hall of the University of Dublin to present him with a public address, which was read by Mr. Edward Gibson, Q.C., M.P.:—

“Address to Henry Irving, Esq., presented by the Graduates and Undergraduates of Trinity College, Dublin.”

“SIR,—The engagement which you bring to a conclusion to-night at the Theatre Royal has given the liveliest pleasure to the graduates and undergraduates of Trinity College, Dublin.

“To the most careful students of Shakespeare you have, by your scholarly and original interpretation, revealed new depths of

meaning in 'Hamlet,' and aroused in the minds of all a fresh interest in our highest poetry.

"As Charles I., in the new drama of our countryman, Mr. Wills, you have set forth the dignity of fallen grandeur. You have depicted in the 'The Bells,' with a terrible fidelity, the Nemesis that waits on crime.

"For the delight and instruction that we (in common with our fellow-citizens) have derived from all your impersonations, we tender you our sincere thanks. But it is something more than gratitude for personal pleasure or personal improvement that moves us to offer this public homage to your genius. Acting such as yours ennobles and elevates the stage, and serves to restore it to its true function as a potent instrument for intellectual and moral culture.

"Throughout your too brief engagement our stage has been a school of true art, a purifier of the passions, and a nurse of heroic sentiments; you have even succeeded in commending it to the favour of a portion of society, large and justly influential, who usually hold aloof from the theatre.

"It is not too much to say that, with opportunities such as you have afforded us, Dublin audiences might again become what tradition reports them once to have been—a tribunal whose approval went far to make the fame of an artist hitherto unknown, and without whose sanction no reputation was considered to be absolutely assured."

On that night "Hamlet" was performed before a vast audience, which included the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland and His Grace the Duke of Connaught. Five hundred of the students of Trinity College occupied the pit on this eventful evening. The