

A critique of the reading appeared in the The Dundee, Perth and Cupar Advertiser on October 5th 1858

Mr DICKENS READINGS

□□ *On Friday night Mr Charles Dickens gave his first reading – the Christmas Carol – in the Exchange Hall, Bank Street, in presence of a very large and fashionable audience, who had met to see and hear the most popular novelist of the day.*

The doors were opened at half-past seven o'clock, when the hall immediately began to fill, and within an hour all the available space was completely occupied. Punctually at half-past eight o'clock

Mr Dickens stepped upon the platform in the midst of loud and continued applause. He then in a few words introduced himself to the audience, hoped they would all be as like to a family party as possible, told them to be quite at ease and not restrain themselves in the slightest, but give free-vent to whatever emotions, risible or otherwise, the little ebullition of feeling would not interrupt him, but rather be agreeable.

He then introduced his hearers to the company of Scrooge, the unsocial, selfish, miserly partner of the deceased Jacob Marley ; showed them into the miserable little den of a counting-room, wherein Bob Cratchit, Scrooge's half starved, unimaginative clerk strove in vain to warm himself at a candle ; introduced them also to the notice of those three weird and yet loveable spirits, the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future, who wrought the blessed change on Scrooge the-sordid, and transformed him into a new man, called forth their tears of pity as he read of little, cripple, Tiny Tim ; and threw them into convulsions as he narrated all about old jolly Faiseywig, and his wife, and his family, and Scrooge's nephew and Scrooge's niece by marriage, and that lady's plump sister, and that sister's sweetheart, and little Bob Cratchit's small family's Christmas dinner ; and kept them as merry and as happy as possible during the two hours that the reading occupied.

□□□ *Mr Dickens concluded amid loud applause.*

□□ *On Saturday night, at the same hour, and in the same place he read "The Poor Traveller," "Boots at the Holly Tree Inn," and "Sairey Gamp." The first of these was a beautiful story, beautifully read : the second kept the house in one continued fit of cacchination [sic] ; the third, however – "Sairey Gamp." With her pattens and umbrella, from whom we expected most, was not so good.*

□□ *The attendance on this evening, though large, was very much smaller than on Friday evening ; and we can only account for the falling off from the fact that on Friday Mr Dickens was scarcely heard at all by those in the back seats. Indeed, many even in the reserved seats heard very indistinctly, and only those were acquainted with the readings previously were able to follow every word as it was uttered.*

On October 12th a letter to the editor is printed and is almost worthy of Dickens himself –

MRS GAMP ON THE “STALLS.”

Sir, -

I wonder that you who they say notice everything and let nothing pass have not said one single word about that shameful case of false pretences at Mr Dicken’s readings – I mean the stalls. I may tell you that I am one that like comfort; I always sit at home on a soft-bottomed chair. Now that I am getting old, I like one with spring cushions I never went but once on a railway in a third-class carriage, and I don’t intend to go again. My infirmity, if I have one, is that I must have a soft seat, and certainly, when my respected friend Mrs Harris told me she had paid four shillings for a ticket for the stalls in Lord Kinnaird’s fine new hall, I thought that I was sure of getting a seat with a velvet cushion. You will conceive my feelings then in having to sit two hours upon one of the hardest planks my poor old bones ever did sit upon.

When I got home I said to Mrs Harris, said I, “Mrs Harris,” I said, said I, “none of your crockerydial tears; you have hurt my feelings in my tenderest part. You have known these sixty years and more that if there was anywhere whatsoever where my feelings was acute. And where I need consideration, it was in that part which M Gamp, after he was shot in it at the time

