

IV

HONOURS FROM DUBLIN UNIVERSITY

*Public Address—University Night—Carriage Dragged
by Students*

DURING that visit to Dublin, 1876, Irving received at the hands of the University two honours, one of them unique. Both were accorded by all grades of the College—for Dublin University is the University of the College.

Both honours were unofficial and yet both entirely representative. Both were originated by a few of us the morning after his first performance of *Hamlet*—before I had the honour of knowing him personally. The first was an Address to be presented in the Dining Hall by the Graduates and Undergraduates of the University. The movement came from a few enthusiasts of whom the late G. F. Shaw and Professor R. Y. Tyrrell, both Fellows of the University, were included. As I had originated the idea I was asked by the Committee to write the draft address.

One of the paragraphs, when completed, ran as follows :

“ 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.”

The Address was signed with the names necessary to show its scope and wide significance.

To this Irving replied suitably. I give some passages of his speech; for the occasion was a memorable one, with far-reaching consequences to himself and his art and calling:

“I believe that this is one of the very rare occasions on which public acknowledgment has been given by an Academic body to the efforts of a player, and this belief impresses me with the magnitude of the honour which you have conferred. . . . I feel not merely the personal pride of individual success which you thus avow, but that the far nobler work which I aim at is in truth begun. When I think that you, the upholders of the classic in every age, have thus flung aside the traditions of three centuries, and have acknowledged the true union of poet and actor, my heart swells with a great pride that I should be the recipient of such acknowledgment. I trust with all my soul that the reform which you suggest may ere long be carried out, and that that body to whom is justly entrusted our higher moral education may recognise in the Stage a medium for the accomplishment of such ends. What you have done to-day is a mighty stride in this direction. In my profession it will be hailed with joy and gladness—it must elevate, not only the aims of in-