## MR. CHARLES DICKENS AT BIRMINGHAM.

The good people of Birmingham may well congratulate themselves on the manner in which they have been spending the Christmas week. While the inhabitants of our other large towns have been contenting themselves with pantomimes and the other usual amusements of the season, it has been their good fortune and privilege to be gathered together like one great family into their fine hall, listening to the most admired fiction-writer of his time, who had come down among them on a mission of most seasonable good will and benevolence. In times past several attempts have been made at Birmingham to establish good and useful mechanics' or literary institutions. To a community of the kind ready and powerful means for conveying instruction to the adult population formed an object of very great importance. The efforts, however, which at different periods have been made in that direction have all, sooner or later, ended in failure; and now that the question of education is engaging such serious attention, especially in the manufacturing districts, when from day to day the impression gathers strength that the position which we have acquired by our material resources and our industry can only be secured to us by superior intelligence, the people of Birmingham are wisely alive to their wants in that respect. On the 16th of January, 1853, they adopted the outline of a comprehensive scheme for the formation of a new institute, and since that time they have been actively engaged in devising and maturing the means for the accomplishment of their design. It is one of a comprehensive character, involving a large preliminary outlay, and presenting difficulties which those who are conversant with the nature of such undertakings will best no loss to understand. The present idea is that the institute should comprehend two departments, the first special in its character, and confined to schools of industrial science; the other general, and embracing libraries, reading-rooms, lectures, museums, mining records, meetings for the discussion of original communications, accommodation for the literary societies of the town, and a gallery of art. It is proposed to secure the permanence of the institute by vesting the property in the corporation of Birmingham as trustees, and the necessary buildings are not to be commenced until the amount which is required for their completion, and which is estimated at 20,000*l.*, has been obtained. To collect such a sum as this by voluntary contributions, even in the manufacturing capital of the midland counties, is a matter of no ordinary difficulty; but it shows how earnest the inhabitants are in a cause which all must applaud, and it proves that the memorable lesson which the Great Exhibition of 1851 taught the productive classes of this country has not been forgotten.

But the interest felt in undertakings of this description in a country so full of public spirit as ours is never entirely local, and aid comes to them not unfrequently from distant and unexpected sources. It may seem strange, but it is nevertheless true, that the best friend which the new Birmingham Institute has yet found is Mr. Charles Dickens. Actuated, probably, by no other motive than that deep sympathy which breathes through his works for the humbler classes, he has collected and placed at the disposal of the committee a larger sum than any other subscriber. On the evenings of Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday last he presented himself to the inhabitants of Birmingham, in their town hall, and, to their great gratification, read his *Christmas Carol* and his *Cricket on the Hearth*. The former, selected for Tuesday, was repeated on Friday, and on both occasions, but especially the last, was received with unbounded admiration. The latter did not tell so strongly, but was nevertheless very favourably received. During the three nights of his appearance 6,000 people attended, and the spacious hall, which on the first two nights was filled with the wealthier classes, on the third almost exclusively reserved for the operatives and their families. It is an unprecedented thing now-a-days to hear authors reading their own works in public. The simple fashion of bardic times is past, and the fastidiousness of modern refined minds or fancies something egotistical in such displays. It is within the narrow circle of private life that the man of literary genius has alone been considered privileged to develope his own conceptions of what he has written. The multiplication of books seems to remove him further and further from personal observation, and we neglect to gratify while yet we may that natural curiosity which, when the object is gone, gives a charm to the reminiscences of friendship and inspires many of the most ingenious speculations of commentators and critics. The appearance of Mr. Dickens at Birmingham is a return to the practice of the olden time, while the benevolent object in view is a complete answer to any insinuation of vanity. Indeed, the writer who encounters a large and intelligent audience with a work of fiction, originally intended for quiet perusal in the closet, braves an ordeal which, unless supported by the highest merit, would soon take the self-complacency out of him. There is probably no author in the country, except Mr. Dickens himself, who would have ventured to do so. The keen perception of character, the genial spirit, the vivid word painting, the minuteness of observation, reminding one of the style of the Dutch masters; above all, the irresistible and original powers of humour and pathos, developed in works which deal principally with society among the middle and humbler classes, while they have achieved for him immense popularity, are possessed in the same measure by none of his contemporaries. To these characteristics of his genius he adds an excellent voice, distinct, well-toned, audible to a very large assembly without apparent effort, and which he modulates with much elementary skill. His manner also is perfectly self-possessed and unembarrassed. Practice in amateur theatricals enables him to introduce into dialogues and conversations especially a judicious and enlivening amount of dramatic effect, but this he has the good taste not to carry too far, nor in the actor to sink the individuality of the author. Bringing these personal advantages to bear upon such a work as the *Christmas Carol*, is it wonderful that Mr. Dickens should have achieved a triumphant success in the benevolent object which took him to Birmingham? He has not left an unconverted "Scrooge" in the great hardware metropolis; he has added some 500*l.* or 600*l.* to the fund for the new institute, and he has filled the minds and hearts of the working classes especially with an appreciation of his talents which they never could have gathered from his writings. Among the multitude of readers how few are gifted with that fine discernment which determines the just value of literary merit; overlooks no beauty, however modestly withdrawn, and no defect, however artfully concealed! But, though only one man in a thousand may be able unaided to extract from a book its true significance, let the author be a good elocutionist and consent to fill the office of reader, and the whole rise at once by an easy effort to the level of intelligent appreciation. So it was on the occasions to which we are referring, but most so on the Friday evening, when Mr. Dickens entertained the working men and their families. All the large establishments of Birmingham were well represented there, and it was, indeed a spectacle of some novelty, and not devoid of high interest, to see nearly 2,000 people, whose lives are one long round of material toil, forgetting themselves during hours that never sped more swiftly to the pleasures of the imagination and the present influence of genius. They formed an eagerly attentive and delighted audience, catching up with their applause every stroke of humour, self-consciousness, and pathos, and, when the ordeal of a public ordeal he had lopped off everything to which the knife of the critic would have been applied. His tendency to exaggeration and overcolouring became subdued, and the truthfulness of his delineations, thus selected down, grew all the strikingly powerful. It may be remarked, therefore, as one feature of such readings, that their influence, even when the audience is comparatively illiterate, is in a healthy direction upon the mind of the author, whose peculiarities are always more or less liable to be warped by the partiality of his own coterie. By a dexterous use of that humour which with Dickens is never out of place, and often adds point to the profoundest pathos, he has hit upon an intelligible resting place between this world and the world of shadows to which the hardest headed mechanic in Birmingham can unhesitatingly follow his flight. They all did so the other night, and not one among them but accompanied the three spirits of Christmas back into their own youthful days, then through their present, and then forward towards the dark and mysterious future. "It is a fair, even handed, noble adjustment of things," says the author of the *Carol*, "that while there is infection in disease and sorrow there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humour."

## THE WEATHER.

METEOROLOGICAL REPORT FROM THE HIGH-FIELD-HOUSE OBSERVATORY.

| Dec. 26, at 10 p.m. | | Dec. 30, at 9 p.m. |
|---|---|---|
| Barometer (reduced) | 29·867 inches. | 29·494 inches. |
| Thermometer | 27·2 | 38·7 |
| Wet bulb thermometer | 26· | 26·5 |
| Direction of wind | S.S.W. | W.S.W. |
| Force of wind | 1·2 | 0·5 |
| Amount of rain | 0·000 inch. | 0·042 inch. |
| Amount of cloud | 10 | 0·5 |

Remarks.—Thursday—greatest heat in shade, 28·3°; fine; very hard frost; wind changed to S.S.W. about 4 p.m.; brilliant sunset; wind rough in the evening. Friday morning—greatest cold in night, 24·8°; at 2 a.m., snow; 3 a.m., rain; 4 a.m., starlight again; cloudy, distance hazy, thawing. Amount of evaporation, frozen.

## SPORTING INTELLIGENCE.

### HUNTING APPOINTMENTS.

(Weather permitting.)

STAGHOUNDS.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Her Majesty's | Tuesday | Windsor common | 11 0 |
| | Friday | Brackwell | 11 0 |
| Baron Rothschild's | Thursday | Mentmore | 11 0 |
| Bath Subscription | Thursday | Westbury | 11 0 |
| Petre's, Hon. F. | Tuesday | Leadon, Boding | 11 30 |

FOXHOUNDS.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Albrighton | Tuesday | Dudmaston | 10 30 |
| | Thursday | Island Pool | 10 0 |
| | Saturday | Hagley Top | 10 30 |
| Atherstone | Wednesday | Red Lion, Appleby | 11 0 |
| | Friday | Brownsover | 11 0 |
| | Saturday | Colbury | 11 0 |
| Badsworth | Tuesday | Haugh-end | 10 30 |
| | Thursday | Weathers-green | 10 30 |
| | Saturday | South Hardley | 10 30 |
| Belsize | Wednesday | Pickhill village | 10 30 |
| | Friday | Leyburn late Statum | 10 30 |
| Berkshire (Old) | Wednesday | Wyfold | 10 0 |
| | Friday | Lidcote | 10 30 |
| Blackmore Vale | Thursday | Nash Wood | 10 45 |
| Brocklesby | Wednesday | Gatefeth | 10 30 |
| | Friday | Beckenham | 10 30 |
| | Saturday | Rhiwsaesne | 10 30 |
| Beaufort's, Duke of | The first open day | Tetbury | 10 30 |
| Cheshire | Wednesday | Saughton | 10 30 |
| | Thursday | Tarporley | 10 30 |
| | Saturday | Whitchurch | 10 30 |
| Collier's, Mr. | Tuesday | Stanstead R. | 10 30 |
| | Thursday | Bath-wood | 10 30 |
| | Saturday | Flitt house | 10 30 |
| Cottesmore | Tuesday | Market Overton | 11 0 |
| | Thursday | Hambleton | 11 0 |
| | Saturday | Langham | 11 0 |
| Craven | First open day | At the Kennels | 11 0 |
| Crawley and Horsham | Wednesday | Wardham village | 10 45 |
| | Friday | Exhibition | 11 0 |
| Drake's, Mr. | Tuesday | Weston peat gate | 10 45 |
| | Thursday | Horton-common | 10 45 |
| | Saturday | Lower Boxlinghole village | 10 45 |
| Durham County | Wednesday | Sunderland bridge | 10 30 |
| | Friday | Kimblesworth | 10 30 |
| Essex, East | Tuesday | Church Fairgreen | 10 30 |
| | Thursday | Mossing-street | 10 30 |
| | Saturday | Goodrich, King's Head | 10 30 |
| Essex and Suffolk | Tuesday | Belsted hall | 11 45 |
| | Friday | Cockington hall gate | 11 45 |
| Essex | First open day | Blackmore | 11 0 |
| Essex Union | Wednesday | Harlowbury hall | 11 0 |
| | Saturday | Ashington waste | 11 0 |
| Essex, South | Tuesday | Foulne blacksmiths | 11 0 |
| | Saturday | Great Leighs | 11 0 |
| Garth's, Mr. | First open day | Mole, Arlesford | 11 0 |
| Hambleton | Wednesday | Flat-wash park | 10 45 |
| | Friday | The Kennels, Dromfret | 10 45 |
| Herefordshire | Tuesday | Tillington common | 10 30 |
| | Friday | Newport, Burghill | 10 0 |
| Heythrop (Lord Redesdale) | Wednesday | Barton gate | 10 30 |
| | Friday | Adlestrop house | 10 30 |
| | Saturday | Blenheim | 10 30 |
| Holderness | Tuesday | Goodmanham wold-house | 10 45 |
| | Friday | Everingham park | 10 45 |
| | Saturday | Lissett | 10 45 |
| H. H. | Tuesday | Hinton house | 10 45 |
| | Thursday | Cuddesdon village | 10 45 |
| | Saturday | Chislehurst | 10 45 |
| Hurworth | Tuesday | Neasham | 10 30 |
| | Saturday | Girlington | 10 30 |
| Ingram's, (Mr. H. C.) Meynell | Tuesday | Kedleston | 10 45 |
| | Thursday | Markeaton | 10 45 |
| | Saturday | Swarkestone bridge | 10 45 |
| Lesbury | Friday | Fox-wood | 10 30 |
| Lismore | Tuesday | Newry | 10 30 |
| | Friday | Bloomfield-hill | 10 30 |
| Lowndes's, Mr. | First open day | Emmington kennels | 10 30 |
| Lukin's, Mr. | Tuesday | Sandhurst park | 10 30 |
| | Thursday | Dyke-lane | 10 30 |
| | Friday | Grangley | 10 30 |
| Monmouthshire | Thursday | Skenfrith, Inglee | 10 30 |
| New Forest | Tuesday | Eaton's bench | 10 30 |
| | Thursday | Brockenhurst house | 10 30 |
| | Saturday | Burley | 10 30 |
| Pytchley | Tuesday | Brixworth hall | 10 45 |
| | Wednesday | North Kilworth | 10 45 |
| | Friday | Crassly | 10 45 |
| | Saturday | Sandy-lodge | 10 45 |
| Quorn (Sir Richard Sutheby) | First open day | Quorn kennels | 11 0 |
| Radford | Tuesday | Whitefield | 10 30 |
| | Thursday | Thrapston priory | 10 30 |
| | Saturday | Gayhurst | 10 30 |
| Smith's, Mr. A. | Tuesday | Ore hill | 11 0 |
| | Wednesday | Waterfield | 11 0 |
| Shropshire | Thursday | Acton Burnell | 11 0 |
| Staindrop | Tuesday | Staindrop | 10 0 |
| | Friday | Cockfield | 10 0 |
| South Devon (Mr. Whitbread) | Thursday | New Inn, Houghton | 11 0 |
| Southwold Hunt | Wednesday | Cockfield | 10 30 |
| Staffordshire, North | Wednesday | Barlaston hall | 10 30 |
| | Friday | Thursfield, near Market Drayton | 10 30 |
| Suffolk | Tuesday | Fornham-st-Genevieve | 11 45 |
| | Thursday | Denham Chamber's Arms | 11 45 |
| Somerset Subscription | Tuesday | Ashcott wood | 10 30 |
| | Friday | Wick park | 10 30 |
| Southwold | Thursday | Hambleton | 11 0 |
| | Saturday | Herringfleet | 11 0 |
| Tickham | Thursday | Wilmington | 11 45 |
| | Saturday | Tunstall | 10 45 |
| Tindale | Thursday | Stanfordham | 10 30 |
| | Saturday | Rising hill | 10 30 |
| Tiverton | Thursday | Pitton village, near Hampton | 10 30 |
| | Saturday | Bradninch | 10 30 |
| Tunbridge Wells | Thursday | Wood-burst | 10 30 |
| | Saturday | The Common | 10 30 |
| United Pack | Tuesday | Stratford-bridge | 10 0 |
| | Saturday | Castle Hotel, Bishop's Castle | 9 0 |
| V.W.H., Mr. Valentine's | Tuesday | Aston park | 10 45 |
| | Thursday | Charlton park | 10 45 |
| | Saturday | Ancoats village | 10 45 |
| Vine | Tuesday | Sherborne park | 11 0 |