

of genius. They formed an eagerly attentive and delighted audience, catching up with their applause every stroke of humour and melting at each touch of pathos, sensitive to all the changing emotions which it is the object of fiction to evoke, and yielding a ready homage to that magic power which, by the bonds of sympathy, "makes the whole world kin." It is in the midst of such assemblages that we perceive the value to authors, as to every one else, of that genial and kindly spirit which old Jacob Marley would not permit to go forth in life, and which condemned him to wander through the world after death, dragging after him his chain of cashboxes. Dickens, at least, possesses that spirit, or he would not have listened to so delightedly by the artisans of Birmingham. The object which had induced him to come among them had already opened their hearts to him, but the following observations, with which he prefaced his reading, confirmed him in their favour:—

"My good friends," he said, "when I first imparted to the committee of the projected institute my particular wish that on one of the evenings of my readings here the main body of my audience should be composed of working men and their families (cheers) I was animated by two desires—first, by the wish to have the great pleasure of meeting you face to face at this Christmas time, and accompanying myself through one of my little Christmas books (cheers); and, second, by the wish to have an opportunity of stating publicly, in your presence and in the presence of the committee, my earnest hope that the institute will from the beginning recognize one great principle, strong in reason and justice, which I believe to be essential to the very life of such an institution. It is, that the working man shall, from the first unto the last, have a share in the management of an institution which is designed for his benefit, and which calls itself by his name. (Cheers.) I have no fear here of being misunderstood—of being supposed to mean too much in this. If there ever was a time when any one class could of itself do much for its own good and for the welfare of society, which I greatly doubt, that time is unquestionably past. It is in the fusion of different classes, without confusion; in the bringing together of employers and employed; in the creating of a better common understanding among those whose interests are identical, who depend upon each other, who are vitally essential to each other, and who never can be in unnatural antagonism without deplorable results, that one of the chief principles of a mechanics' institution should consist. (Cheers.) In this world a great deal of the bitterness among us arises from an imperfect understanding of one another. (Cheers.) Erect in Birmingham a great educational institution—properly educational—educational of the feelings as well as of the reason—to which all orders of Birmingham men contribute, in which all orders of Birmingham men meet, wherein all orders of Birmingham men are faithfully represented, and you will erect a temple of concord here which will be a model edifice to the whole of England. (Loud cheers.) Contemplating as I do the existence of the Artisan's Committee, which not long ago considered the establishment of the institute so sensibly and supported it so heartily, I earnestly entreat the gentlemen—earnest I know in the good work, and who are now among us—by all means to avoid the great shortcoming of similar institutions; and, in asking the working man for his confidence, to set him the example, and give him theirs in return. (Great cheering.) You will judge for yourselves if I promise too much for the working man when I say, that he will stand by such an enterprise with the utmost of his patience, his perseverance, sense, and spirit; that I am sure he will need no charitable aid or condescending patronage; but will readily and cheerfully pay for the advantages which it confers; that he will prepare himself in individual cases where he feels that the adverse circumstances around him have rendered it necessary; in a word, that he will feel his responsibility like an honest man, and will most honestly and manfully discharge it. (Great cheering.) I now proceed," he concluded, "to the pleasant task, to which, I assure you, I have looked forward for a long time."

And a pleasant task it was, certainly—pleasantly discharged, and most agreeably accepted. The audience never wandered for a moment. The reader, in return, took care not to tax their attention too much. There are many things in the most interesting books intended for quiet perusal which would fatigue a large assemblage of listeners. Even the *Carol* can afford some concessions in this respect, and in the *Cricket on the Hearth* there is still more room for judicious curtailment. Mr. Dickens managed this admirably, and it was curious to observe how nearly under the pressure