

Everybody was moved by the way in which the story was told. Mr. Dickens lent his momentary, or played as if he enjoyed the whole affair immensely, and as if the story was told for his own especial pleasure and delight, had a great effect, and were done just as you would expect a man to do in his own house with a party of congenial souls, and nobody but very near and intimate friends around him. Everybody felt this; and so having established these most amiable relations, they set themselves to work to appreciate every point, joke, and snatch of humour; every gleam of deep feeling; every touch of that nature which makes the whole world kin. And they did it most intelligently. The laugh and the sob—for there were tears also—followed the joke or the pathos, as sharply as the crack of the rifle follows the touch of the trigger. Indeed, nobody could help it. The strong, manly, off-hand, unaffected elocution, artful for all that, though almost undistinguishable from utter spontaneity;—the touching pathos, the tragic power, the genial, good-natured, honest feeling of brotherhood and humanity,—spoken so earnestly and with so true an utterance, was quite contagious. There was nobody in the Hall that didn't feel it. You may be bound that not a Scrooge, in his primitive state, left his walls.

Even the bits of narrative where dramatic action flagged—where ordinary readers would find little meaning beyond the surface, and which people would skip—that is to say, if they could skip anything of Dickens's—were invested with such gleams of light, and so personified and individualised, that you saw a new world in the word-pictures, and could sympathise even with Scrooge's door-knocker. The rich tracery of quaint fun and subtle wit; of cutting sarcasm, although spoken kindly; and of deep feeling, was never so beautifully seen, and never looked so tasteful and true as when shown by the author himself. It is no slight thing to say we think that we have met nearly two thousand men, unaided, telling an old tale, kept nearly two thousand people charmed—spell-bound by the fascinations of his genius and the witchery of his kindly sympathy—all the time. Mr. Dickens did it; we don't know that any other body could. If they can, we should like to see them, that's all; and then we shall begin to believe in the possibility of a second Pickwick. And after it was all over, the company went home in the snow, and without care, warm at heart, glowing with goodwill and happiness, making all sorts of resolutions to check the current of selfishness which had begun to set in—to be more brotherly, and before they went to bed that night, echoing the prayer of Tiny Tim, "God bless Us Every One!"

THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH.

Thursday night was no improvement on the evening but one before, so far as the weather was concerned. There was still ice and snow upon the ground below; keen, trenchant, cutting winds above. But a larger party than ever assembled to hear the chirping of "The Cricket,"—about two thousand of them—sitting all in evening dress, which made the place look very gay indeed. And they enjoyed a treat that compensated for all the inconvenience of a pedestrian excursion through the crisp snow, in the absence of cabs and cars, which, like policemen, are never to be found when wanted. No doubt the chirpings of the Cricket and the staves of the Carol are, though both musical, widely different. So Mr. Dickens said himself, by the way. He should have preferred some of its brother tales, the Cricket being deficient in that dramatic interest which he was vain enough to think some of the others possessed. He even went so far in his own well-known obstinate way as to prepare for another; and even proceeded to the length of telling the committee so; but they fell into low spirits immediately, and being pleased to speak of its homely domestic character, and of his being sure to have the support of every one of the ladies, he consented at an immense sacrifice to his feelings to lay "The Cricket" at their feet. And he did; and fine, rich, happy music it made: it was a perfect Festival in itself.

The good rough honest carrier, John Perrybingle, who was always "very near it," how strongly and vividly he stood before everybody, till they could have shaken him by the hand! And the cheery, delightful, delicious, dimpling little Dot was a companion that you could have taken to your heart on the spot, at the risk of committing bigamy, and with the moral certainty of being tried for the offence at the next assizes. There were silent tears for poor blind Bertha, sitting alone in her dark world which she had lighted up with beaming love all round, and had extinguished by a breath. Miserable Caleb Plummer, with his sackcloth coat, and the heart that beat so truly under it, and who was always swindling himself; sinister Gruff and Tackleton, cold and hard as iron; the Deaf Old Gentleman that turned out to be the son from the golden South American; that peevish genteel chip of a lady, Mrs. Fielding, with her convulsion in the Indigo trade; that wonderful baby, "equal to the general run of children at five months old," and that imitable Tilly Slowboy, who handed round the baby aforesaid "as if it was something to drink"—why, every one of them was standing before you in the Hall that night talking to you. Including Boxer and the Kettle, not to speak of the Cricket, or the Haymaker on the Dutch clock, or the Cuckoo that came out of the trap door in the Moorish palace for nothing in the world but to hieep—there they all were. And most admirable company they were, too, as ever you would wish to meet.

That marvellous power of personification which Mr. Dickens possesses, putting life and sympathy—which is always kindly and benevolent, into everything—made the long narrative full of bustling active motion, that supplied the place of rapidity of action, and carried the attention and the interest triumphantly through to the very end. Many of the scenes of course provoked great wrath; some of them tears; but you would be puzzled to say which people liked best, as they cheered both tremendously; and with no less power and effect many parts which had neither wit nor pathos in them, but were genial heads of human nature, displayed under ordinary circumstances, but so truthfully powerfully spoken that you were betrayed into a response hearty and cordial as the feeling which elicited it before you were aware

of it. (Great cheering.) I now proceed to the pleasant task, to which, I assure you, I have looked forward for a long time.

And he did it with racy and most excellent humour; and without a jot less graphic power, and telling elocution than before. No party enjoyed the whole affair more; and the admirably cordial relation between the host and his guests contributed to make the evening one of the happiest of the whole. There was not a single point they did not "take;" not a joke missed fire; not a bit of tender feeling did not find a response. It was one of the finest things, without exception, ever seen in that Hall. And when the story was finished, and Captain Tindal, as Chairman of the Institute Committee, proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. Dickens, and put the motion, a deafening "aye," that sounded like a thunder-clap, pealed out in a moment, subsiding into a round of applause bearing a strong resemblance to the report of a whole park of artillery. But they were not content with that—were these working men. They had their hearts in the affair, and were resolved to do it thoroughly; so one of them got up in the body of the Hall, and called for "three cheers for Charles Dickens," which were given with overpowering effect, and were extended to three more for "Mrs. Dickens," quite as lustily and heartily as before, or more so, if that was within the bounds of possibility. Of course Mr. Dickens made his acknowledgments. He said:—

You have heard so much of my voice since we met to-night, that I will only say, in acknowledgment of this affecting mark of your regard, that I am truly and sincerely interested in you; that any little service I have been able to render you I have freely rendered from my heart—[applause]—that I hope to become an honorary member of your great institution—[great applause]—and will meet you often there when it becomes practically useful; that I thank you most affectionately for this new mark of your sympathy and approval; and that I wish you many happy returns of this great birth-day time, and many prosperous years. [Great cheering.]

It was very near eleven o'clock before the story was ended, and the party broke up; but there were no thoughts of going home so long as there was a line to be read; and accordingly there they sat in high glee until the very close. And thus finished this unique entertainment. Nearly six thousand people have been partakers of Mr. Dickens's intellectual feast, which ended as few feasts do, with no regrets, but with kindly feelings to every one; and in lessons of brotherhood which could not be heard without scattering at least a portion of their influence even upon the most world worn and inaccessible heart.

And the festival of the week, begun and carried out so happily, will end in good fellowship soon after these pages are in the hands of our readers, for the committee of the Institute entertain their entertainer to breakfast this morning. As newspaper people go everywhere, may we say to Mr. Dickens, on behalf of the six thousand—more or less—who have assisted at these Readings, that his genial teachings and kindly philosophy will long help to keep their memory green! And so, with Tiny Tim aforesaid, we repeat, "God Bless Us Every One"—the Scrooges of the world, and the Gruffs and Tackletons, if there be any left, not excepted.

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE ELECTION.

Although the canvass of Lord PAGET has not yet formally been begun, it is symptomatic of his earnestness to find him thus early personally engaged in the work which is so essential to a successful result. His Lordship has, during the week, visited several towns in the district, not with a view to meet and address great bodies of the electors in public meeting, nor for the purpose of any minute canvass of the freeholders generally, but simply to meet and make the acquaintance of some of the most influential of his Lordship's supporters, preparatory to the immediate organisation of local committees, and the appointment of public meetings, whereat the noble candidate will attend and address the electors.

These introductory visits commenced at Walsall on Tuesday, where Lord PAGET was received by CHARLES FORSTER, Esq., M.P., who subsequently introduced him to sixty or seventy gentlemen, hastily assembled at the Dragon Hotel. He was expected at Willenhall also, on the same day, but, owing to some misunderstanding on the part of the committee at Wolverhampton, his Lordship was not aware of the arrangement, and did not reach Willenhall.

At Wolverhampton, on Wednesday, his Lordship was met at the Swan Hotel by the Hon. A. WROTTESELEY, THOMAS BARKER, Esq., E. B. DIMMACK, Esq., H. WALKER, Esq., — THOMPSON, Esq., SIDNEY CARTWRIGHT, Esq., R. A. KETTLE, Esq., T. M. PHILLIPS, Esq., THOMAS BOLTON, Esq., F. WALTON, Esq., G. WYNN, Esq., Alderman BRADSHAW, and a number of other gentlemen, who accompanied him to the Corn Exchange, where his Lordship experienced a most favourable and flattering reception, as well among the agricultural as the commercial portion of the gentlemen assembled. Lord PAGET also called upon the MAYOR, upon W. F. FRYER, Esq., GEORGE ROBINSON, Esq., and several other leading inhabitants, from whom he received very gratifying personal assurances.

On Thursday, his Lordship proceeded to make the acquaintance of some of the principal of the Staffordshire Freeholders residing in Birmingham, where he was visited at Dee's Hotel, by WILLIAM SCHOLEFIELD, Esq., M.P., CHARLES GRACE, Esq., M.P., WILLIAM MATHEWS, Esq., T. KENRICK, Esq., SAMUEL BEALE, Esq., W. BEALE, Esq., WILLIAM WILLS, Esq., GEORGE DAWSON, Esq., Messrs.