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Making it in America: How Charles Dickens and His Cunning Manager George Dolby Made Millions from a Performance Tour of The United States, 1867-1868

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MAKING IT IN AMERICA: HOW CHARLES DICKENS AND HIS CUNNING MANAGER
GEORGE DOLBY MADE MILLIONS FROM A PERFORMANCE TOUR OF THE
UNITED STATES, 1867-1868

by

JILLIAN MARTIN

Under the Direction of Leonard Teel, PhD

ABSTRACT

Charles Dickens embarked on a profitable journey to the United States in 1867, when he was the most famous writer in the world. He gave seventy-six public readings, in eighteen cities. Dickens and his manager, George Dolby, devised the tour to cash in on his popularity, and Dickens earned the equivalent of more than three million dollars. They created a persona of Dickens beyond the literary luminary he already was, with the help of the impresario, P.T. Barnum. Dickens became the first British celebrity to profit from paid readings in the United States. This research thesis asks how Dickens earned a fortune from his performance tour.

INDEX WORDS: Dickens, reading tour, entrepreneur, travel to United States

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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JILLIAN MARTIN

Committee Chair: Leonard Teel

Committee: Jack Boozer

Marian Meyers

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderfully supportive family; especially my fantastic husband, Nick, my meticulous editor/devoted father, Ed Martin; and my wonderful children.

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1 Dickens Seeks a Fortune in America

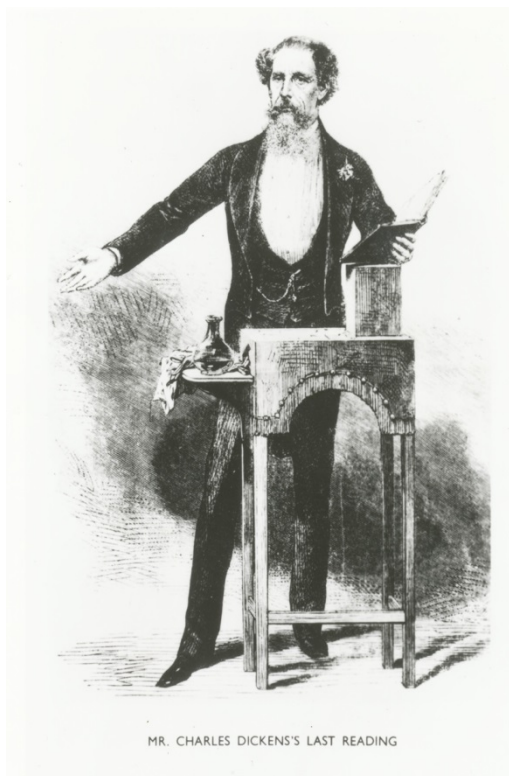


Figure 1.1 Charles Dickens Performs in Boston
Reproduced by Courtesy of Charles Dickens Museum, London

Charles Dickens was the first famous British author to cash in on his fame in the United States. Dickens harnessed the attention and the affluence of his U.S. fan base to earn a fortune, and leave a lofty legacy for his family. This project uses historical methodology to explore how Dickens used his creative skills as an entrepreneur to make the equivalent of millions of dollars in the United States. Along with his canny and passionate manager, George Dolby, Dickens devised a reading tour of the United States to profit from the celebrity status he had earned among a well-read and prosperous audience. In this project, I will argue that their innovative scheme for charging admission to public spectacles, which featured Dickens acting out multiple roles from his popular works, made the author a successful entrepreneur, as well as a literary superstar.

Dickens had enjoyed success during a series of paid performances in Europe, starting in 1853. He performed *A Christmas Carol*, his novella about a miser who transforms from miserable to merry, in front of two thousand people in Birmingham, England, in December 1853.¹ Dickens told his friend, Charles Kent: “There would be some novelty in the thing, as *I have never done it in public*, though I have in private, and (if I may say so) with a great effect on the hearers.”² The readings raised money to benefit a new Literary and Scientific Institution planned for Birmingham.³ This gave him an idea. In 1858, Dickens started to give readings through England, Scotland and Ireland for a profit.

The emergence of a well-heeled literate audience in the United States after the Civil War opened the door for Dickens to expand his money-making enterprise. He earned the equivalent of more than three million dollars from a multi-city tour of the United States from November, 1867, through April, 1868. During his six-month long, eighteen-city tour, he returned to American cities he had first seen on his initial visit of the country, twenty-five years before.⁴ But the motivation for this visit had changed dramatically from his first journey across the Atlantic, when a spirit of adventure, a quest for knowledge and a desire to acquire copyright revenue inspired him.

From January through June, 1842, Americans had come in droves to try to meet Dickens, or even glimpse him, during his initial American tour. By then, Dickens had published such “popular” works as *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836) (more commonly referred to as *The Pickwick Papers*), *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839) and *The Old*

¹ Charles Kent, *Charles Dickens as a Reader* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872), 39.

² Ibid, 40.

³ Ibid, 39.

⁴ Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1990), 1014.

Curiosity Shop (1840).⁵ He was a newly renowned young author, largely thanks to the sudden popularity of *The Pickwick Papers*. His dear friend, John Forster, remembered fan reaction to publication of his first novel in 1836: “Dickens was but twenty-three when, with the publication in complete form, he reached with a bound the topmost height of fame and popularity. His book was the talk of England; everybody was reading it and laughing over it.”⁶ As his devoted friend and fan, Forster wrote in his biography of Dickens that the author’s fame increased until he was universally held to be the greatest novelist of the nineteenth century.⁷ As a young, famous writer, Dickens set out to explore the young country.

On January 3, 1842, Charles Dickens, his wife, Catherine Dickens, and her maid, Anne Brown, set out from Liverpool for Boston on board the new steamship *Britannia* in January 1842. Dickens was an early adapter to steam power; the ship had only taken its maiden voyage on July 2, 1840.⁸ The turbulent weather they encountered on the ship terrified Dickens and his wife. A storm tossed the *Britannia* about, as he recounted in his travelogue, *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842), in one long description:

But what the agitation of a steam-vessel is, on a bad winter’s night in the wild Atlantic, it is impossible for the most vivid imagination to conceive. To say that she is flung down on her sides in the waves, with the waves dipping into them, and that, springing up again, she rolls over on the other side, until a heavy sea strikes her with the noise of a hundred great guns, and hurls her back—that she stops, staggers, and shivers, as though stunned, and then, with a violent throbbing of her heart, darts onward like a monster goaded into madness, to be beaten down, and battered, and crushed, and leaped on by the angry sea—that thunder, lightning, hail, and rain, and wind, are all in fierce contention for the mastery—that every plank has its groan, every nail has its shriek, and every drop of water in the great ocean its howling voice—is nothing. To say that all is grand, and all appalling and horrible in the last degree, is nothing. Words cannot express it.

⁵ “Charles Dickens, author of the *Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist* &c,” *Boston Courier*, 15 November 1841, Issue 1832 col B.

⁶ John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, (Boston: James R. Osgood & Company, 1875), 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Lamont Buchanan, *Ships of Steam* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), 24.

Thoughts cannot convey it. Only a dream can call it up again, in all its fury, rage and passion.⁹

On that first journey to the United States, Dickens also had other, less dramatic, complaints about steamship travel. He also complained about the thin mattress, and the small cabin, which he compared to “a profoundly preposterous box.”¹⁰ The journey left him profoundly seasick and scared; when he returned to Britain six months later, he traveled by sail, instead of steam.¹¹

Upon his first arrival in Boston, on January 22, 1842, Dickens was welcomed by political, social, business and literary greats.¹² Statesmen, authors, poets, scholars, merchants, judges, lawyers, editors and others, with their wives, daughters and sons, came to admire Dickens and his wife. His traveling secretary during his visit, G.W. Putnam, described fans’ reaction in an essay for *The Atlantic*: “They found the great author just what they hoped and expected he would be from his writings, and no happier greetings were ever exchanged than those at the Tremont House on the arrival of Charles Dickens and his wife at Boston.”¹³ During this visit, the thirty-year-old Dickens solidified his avid American fan base, despite his negative impressions of the country.¹⁴

During that first visit to the United States, Dickens argued unsuccessfully for copyright laws that would allow him to profit from his American readership.¹⁵ Newspapers in the United States had serialized his works for more than a decade, without paying any royalties. But in his reflections on this journey, Dickens focused on a much darker side of his host country. On that

⁹ Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1842), 18.

¹⁰ Buchanan, *Ships of Steam*, 24.

¹¹ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 341.

¹² *Ibid.*, 342.

¹³ G.W. Putnam, “Four Months with Charles Dickens,” *The Atlantic*, 1 October, 1870, 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Lawrence H. Houtchens, “Dickens and International Copyright,” *American Literature*, March 1941, Vol. 13 Issue 1.

trip he was disgusted by: “that most hideous blot and foul disgrace--Slavery,”¹⁶ as he recounted in *American Notes for General Circulation*, the book of his U.S. impressions he published upon his return to Great Britain. His disgust for slavery clouded his perspective on the United States, and influenced his writing for years. As in his novels, he focused on the plight of the downtrodden. True to his commitment to social reform, Dickens balanced his itinerary of delectable dinners and comfortable lodgings with visits to prisons and homes for the mentally ill.

Yet his American fans focused not on his social conscience, but rather on his status as a celebrity. In January 1842, newspapers hailed his arrival in Boston. One Boston newspaper called him “the most popular novelist of the day.”¹⁷ Even as fans focused on the novelty of his visit, feting him with dinners and parties in his honor, Dickens concentrated on the country’s poor. As Dickens wrote to his friend, Thomas Mitton in London, in March 1842, he struggled to balance these opposing perspectives. “Parties—parties—parties—of course, every day and night. But it's not all parties. I go into the prisons, the police-offices, the watch-houses, the hospitals, the workhouses.”¹⁸

Dickens was a gracious guest during that first visit, by most accounts. But he was not always impressed by the social graces of his hosts. Upon his return to Great Britain, Dickens expressed disgust with a prevalent American habit. On a visit to Washington D.C., he wrote about his disappointment that the “filthy custom” of chewing and spitting tobacco was acceptable in public places. Dickens wrote in *American Notes*: “As Washington may be called the head-quarters of tobacco-tinctured saliva, the time is come when I must confess, without any disguise, that the prevalence of those two odious practices of chewing and expectorating began

¹⁶ Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, 22.

¹⁷ “Among the passengers in the *Britannia*, we are gratified to learn, is Charles Dickens, the most popular novelist of the day,” *Boston Courier*, 27 January 1842, Issue 1852, col B.

¹⁸ Charles Dickens, Dickens, Mamie, and Hogarth, Georgina, *Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. 1, 1833 to 1856* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1879), 160.

about this time to be anything but agreeable, and soon became most offensive and sickening.”¹⁹ Dickens was amazed that the practice was widespread, even in the nation’s capital. Senators, judges and other members of educated professions indulged in the practice, which appalled him.²⁰

Slavery and tobacco spitting were not the only American practices to disturb Dickens during his first trip to the United States. The attention from his fans reached a level of absurdity during his voyage. He recounted an unusual encounter on a train en route to Washington, D.C. “Being rather early, those young men and boys who happened to have nothing particular to do, and were curious in foreigners, came (according to custom) round the carriage in which I sat; let down all the windows; thrust in their heads and shoulders; hooked themselves on conveniently, by their elbows; and fell to comparing notes on the subject of my personal appearance, with as much indifference as if I were a stuffed figure.”²¹ Dickens’ physical demeanor also attracted attention from his hosts—particularly his hair. His long ringlets seemed to cause hysteria among his American fans, which also amused him. A group of women from Plymouth, Massachusetts, requested a lock of his hair in a letter to their local newspaper. Dickens humorously and gently turned them down, responding in a letter to *The New York Herald*, “I confess I am afraid to send you a lock of my hair, as the precedent would be one of a most dangerous and alarming kind, and likely to terminate before long in my total baldness.”²² Unabashed staring seemed to offend him, but he appreciated the warm welcome he received from most of his hosts. Unlike his anti-slavery rants, Dickens’ commentary on rude social practices was biting, but amusing, showing

¹⁹ Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, 94.

²⁰ Edward Pessen. *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality and Politics*. Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1969, 23.

²¹ Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, 155.

²² “Charles Dickens and the Plymouth Ladies,” *The New York Herald*, 27 February 1842, col B.

that he did not take the offense too seriously.

During the 1842 visit, the young country was in turmoil. Tensions were simmering between the North and the South over slavery. While Dickens had intended to travel as far south as Charleston, South Carolina, he changed his itinerary, confining his southern tour to a few days in Virginia.²³ Slavery kept him away from the region. Every aspect of the practice appalled him: from the buying and selling of people, to the splitting up of families, to the widespread torture slavery often entailed. In his travels, he witnessed what he described as the cruelties and horrors associated with slavery. Upon his return to Great Britain, he reflected on his encounters with the practice: “Now, I appeal to every human mind, imbued with the commonest of common sense, and the commonest of common humanity; to all dispassionate, reasoning creatures, of any shade of opinion; and ask, with these revolting evidences of the state of society which exists in and about the slave districts of America before them, can they have a doubt of the real condition of the slave, or can they for a moment make a compromise between the institution or any of its flagrant, fearful features, and their own just consciences?”²⁴ Clearly, he was deeply troubled by the practice. As an author, he most often took on the role of the sympathizer with modern society’s most vulnerable. Slavery confronted him with overwhelming unfairness and adversity, as well as bitter irony: he witnessed the injustice of the institution amid the decadence and opulence enjoyed by much of the United States. Even as he bemoaned slavery and its cruelties, he was feted and toasted during his travels.

Twenty-five years later, in 1867, Dickens and his manager, George Dolby, were confident that a zealous audience awaited Dickens in the post Civil War United States, despite

²³ Amanda Claybaugh, “Toward a New Transatlanticism: Dickens in the United States,” *Victorian Studies* 48, no. 3 (2006): 439–60, 449.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 168.

his criticism of the country after his first visit in 1842. Dickens now had a more practical purpose for a tour: he wanted to make money. The prevailing sentiment in the United States was one of materialism, as one historian wrote of the era: “The distinguishing feature of the American was his love of money.”²⁵ In this visit, Dickens was willing to overlook rude social practices, such as tobacco spitting, in his quest for riches.

Dickens, now fifty-five and in poor health, intended to make a fortune in the United States that could support his family after his death. Unlike other authors of his time, Dickens had figured out how to earn an ample living as a writer. He not only relished earning money; he also enjoyed spending it. In 1837, Dickens had moved to a house on Doughty Street, in central London, where he completed *The Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist*, and celebrated his popularity. “Here in Doughty Street he gave dinners and entertained his friends (as well, no doubt, as his parents); on so grand a scale, in fact, it seems that some people believed he was spending money too lavishly even for so young and successful an author.”²⁶ Over the next several years, he and his growing family moved to increasingly larger and more opulent properties. After Doughty Street, the Dickens clan moved to Devonshire Terrace, near Regent’s Park in London: “...in some ways it was a grander address than Doughty Street and certainly a grander house.”²⁷ In 1851, the family moved to their next home, nearby Tavistock House. It served as the Dickens family home until 1860, as well as the site of a series of amateur theatrical productions put on by Dickens and his contemporaries.²⁸ His friend John Forster recalled that in the summer of 1855, Dickens “threw open to many friends his Tavistock House Theatre,” which

²⁵ Pessen, *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality and Politics*, 29.

²⁶ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 223.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 294.

²⁸ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 66.

they billed as “the smallest theatre in the world.”²⁹ Productions included *The Lighthouse*, a melodrama by Dickens’ friend and author, Wilkie Collins. In 1858, with his appetite whetted for public performance, Dickens began a series of reading tours in Europe to publicize his works, and build his earnings.³⁰

Dickens toured England, Scotland and Ireland with his friend and secretary, Arthur Smith.³¹ After sixteen nights at St. Martin’s Hall in Central London, Dickens performed eighty-seven readings.³² He began in Clifton, on August 2, 1858, then stopped in such cities as Ipswich, Norwich, Cambridge, Oxford, Birmingham and Dublin.³³ He wrote to his sister-in-law, Georgina Hogarth, about his successful performance in Liverpool, where two thousand three hundred people came to watch. “They turned away hundreds, sold all the books, rolled on the ground of my room knee-deep in checks, and made a perfect pantomime of the whole thing.”³⁴ After Smith died in 1861 and Dickens replaced him with Arthur Headland.³⁵ George Dolby took over in 1866, and spearheaded Dickens’ lucrative tour of the United States the following year.³⁶

On November 9, 1867, Charles Dickens set out for the United States for the second time.³⁷ Across the Atlantic, he was a far greater celebrity than twenty-five years earlier. Now, he was also a cunning businessman. During his second visit, Dickens’ fans’ enthusiasm exceeded what he had witnessed in 1842. A Washington newspaper reporter wrote that Dickens

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Whitney Helms, “Performing Authorship in the Celebrity Sphere: Dickens and the Reading Tours.,” *Papers on Language & Literature* 50, no. 2 (2014): 115.

³¹ Charles Dickens, Dickens, Mamie, and Hogarth, Georgina, *Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. 2, 1857-1870* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1879), 45.

³² Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 196.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Charles Dickens, Dickens, Mamie, and Hogarth, Georgina, *Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. 2*, 56.

³⁵ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 904.

³⁶ Foster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 196.

³⁷ “Charles Dickens, after the Lapse of a Generation, Has Reached Our Shores Again,” *Lowell Daily Citizen and News*, November 20, 1867, sec. Issue 3540; col A.

had an effective method of dealing with autograph seekers by refusing the requests with a printed form letter that read: “To comply with your modest request would not be reasonably possible.”³⁸ Because fans and autograph seekers greeted him at every stop on his American tour, Dickens could not satisfy every request.

Gifted and prolific, Charles Dickens had, with his marvelous wit, vivid narratives and searing social commentary, become a wildly successful writer by creating characters who resonated with his readers. His public readings allowed Dickens to profit from his fans’ affection, using the novelty of his visit, and the theatrical format he had perfected in Great Britain and France.³⁹ His natural charisma, his showmanship, and characters from his novels and short stories allowed Dickens to create an unprecedented series of performances that lifted spirits in a country still struggling to recover from the Civil War.⁴⁰

The performances also provided a diversion from Dickens’ own tempestuous life. By 1867, he was separated from his wife of thirty-one years, Catherine Dickens, the mother of his ten children.⁴¹ While she had accompanied him to the United States in 1842, he traveled without his family in 1867. Catherine moved out of their family home in 1857, after she received a piece of jewelry (either a brooch or a bracelet) intended for her husband’s mistress.⁴² Their marriage had been unstable for several years; the discovery of Dickens’ affection for his mistress was the catalyst for their separation. Charles and Catherine Dickens never divorced, which was an uncommon practice in nineteenth century England. But they never lived under the same roof again.

³⁸ “Mr Charles Dickens Has an Effectual Mode of Dealing with the Numerous Applications for His Autograph,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 1, 1868, col A.

³⁹ Ryan Barnett, “The Late Dickens: Mourning the Memory of the Early Dickens in the Reading Tours,” *Dickens Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (September 2013), 234.

⁴⁰ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 74.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 808.

⁴² *Ibid*.

American newspapers had followed the Dickens family troubles at least since 1858, the year after he and his wife separated.⁴³ His sister-in-law, Georgina Hogarth, lived with Dickens' family, and helped to care for his brood. She first moved in to the family home when Dickens and his wife visited America for six months in 1842, when they had four young children (they went on to have six more). Georgina was also her brother-in-law's confidante; she and his eldest daughter Mamie published a collection of his letters after his death.⁴⁴

For twenty-five years, Dickens carried on an affair with the actress Ellen Ternan, who was more than twenty years his junior, which he managed to keep largely out of the public eye. They met when he was forty-five, and she was eighteen. In 1867, he had wanted to bring her to the United States with him, but bowed to pressure when his management team and friends argued that her presence would be inappropriate; impractical for him, and scandalous for her.⁴⁵ Still, Dickens was devoted to her until the end of his life, leaving Ellen Ternan one thousand pounds in his will,⁴⁶ the equivalent of approximately \$125,000 today.⁴⁷ He endured the six-month separation from her while he traveled in the United States.

Dickens overcame personal phobias on the stormy Atlantic. His trust in steam technology had grown by 1867, despite the memories of his perilous journey in 1842. He confidently boarded the *Cuba* in Liverpool in November, 1867, bringing an array of medicines to combat seasickness.⁴⁸ He read many books on his way across the Atlantic, including *Life and*

⁴³ "Separation of Dickens and His Wife," *The Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register*, June 26, 1858, Issue 51; col C.

⁴⁴ Charles Dickens, Dickens, Mamie, and Hogarth, Georgina, *Letters of Charles Dickens*.

⁴⁵ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 1008.

⁴⁶ Robert Garnett, "The Mysterious Mourner: Dickens's Funeral and Ellen Ternan," *Dickens Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (June 2008): 109.

⁴⁷ Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "MeasuringWorth," *Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present*, (2014), www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 1009.

Letters of Wilder Dwight.⁴⁹ Heading to Boston, the sea was predictably choppy, so much so that the clergy and congregation swayed and slid as the sea shook the *Cuba* during a Sunday church service, a scene that amused Dickens.⁵⁰

But the purpose of this visit was not to observe; it was to make money. His visit to the United States in 1842 had yielded *American Notes for General Circulation*, the book of his impressions; his visit in 1867 was intended for profit, rather than commentary.

⁴⁹ J.T. Fields, *Charles Dickens, Barry Cornwall & Some of His Friends* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 1881), 64.

⁵⁰ Charles Dickens, Mamie Dickens, and Georgina Hogarth, *Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. 2*, 191.

2 The Quest for Riches



**Figure 2.1 U.S. Newspaper Cartoons of Dickens and Dolby, Enjoying Profits
Reproduced by Courtesy of Charles Dickens Museum, London**

By the time of his return in 1867, Charles Dickens had cemented his American fan following. He had already published fourteen novels, including his most popular, *Great Expectations* (1860) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). His works were widely read in the United States, particularly as rates of literacy rose in the young country. By 1850, more than half of white children in the United States between the ages of five and nineteen were enrolled in school.⁵¹ Rates of school enrollment were significantly lower for African Americans than they

⁵¹ Thomas D. Snyder, “120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait,” *National Center for Education Statistics*, U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, January, 1993, 6.

were for whites during this period, but following the Civil War, the enrollment rate for this group rose from ten percent in 1870 to thirty-four percent in 1880.⁵²

Dickens' readings endeared him even more deeply into the hearts and minds of his American audience. A Boston newspaper recounted that his first reading met the "Great Expectations" of his crowded audience, concluding: "Great is Dickens--not much less as a reader than as a writer."⁵³ With this visit, Charles Dickens put his financial ambition ahead of his concerns about well-being. His health was poor before he even boarded the ship. He was no longer the fit and healthy thirty-year-old man Americans had seen in 1842. He was besieged by heart and stomach ailments, and a knee injury caused him to walk with a cane.⁵⁴ The grueling schedule during the American winter wore on him. He wrote to his sister-in-law in a letter from Boston: "...the work is hard and the climate is hard."⁵⁵ Ultimately, he limited his American tour, blaming his health. He stayed in the Northeast, and cancelled his visit to Chicago.⁵⁶

Charles Dickens had not visited Chicago during his first visit, and now this cancellation befuddled and angered his Midwestern fans. The perceived slight led to "bitter personal attacks upon him" in Chicago newspapers.⁵⁷ The *Chicago Tribune* referred to him as "A Hypocrite in Literature."⁵⁸ Dickens also omitted Cincinnati and St. Louis. Dickens told his confidante John Forster what one American told him about his Midwestern cancellations: "Good heavens sir,' the great Philadelphia authority said to me this morning, 'if you don't read in Chicago the people will go into fits!' 'Well,' I answered, 'I would rather they go into

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ "Mr. Charles Dickens Gave His First Reading at Tremont Temple on Monday Evening Last, before a Crowded and Brilliant Audience, Whose 'Great Expectations' Were Fully Sustained," *The Congregationalist and Boston Recorder*, December 5, 1867, Issue 49, col A.

⁵⁴ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 993.

⁵⁵ Charles Dickens, Mamie Dickens, and Georgina Hogarth, *Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. 2*, 172.

⁵⁶ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 1019.

⁵⁷ "The Dickens Chicago Story," *New York Times (1857-1922)*, May 7, 1868, 4.

⁵⁸ Horace White, "A Hypocrite in Literature," *Chicago Tribune*, February 6, 1868, via Chicagomag.com.

fits than I did.”⁵⁹ Dickens would only admit that his poor health kept him from visiting Chicago.

Skeptics questioned whether his true motive for skipping Chicago was a Dickens family scandal. Charles Dickens’ manager, George Dolby, recounted how disappointed the author’s fans in Chicago, St. Louis and Cincinnati were by the cancellation of the Midwestern readings. In his memoir, Dolby wrote: “...much speculation existed in the public mind as to the cause which determined Mr. Dickens not to read in Chicago, it may be as well to state here that his reasons were entirely of a private character with which the general public have nothing whatever to do.”⁶⁰ Dickens’ younger brother, Augustus, abandoned his wife, Harriet, when she became blind, moving to Chicago with his mistress.⁶¹ U.S. newspapers reported the drama: “Augustus was a scamp, and his brother more than once aided him when his dissipation and extravagance threatened ruin and distress to himself and his family,”⁶² wrote the *Chicago Journal*. In October, 1868, Charles Dickens learned of his brother’s death from tuberculosis; he offered financial assistance to his widow in England, as well as his oldest son, Bertram, adding to his formidable financial commitments.⁶³ He paid Bertram Dickens fifty pounds a year; that is the equivalent of more than six thousand dollars by today’s standards.⁶⁴

Charles Dickens’ focus on money in 1867 was motivated by pressures on his earnings from his immediate and extended family, and by his failing health. The American tour was his opportunity to provide a comfortable living for his sizable family after his death. His manager, George Dolby, noted some of the demands his family put on Dickens’ finances: “But the

⁵⁹ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 110.

⁶⁰ George Dolby, *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1885), 200.

⁶¹ Claire Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011), 216.

⁶² “The Dickens Chicago Story,” *Lowell Daily Citizen and News*, May 16, 1868, 1.

⁶³ Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 357.

⁶⁴ Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, “MeasuringWorth,” *Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present*, (2014), www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/.

greatest pressure of all came from his desire to do his duty in promoting interests of an already expensive family, and his wish to leave them after his death as free as possible from monetary cares—could self-sacrifice have done it, he would have left them free from every kind of care.”⁶⁵ Dickens’ decision to sell tickets to his readings made headlines in the United States before his journey began. A Cleveland newspaper reported in 1858 that Dickens planned to turn to the “more lucrative profession” of reading for his own benefit.⁶⁶ As it turned out, ticket sales evidenced that Dickens was already a proven attraction abroad as well as at home.

Dickens had devised the idea of the reading tours in Europe in 1858 to publicize his works, and build his earnings.⁶⁷ Dickens gave his first paid reading that year, but he had considered making money this way as early as 1846. He wrote to Forster: “I was thinking the other day that in these days of lecturings and readings, a great deal of money might possibly be made (if it were not *infra dig*)⁶⁸ by one’s having Readings of one’s own books. It would be an *odd* thing. I think it would take immensely. What do you say?”⁶⁹ Forster did not prove to be an ardent supporter of Dickens’ onstage enterprises, despite his loyal friendship throughout Dickens’ life. Yet Dickens proceeded with his planned readings anyway. In March, 1862, Dickens performed a condensed version of *David Copperfield*, his 1850 novel about a young boy forced to fend for himself after his father dies. He described the enthusiastic response from a London audience in a letter to his friend, the philanthropist William de Cerjat: “The success of ‘Copperfield’ is astounding. It made an impression that *I* must not describe. I may only remark that I was half dead when I had done; and that although I had looked forward, all

⁶⁵ Dolby, *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him*, 89.

⁶⁶ “It Is Asserted, on Good Authority, That Charles Dickens Has Quit Novel Writing and Taken to a More Lucrative Profession,” *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, May 11, 1858, Issue 110; col B.

⁶⁷ Helms, “Performing Authorship in the Celebrity Sphere: Dickens and the Reading Tours,” 115.

⁶⁸ According to the Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English, this expression means: “‘beneath one; demeaning.” Accessed October 19, 2014. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/laudanum>.

⁶⁹ Malcolm Andrews, *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 32.

through the summer, when I was carefully getting it up, to its being a London sensation; and that although Macready, hearing it at Cheltenham, told me to be prepared for a great effect, it even went beyond my hopes.”⁷⁰ Despite Forster’s disdain for the concept of paid readings, Dickens found enthusiastic support from Dolby, who was a cunning businessman intent on maximizing profits through the Dickens brand. One historian wrote: “Dolby was a tall, bald, thick-set man with a loud laugh, and a supply of humorous stories matched only by theatrical gossip. Precisely the kind of man, in other words, that Dickens liked.”⁷¹ The two became close friends. Dolby was thirty-five years old when he started working with Dickens. He was “...a big man, full of energy, optimism and know-how, and talkative, with a stammer he bravely disregarded.”⁷² An out of work theatre manager before he took on the reading tour assignment, Dolby threw himself into Dickens’ career with gusto. He traveled to the United States to seek advice from the legendary showman, Phineas Taylor Barnum, better known as “P.T.” By 1878, Barnum was internationally known for staging public spectacles. In preparing Dickens’ tour, Dolby wrote that Barnum’s “...opinion would be well worthy of consideration.”⁷³

George Dolby performed many roles as Dickens’ manager. Dolby helped to concoct the idea of the readings. He answered Dickens’ fan mail, and he found and booked the venues in the United States where tickets would sell.⁷⁴ In 1867, Dickens told to his sister-in-law, Georgina Hogarth, how helpful Dolby was on his tour of Britain: “...everything is made as easy to me as it possibly *can* be, and Dolby would do anything to lighten the work, and does everything.”⁷⁵ Dolby was meticulous in planning Dickens’ readings, particularly in the United

⁷⁰ Charles Dickens, Mamie Dickens and Georgia Hogarth, *Letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol. 2, 178.

⁷¹ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 977.

⁷² Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 353.

⁷³ Dolby, *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him*, 125.

⁷⁴ Andrews, *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves*, 2.

⁷⁵ Charles Dickens, Mamie Dickens and Georgia Hogarth, *Letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol. 2, 245.

States. Dolby chronicled his adventures with Dickens in a memoir, *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him* (1885). He described how he organized Dickens' publicity in the United States, ahead of the author's arrival: "In the matter of printing the bills and posters, an unexpected difficulty presented itself in the fact that no paper of Mr. Dickens's favorite color (a light orange) was to be found in America; and as he always used this paper in all his English enterprises, whether for the "contents' bills" of "All Year Round" or for reading purposes, I (being so desirous of making him feel that the Readings in America were identical with those in England) was naturally anxious to have all the familiar details reproduced as far as possible."⁷⁶ Dolby claimed that he searched American paper factories for the perfect color for the posters that would promote Dickens' U.S. readings. He placed an order for two tons of a similar shade of orange. They did not use the posters, however; tickets to Dickens' readings sold to his fans based on word of mouth, rather than advertisements printed on posters. But Dolby managed to re-sell the unused paper stock for more than he had paid for it.⁷⁷ Dolby prided himself on his business savvy.

⁷⁶ Dolby, *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him*, 143.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

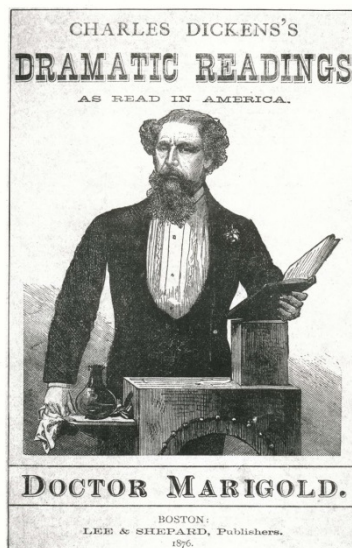


Figure 2.2 Poster Promoting Dickens' Performances
 Reproduced by Courtesy of Charles Dickens Museum, London

Dolby was also effusive in his descriptions of Dickens' reading tours, calling them, "the most brilliantly successful enterprises of their kind that were ever taken."⁷⁸ Dolby referred to Dickens as his "Chief," and his "great hero."⁷⁹ Their months traveling together on the reading tours were the happiest days of Dolby's life, he wrote in his biography.⁸⁰ Dickens' publishers, Chappell and Company, enlisted Dolby to organize Dickens' reading tours in 1866, just as Dickens' health started to falter.⁸¹ Chappell and Company paid Dickens £1,500 for thirty readings.⁸² That is the equivalent of approximately \$225,000 by today's standards.⁸³

⁷⁸ Ibid, vii.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Dolby, *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him*, viii.

⁸¹ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 977.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "MeasuringWorth," *Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present*, (2014), www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/.

After Dolby's four-year stint working with Charles Dickens, he managed Mark Twain's readings, which were smaller affairs than the ones Dolby devised with Dickens.⁸⁴ Twain initially rebuffed Dolby's advances. The author wrote to his wife, Olivia Clemens, in 1872: "Mr. Dolby, who took Dickens to America, is coming to talk business to me tomorrow, though I have sent him word once before, that I can't be hired to talk here, because I have no time to spare."⁸⁵ Dolby changed Twain's mind the following year. He convinced Twain to lecture about the time he spent in the Sandwich Islands in Hawaii, "a talk which seven years before had brought him great success," at the Queen's Court Rooms in Hanover Square in Central London, from October 13-18, 1873.⁸⁶ But Dolby devoted far more time and resources to his tour with Dickens.

In January 1867, Dickens and Dolby launched a grueling three-month reading tour through thirty-six British cities. The author told his daughter Mamie in a letter that he felt faint and sore during the tour, yet he pressed on with the readings.⁸⁷ Dickens' health worsened. On his readings across England just months before the second U.S. tour, he suffered from gout, insomnia, indigestion and high blood pressure. According to Christopher Hibbert in *The Making of Charles Dickens*: "In America he lost his appetite, could only sleep after taking laudanum,⁸⁸ could only read after drinking sherry or champagne."⁸⁹ His hectic travel schedule continued throughout the next several months, however, and included more than just professional endeavors.

⁸⁴ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 977.

⁸⁵ Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Letters* (New York: Harper, 1917), 199.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 209.

⁸⁷ Charles Dickens, Mamie Dickens and Georgia Hogarth, *Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. 2*, 315.

⁸⁸ Laudanum is any of various formerly used preparations of opium, according to Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed October 19, 2014. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/laudanum>.

⁸⁹ Christopher Hibbert, *The Making of Charles Dickens* (New York, N.Y.: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1967), 267.

Charles Dickens also frequently found solace with his mistress, Ellen Ternan. She and her two sisters moved to a large house in North London, which was apparently paid for by Dickens.⁹⁰ “Nelly,” as Dickens called Ellen, stayed in Slough, a village twenty miles west of London, during the summer of 1866.⁹¹ There, Dickens hoped he could visit her unrecognized in the small village away from London.

During this period, his doctor told him that his heart functions had degenerated.⁹² His illness did not deter him from making plans for the trip across the Atlantic. Yet he wondered in letters to his friend John Forster whether he was well enough for the trip: “You have no idea how heavily the anxiety of it sits upon my soul. But the prize looks so large!”⁹³ That prize over-rode concerns for his health.

John Forster believed strongly that Dickens should not go back to the United States in 1867. The subject caused friction within Dickens’ inner circle, particularly when Forster expressed his reservations to George Dolby. Dolby recounted in his biography that Forster questioned Dolby’s projected £15,500 profit (the equivalent of approximately two million dollars in current value, adjusted for currency fluctuations and consumer price indexes)⁹⁴ from the American tour: Forster did not believe that the size of the venues Dolby booked in the United States would enable Dickens to earn such a massive sum.⁹⁵ Dolby argued that any ill will resulting from the publication of *American Notes for General Circulation*, or *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*, his 1843 satire of life in America, had dissipated: “There was not anxiety whatever about public feeling in America, and the ‘American Notes’ and ‘Martin

⁹⁰ Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 307.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 185.

⁹⁴ Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, “MeasuringWorth,” *Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present*, (2014), www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/.

⁹⁵ Dolby, *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him*, 137.

Chuzzlewit' had no more to do with Mr. Dickens' calculations than if they'd never been written."⁹⁶ Dickens and Dolby were convinced that because of the 1868 Presidential Election, Dickens should head to the United States during the winter of 1867-1868, or not at all.⁹⁷ They appeared to fear that the upcoming election would provide a national distraction for Dickens' ground-breaking reading tour. Their argument eclipsed worries that the winter weather in the United States would threaten Dickens' health. Dolby said Forster also argued that Dickens' previous visit to the United States had been unprofitable.

Despite disagreements, John Forster was Dickens' most loyal friend and confidante throughout his life. In 1842, Dickens had written to him about his first trip to the United States, describing the overzealous American fans: "How can I give you the faintest notion of my reception here; of the crowds that pour in and out the whole day; of the people that line the streets when I go out; of the cheering when I went to the theatre; of the copies of verses, letters of congratulation, welcomes of all kinds, balls, dinners, assemblies without end?"⁹⁸ They remained best friends until Dickens' death in 1870.⁹⁹

During both visits to the United States, Dickens met the Presidents of the United States. In 1842, when he was introduced to the fifty-one year old John Tyler, Dickens said: "I am astonished to see so young a man, Sir."¹⁰⁰ At a White House reception in Washington, D.C., it was Dickens who was the center of attention, although another famous author was present: Washington Irving, author of "Rip Van Winkle" (1817) and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820).¹⁰¹ The White House reception was the second encounter between the two authors:

⁹⁶ Ibid, 93.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Philip Collins, *Charles Dickens: The Critical Heritage*. (New York: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 1995), 115.

⁹⁹ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 1068.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 360.

¹⁰¹ The White House Historical Association, "A Literary Viewpoint: Charles Dickens Visits the White House, 1842," *White House History Classroom*, accessed October 13, 2014.

they met in New York shortly after Dickens arrived in the city in January 1842.¹⁰² The two remained friends for many years, with Dickens writing to Irving in 1841, before they had met: “There is no man in the world who could have given me the heartfelt pleasure you have, by your kind note of the 13th of last month. There is no living writer, and there are very few among the dead, whose approbation I should feel so proud to earn.”¹⁰³ Correspondence between the two authors stopped after Dickens returned to Great Britain in June 1842.¹⁰⁴ Some historians suggest that a rift arose between the two writers, but their friendship was strong during Dickens’ first U.S. visit.¹⁰⁵

During the second visit, Charles Dickens met President Andrew Johnson just before Johnson endured impeachment proceedings.¹⁰⁶ Johnson’s impeachment trial occurred during Dickens’ visit, on February 24, 1868.¹⁰⁷ Johnson was in a difficult position as president, having stepped into the role after Abraham Lincoln’s assassination on April 15, 1865. The country was embroiled in post-Civil War upheaval. There was also noticeable remorse over Lincoln’s death. In 1865, the *Liberator*, a Boston abolitionist newspaper noted: “By the late melancholy death of President Lincoln, Andrew Johnson is placed in the presidential chair. He assumes this great responsibility at a time when there are complicated principles to settle and difficult subjects to discuss, which require almost superhuman wisdom, sagacity, and foresight, a clear and unbiased judgment, a love of justice and mercy, and great energy to meet every emergency that will arise.”¹⁰⁸ Dickens was so concerned about making money that he worried

¹⁰² W.C. Desmond Pacey, “Washington Irving And Charles Dickens,” *American Literature* 16, no. 4 (January 1945): 332.

¹⁰³ Charles Dickens, Mamie Dickens and Georgia Hogarth, *Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. 1*, 21.

¹⁰⁴ W.C. Desmond Pacey, “Washington Irving And Charles Dickens,” 332.

¹⁰⁵ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 351.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 1019.

¹⁰⁷ “Impeachment in the Country,” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, February 24, 1868.

¹⁰⁸ L.N. Fowler, “Phrenological Description of Andrew Johnson, President of the United States,” *The Liberator*, September 15, 1865, col B.

that the turmoil over President Johnson's impeachment might impact his ticket sales.¹⁰⁹ Dolby noted that the media coverage of Johnson's impeachment did indeed distract fans from Dickens' visit. Dolby wrote during that week: "Everything in America has to give way to political matters, and I foresaw that in this excitement even the rage for Dickens in Boston was likely to abate for a time, for the sale of the tickets for the four readings for the following week, although large, was not up to the standard of our previous readings in Boston."¹¹⁰ Because of the political excitement, and Dickens' poor state of health, they decided to hold four, rather than eight, readings in Boston in February 1868.

Dickens and Dolby were forthright about their intentions to make money from their U.S. tour. Yet Dickens' attention to his finances did not alienate his fans. Their purchase of tickets confirmed his entrepreneurial instincts. The American press noted Dickens' financial acumen. The *Boston Daily Advertiser* wrote: "Mr. Dickens is one of the most careful businessmen in England."¹¹¹ The same article referred to him as a kind friend to poor authors. Dickens was capitalizing on his celebrity, as Dolby foresaw, and the tour was attracting widespread attention, while earning him a fortune. Dickens had become acutely aware of his need to increase his earnings in his later years, although he had always been concerned about money and debt.

As a child, Charles Dickens' family's financial problems had forced him to leave the school he loved. He attended William Giles' school in Kent, run by a 23-year-old dissenter who had separated from the Church of England.¹¹² But his two years there ended when

¹⁰⁹ Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 368.

¹¹⁰ Dolby, *Dickens as I Knew Him*, 259.

¹¹¹ "Popular Fallacies with Regard to Charles Dickens," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, September 21, 1867, sec. Issue 72; col C.

¹¹² Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 41.

Charles was twelve, and his father was sent to a debtors' prison.¹¹³ While his mother and younger siblings went with their father to the Marshalsea Prison in South London, as was the custom for debtors during the early 1800s in Great Britain, young Dickens went to work at Warren's Blacking, a factory overlooking the River Thames by Charing Cross Station.¹¹⁴ For six shillings a week, twelve hours a day, he had to stick labels onto pots of black boot polish.¹¹⁵ His first day at the factory came just two days after his twelfth birthday, on February 9, 1824.¹¹⁶ The work was boring and redundant, and forced him to interact with illiterate and belligerent boys. While Dickens did not speak often of his months working in the factory; the experience traumatized him, and colored his writing throughout his career. He referred to the experience in several of his books, including *The Pickwick Papers* (1836), and *Sketches by Boz* (1839). *Nicholas Nickleby*, the story of a young man who must support his family after his father dies, appeared as a serial in 1838, finishing in 1839. The tale holds similarities to Dickens' own life.

In *Nicholas Nickleby*, Dickens showed his skepticism for the British legal system, and his distaste for prisons. As the title character visits King's Bench, a South London prison often used to incarcerate people who fail to pay their debts, he observes: "There are many pleasant fictions of the law in constant operation, but there is not one so pleasant or practically humorous as that which supposes every man to be of equal value in its impartial eye, and the benefits of all laws to be equally attainable by all men, without the smallest reference to the

¹¹³ Ibid, 74.

¹¹⁴ Hibbert, *The Making of Charles Dickens*, 52.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 52.

¹¹⁶ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 67.

furniture of their pockets.”¹¹⁷ Dickens’ belief in the unfairness of the legal system, and the lack of power of the poor, inspired his works.

As an adult, Dickens remembered his humble beginnings, particularly as his expenses rose. By 1867, Dickens was supporting nine children; his mistress and her mother and sisters; a large estate in Higham, Kent, in the Southeast of England, called Gad’s Hill Place; and assorted servants and attendants. He also supported his son-in-law, Charles Collins, whose firm was about to be declared bankrupt in 1867.¹¹⁸

Those responsibilities made the anticipated financial reward of the trip all the more critical. Aware that his health was waning, Dickens looked to his United States visit to yield millions of dollars, and ensure his family’s financial security.

¹¹⁷ Dickens, Charles, *Nicholas Nickleby* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1839), 389.

¹¹⁸ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 1004.

3 The Making of a Media Maestro: The Ticket Sales

Charles Dickens had already witnessed his enthusiastic fan base in the United States in 1842, as arguably the most famous writer in the world.¹¹⁹ But in the years leading up to his visit, he had a reputation as a recluse – a sentiment that was generated by the press. The London correspondent for the *New York Mirror* reported in 1839 that Dickens, whom he called the “celebrated author of *Nicholas Nickleby*,”¹²⁰ attended a show in London with his “pretty wife.”¹²¹ Describing Dickens as “a handsome fellow,”¹²² the reporter wrote: “Dickens leads quite a retired life, and is rarely seen in public.”¹²³ The impression of Dickens as a solitary figure, whether correct or false, seemed to pique the curiosity of his American fans. As their familiarity with his writing grew, so did their desire to meet him. A song printed in a Pennsylvania newspaper in 1842 exemplified the giddiness his U.S. arrival inspired: “What a stir on the wharf as the ship steams along, That fetches great Boz to our shores, How the learned shall rush, and the ‘prentices throng, And the newspaper authors by scores.”¹²⁴

Dickens first distinguished himself as a writer at the age of twenty-four in 1836. That year he published *Sketches by Boz*, a collection of his newspaper and magazine articles about London life illustrated with drawings by an artist named Phiz.¹²⁵ American and British newspapers afterwards referred to Dickens by that pen-name, “Boz.” The early book bore the hallmarks of his subsequent works: *Sketches by Boz* contained observed scenes, vivid characters and searing social commentary. Poverty and social injustice came into sharp focus through these

¹¹⁹ “When Charles Dickens fell out with America,” *BBC Magazine*, 13 February 2012, 1.

¹²⁰ “Dickens,” *New York Mirror via Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, 4 September, 1839, Issue 56, col C.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ “Address to Charles Dickens, Esq.,” *Pennsylvania Inquirer and National Gazette*, 5 February 1842, Issue 31, col F.

¹²⁵ Valerie Lester Browne, *The Man Who Drew Dickens* (London: Random House, 2004), 15.

studies of everyday London life. He described Newgate prison, a dismal facility located by the Old Bailey courthouse in the City of London:

If Bedlam could be suddenly removed like another Aladdin's palace, and set down on the space now occupied by Newgate, scarcely one man out of a hundred, whose road to business every morning lies through Newgate-street, or the Old Bailey, would pass the building without bestowing a hasty glance on its small, grated windows, and a transient thought upon the condition of the unhappy beings immured in its dismal cells; and yet these same men, day by day, and hour by hour, pass and repass this gloomy depository of the guilt and misery of London, in one perpetual stream of life and bustle, utterly unmindful of the throng of wretched creatures pent up within it — nay, not even knowing, or if they do, not heeding, the fact, that as they pass one particular angle of the massive wall with a light laugh or a merry whistle, they stand within one yard of a fellow-creature, bound and helpless, whose hours are numbered, from whom the last feeble ray of hope has fled for ever, and whose miserable career will shortly terminate in a violent and shameful death.¹²⁶

Prisons provided Dickens with fodder for many of his most famous scenes, as did courthouses.

Dickens' first literary success in 1836 came with *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, also called *The Pickwick Papers*, a series of fictional adventures of jolly Samuel Pickwick, his loveable servant Sam Weller and fellow Pickwickians as they traversed across England. The book proved to have enduring popularity: Dickens performed a scene from *The Pickwick Papers* during his United States reading tour, speaking for all of his characters in an array of different voices. Witnesses wrote that he transformed himself into the eight different characters he performed: “His little round eyes, wide open and blinking; his elevated eyebrows that are in a constant state of interrogation; his mouth, drawn down by the weight of the law; the expression of the *ensemble*, which clearly denotes that everybody *is* a rascal whether found guilty or not; and the stern, iron-clad voice, apparently measuring out justice in as small quantities as possible,

¹²⁶ Dickens, Charles, *Sketches by Boz* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1839), 166.

and never going faster than a dead march,--make up an impersonation that is extraordinary, even for Dickens."¹²⁷ During most of his readings, Dickens used the trial from *The Pickwick Papers* to end his performances on an upbeat note.

The comic scene Dickens chose to perform depicts a theatrical courtroom drama about misunderstandings and double meanings. He acted it out at his last performance in Boston, every seat in Tremont Temple was taken, with a large standing crowd, despite the rain and wind on December 6, 1867.¹²⁸ The audience, more than two thousand people strong, greeted the performance with hearty applause. The Boston reporter for the *New York Times* was impressed: "The Trial from Pickwick was superb. It is the very best and most effective thing Mr. Dickens has given us the whole week. He appears the most at home in it. The lights and shadows and the tones—the individualities and the irregularities of the characters—are brought out in just the right proportions."¹²⁹ The comic scene "convulsed the audience with laughter" during a previous Boston performance, the reporter wrote.¹³⁰ The scene enabled Dickens to perform as a comic, particularly as he portrayed the befuddled characters of Elizabeth Cluppins and Serjeant Snubbin:

'I was there,' resumed Mrs. Cluppins, 'unknown to Mrs. Bardell; I had been out with a little basket, gentlemen, to buy three pound of red kidney pertaties, which was three pound tuppence ha'penny, when I see Mrs. Bardell's street door on the jar.' 'On the what?' exclaimed the little judge. 'Partly open, my Lord,' said Serjeant Snubbin. 'She said on the jar,' said the little judge, with a cunning look. 'It's all the same, my Lord,' said Serjeant Snubbin. The little judge looked doubtful, and said he'd make a note of it.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Kate Field, *Pen Photographs of Charles Dickens's Readings: Taken From Life*, (London: Trübner, 1871), 103.

¹²⁸ "Mr. Dickens' Last Reading in Boston," *New York Times (1857-1922)*, Dec 08, 1867.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ "Mr Charles Dickens," *New York Times (1857-1922)*, Dec 03, 1867.

¹³¹ Charles Dickens. *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1836), 454.

The *New York Times* called the performances the best entertainment to come to Boston for several years.

Yet the two dollar ticket prices, which would equal about thirty-five dollars today, were out of reach for many Americans;¹³² indeed, so was the price of the prevalent practice of hiring placement holders to secure places in line just to buy the tickets. A newspaper report recounted the New York ticket sales to Dickens' readings there: "We have all heard of ten or twenty dollars being offered for tickets; but it is a literal fact that five dollars were frequently offered after 7 o'clock for *places* in line."¹³³ Many newspaper reporters complained of the two dollar price of each ticket to his Boston readings, which sold swiftly before Dickens had even arrived in the country: "Perhaps he had no hand in charging this extravagant sum, but it is a way that some people have of doing things in Boston."¹³⁴ The reporter went on to point out the irony that Dickens wrote about the poor, but only the rich could afford tickets to his readings. Despite his initial plan to make ticket prices accessible to the common man, they become so popular that opportunistic ticket sellers bought and re-sold tickets at a huge profit, pricing out all but the wealthy. The reporter wrote: "It seems impossible to devise any scheme for getting the tickets into the people's hands without the intervention of speculators."¹³⁵ Newspaper reports estimated that scalpers made three thousand dollars through buying and selling tickets for his first reading in Boston.¹³⁶

Setting the ticket price was a cunning exercise for Dickens' team. When George Dolby

¹³² Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "MeasuringWorth," *Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present*, (2014), www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/.

¹³³ "The Facts about the Sale of the Dickens Tickets in America Read Very Much like a Joke; but They Are No Joke to the Hundreds of People That Shiver Outside Steinway Hall on a Raw December Morning," *The Independent Press*, December 20, 1867, sec. Issues, 21; col H.

¹³⁴ "Charles Dickens, the Famous English Novelist, Arrived in This City Last Week in One of the Cunard Steamers," *Boston Investigator*, November 12, 1867, sec. Issue 30; col A.

¹³⁵ Charles Dickens, Mamie Dickens and Georgia Hogarth, *Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. 2*, 170.

¹³⁶ "The Ticket Speculators Have Realized \$3,000 by Buying up and Selling Tickets for Dickens First Reading in Boston," *Daily Evening Bulletin*, January 14, 1868, Issue 82; col B.

arranged the venues where Dickens would perform, he met the New York newspaper magnate, James Gordon Bennett. His newspaper, the *New York Herald*, referred to the author's visit as the "second coming of Dickens."¹³⁷ Dolby wanted to meet the high-profile newspaper owner, whom he called "remarkable."¹³⁸ According to Dolby, Bennett "believed, or affected to believe, that the public would eagerly fill every room in the country at ten dollars a ticket."¹³⁹ Indeed, fans in New York slept outside in the cold to secure the opportunity to buy tickets to Dickens' readings in New York.

Crowds welcomed Dickens to the eighteen cities he visited, even during the journey to Boston. Dickens complained to Dolby about overzealous fans, who now tried to peek at him through a crack in the door of his sitting room on the ship.¹⁴⁰ Charles Dickens' celebrity status fueled ticket sales in each of the cities he visited. In New York and Boston, lines of thousands of fans hoping to buy tickets to his readings stretched for half a mile, an hour before the ticket office even opened.¹⁴¹ The excitement about the author's arrival was particularly intense in Boston, the first city he visited. Dickens' readers were well behaved, according to newspaper reports. The morning of Tuesday, November 19, 1867, fans marked Dickens' arrival by standing in line to buy tickets to his Boston readings starting at six thirty on a "frosty morning."¹⁴² Police stood guard, but the crowd was subdued, even in the howling wind. The *Boston Journal* reported: "But the crowd out in the cold was a most orderly and gentlemanly crowd, and seemed determined to be jolly and good-natured under any circumstances.... The wind swept around the

¹³⁷ Dolby, *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him*, 123.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁴¹ Malcolm Andrews, *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

¹⁴² "Mr. Dickens in Boston--The Eager Demand for Tickets.," *New York Times* (1857-1922), November 20, 1867, 92335198, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2010).

corner of Hamilton Place incessantly and remorselessly, and worked its way through the thickest coats and the warmest shawls to the very vitals of those they attempted to comfort and protect.” The fans even sang songs, such as “We Won’t go Home till Morning,” to the tune of “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow,” an apt sentiment for the several hour wait for Dickens’ fans.¹⁴³ A group of newspaper reporters and other well-wishers greeted Dickens upon his arrival at eight thirty in the evening.¹⁴⁴

Boston had evolved remarkably between Dickens’ two trips. He wrote in a letter to his friend, Samuel Cartwright, on January 29, 1868: “...the handsomest part of Boston was a bleak swamp when I saw it five-and-twenty years ago.”¹⁴⁵ Dickens found the people of Boston to be as welcoming in 1867 as they had been in 1842. During his second visit, he stayed at the Parker House, where a crowd waited outside to greet him upon his arrival. Dickens developed affection for Boston during his first visit to the United States in 1842. Ensnared in Boston’s Tremont House, which he considered “very excellent,”¹⁴⁶ Dickens seemed to love the city. “It has more galleries, colonnades, piazzas, and passages than I can remember, or the reader would believe,” Dickens wrote in his account of his first visit, *American Notes for General Circulation*.¹⁴⁷ The Tremont House was a luxury hotel of its day, hosting notable visitors who came to Boston, such as President Andrew Jackson in June, 1833.¹⁴⁸ To stay there would have been an honor for a local luminary; even more so for a visitor from abroad.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 1010.

¹⁴⁵ Charles Dickens, Dickens, Mamie, and Hogarth, Georgina, *Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. 2*, 191.

¹⁴⁶ Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, 10.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ “We have not farther accounts of the progress of the President, whom we left at the last accounts, comfortably accommodated during a slight shower of rain, at the Tremont House, Boston,” *The Arkansas Gazette*, 7 August 1833, Issue 33, col B.

Dickens earned the equivalent of more than three million dollars from his tour of the United States, which was a staggering sum at the time, proving that his readings were more lucrative than his writing.¹⁴⁹ Dickens also met celebrities and literary luminaries during his U.S. travels. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Oliver Wendell Holmes attended his reading at the Tremont Temple in Boston on December 2, 1867.¹⁵⁰ Both were famous authors, so their presence added to excitement surrounding Dickens and his readings.¹⁵¹ But not all of his encounters with American literati were positive. Mark Twain attended one of his readings in New York and wrote a negative review for the San Francisco newspaper, *Alta California*, disappointed that every passage Dickens read: “was rendered with a degree of ability far below what his reading reputation led us to expect.”¹⁵² But that review was unusual; most of the responses to Dickens’ performances were positive, if not fawning.

¹⁴⁹ Robert C. Kennedy, “Characters at Dickens’s Readings,” HarpWeek via *The New York Times*, April 25, 2001.

¹⁵⁰ Dickens Quarterly 30, no. 3 (September 2013): 1013.

¹⁵¹ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 1019.

¹⁵¹ Whitney Helms, “Performing Authorship in the Celebrity Sphere: Dickens and the Reading Tours,” *Papers on Language & Literature* 50, no. 2 (2014): 139.

¹⁵² Mark Twain, “Mark Twain in Washington: The Great Dickens-An Honest Criticism,” *Daily Alta California*, February 5, 1868, <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=DAC18680205.2.24>.

4 Making Magic Onstage: From Novels to Performances

Charles Dickens' lifelong passion for the theatre and his love of acting prepared him to be more than a literary superstar. That devotion fueled his desire to perform on stage later in life, fulfilling an ambition that began when he was a teenager. After his months working in the Warren's Blacking factory, sticking labels onto pots of polish while his family languished in a debtors' prison, Charles at thirteen returned to school.¹⁵³ He attended Wellington House Academy in North London, a short walk from his family home.¹⁵⁴ During his two years there, he showed a keen interest in amateur theatrical productions, and acted out plays in the kitchen of a friend's house: Daniel Tobin was Dickens "most intimate companion in the school-days (1824-1826)."¹⁵⁵ John Forster remembered in his biography on Dickens that the young man and his school friends performed the comedies, *Miller and his Men* and *Cherry and Fair Star*, which were popular shows of the day. "Dickens was always a leader at these plays, which were presented with much solemnity before an audience of boys and in the presence of ushers," recalled Dickens' schoolfellow, Henry Danson.¹⁵⁶ As Forster recounted, Dickens was so immersed in theatre that his teachers remembered his dramatic pursuits, rather than his writing, during these years.

Charles Dickens' return to school was short-lived. Because his father failed to pay his school fees, Charles left Wellington House Academy after two years, when he was fifteen years old. With only two years of private school education under his belt, he started as a junior clerk in the law offices of Ellis and Blackmore, where he stayed for eighteen months.¹⁵⁷ He copied

¹⁵³ Hibbert, *The Making of Charles Dickens*, 52.

¹⁵⁴ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 106.

¹⁵⁵ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 84.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 63.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 84.

documents, ran errands, and facilitated registration of wills, tasks which informed his opinion of British law as confusing and inaccessible to the common man. This impression colored his writing throughout his career, particularly in the novels, *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *Bleak House* (1852).

Dickens showed his compassion for destitute children struggling to survive in London in the character of Oliver, the orphan at the center of *Oliver Twist*. The young boy invokes the rage of his workhouse master when he requests more gruel in the novel's most famous line, "Please, sir, I want some more."¹⁵⁸ The proprietor of the workhouse then hit Oliver over the head with a soup ladle. Oliver escaped and headed to London, where he fell in with a band of pickpockets. Dickens drew on his experience with the poor and wretched in London for his description of the hardships there:

Bleak, dark, and piercing cold, it was a night for the well-housed and fed to draw round the bright fire, and thank God they were at home; and for the homeless starving wretch to lay him down and die. Many hunger-worn outcasts close their eyes in our bare streets at such times, who, let their crimes have been what they may, can hardly open them in a more bitter world.¹⁵⁹

Oliver Twist was published in serial installments between 1837 and 1839, and the book was published in November 1838. It was the first English novel to feature a child as a central character.¹⁶⁰

Charles Dickens' dark wit to satirized English legal process in *Bleak House*, which was published in installments between 1852 and 1853.

The one great principle of the English law is, to make business for itself. There is no other principle distinctly, certainly, and consistently maintained through all its narrow turnings. Viewed by this light it becomes a coherent scheme, and not the monstrous maze the laity are apt to think it. Let them but once clearly perceive

¹⁵⁸ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Richard Bentley, 1838), 29.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 253.

¹⁶⁰ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 216.

that its grand principle is to make business for itself at their expense, and surely they will cease to grumble.¹⁶¹

Dickens' legal experience, and his familiarity with London as a setting, inspired *Bleak House*. He celebrated his completion of the novel with a two month long trip to Italy.¹⁶²

In the theatre, Charles Dickens found constant distraction from the legal work at Ellis and Blackmore. He recounted his passion for the theatre during these late teen years in a letter to his friend, John Forster: "I went to some theatre every night, with very few exceptions, for at least three years: really studying the bills at first, and going to where there was the best acting."¹⁶³ The shows ranged from melodrama to comedy to farce in candle-lit theatres with backless benches.¹⁶⁴ He memorized lines from these shows, and in his spare time, took part in amateur theatricals.

Dickens considered a career as an actor, but John Forster noted: "He took to a higher calling (instead)..."¹⁶⁵ After Dickens left Ellis and Blackmore, he worked briefly for another law office, Charles Molloy, then became a writing clerk, recording proceedings in the House of Commons, using shorthand skills.¹⁶⁶ In 1832, when he was twenty, Dickens tried to get a role at Covent Garden theatre. Writing to the stage manager, as he explained to Forster, "I believed I had a strong perception of character and oddity, and a natural power of reproducing in my own person what I observed in others."¹⁶⁷ Despite a request from the stage manager to meet in person, Dickens suffered from "a terrible cold" on the appointed day; as he lamented to Forster: "See how near I might have been to another sort of life?"¹⁶⁸ Dickens continued to harbor his

¹⁶¹ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1852), 128.

¹⁶² Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 54.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁶⁴ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 121.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 58.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

love of theatrical performance, which years later emerged again as a passion in his personal and professional life.

By 1857, Charles Dickens attracted royal attention. He starred in an amateur theatrical production of the play, *The Frozen Deep*, written by his friend, the novelist Wilkie Collins.¹⁶⁹ Queen Victoria attended a special production of the play being staged at the Gallery of Illustration at Regent Street in London.¹⁷⁰ At first, the Queen requested a private performance at Buckingham Palace, but Dickens responded that this would put his daughters in an awkward social position.¹⁷¹ His daughters had not yet been presented at Court, and he did not want their initial visit to the Palace to be as actresses.¹⁷² Thus, Queen Victoria instead attended a private performance at the Gallery before the paying public saw the show. She brought an entourage that included her son-in-law, Prince Frederick of Prussia and King Leopold of Belgium.¹⁷³ In her diary, the Queen wrote that the performance was “intensely dramatic...touching...moving.”¹⁷⁴ Queen Victoria remained a fan of Dickens’ work throughout her life.

The production of *The Frozen Deep* in 1857 was a Dickens family affair: his children, Mamie, Katey and Charley appeared in the London cast, along with his sister-in-law, Georgina Hogarth. When Dickens decided to hire professional actors for a production of the show in Manchester, he found the Ternan family of actors through a friend’s recommendation. The Manchester venue could hold an audience of four thousand, which would present a challenge to the Hogarth and Dickens clans, whose voices were not strong enough to fill the space.¹⁷⁵ Ellen Ternan, an eighteen year old actress, the same age as his daughter Katey, caught his attention.

¹⁶⁹ Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 279.

¹⁷⁰ Sidney Lee, *Queen Victoria: A Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1903), 409.

¹⁷¹ Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 282.

¹⁷² Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 783.

¹⁷³ Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 282.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 283.

She was petite and fair, and already a veteran performer. She had appeared onstage for the first time at the age of three, coming from a family of actors.¹⁷⁶

When Ellen Ternan first met Charles Dickens, he was forty-five, and his twenty-one-year marriage to Catherine was unraveling. In 1857, he wrote to his friend Forster: “Poor Catherine and I are not made for each other, and there is no help for it. It is not only that she makes me uneasy and unhappy, but that I make her so too – and much more so.”¹⁷⁷ Dickens had begun an affair with Ellen Ternan that would last for the rest of his life.

His relationship with Ellen Ternan coincided with his career as a paid public performer. In 1857, at St. Martin’s Hall in London, Dickens gave two readings of his 1843 tale, *A Christmas Carol*, to raise money for a fund honoring his recently deceased friend, Douglas Jerrold.¹⁷⁸ Two thousand people attended each performance.¹⁷⁹ The size of the crowd clearly inspired Dickens. He wrote to his friend and fellow actor, W.C. Macready, in a letter dated July 13, 1857: “The St. Martin’s Hall audience was, I must confess, a very extraordinary thing. The two thousand odd people were like one, and their enthusiasm was something awful.”¹⁸⁰ The size and enthusiasm of the crowd made Dickens realize that the enterprise had potential beyond charity readings. He performed, according to his sister-in-law, Georgina, and his daughter, Mamie: “to such immense audiences and with such success, that the idea of giving public readings for his *own* benefit first occurred to him at this time.”¹⁸¹ By 1859, his success at reading his own works before paying audiences had inspired him to think of a trip to read in America. Writing to his friend, William de Cerjat, Dickens noted that the readings had revealed that he was more popular than ever:

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, vol. 3, 162.

¹⁷⁸ Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 282.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Charles Dickens, Mamie Dickens and Georgia Hogarth, *Letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol. 2, 23.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 4.

I rather think that the readings in the country have opened up a new public who were outside before; but however that may be, [my] books have a wider range than they ever had, and [my] public welcomes are prodigious.¹⁸²

The success spawned a lucrative possibility in America:

Said correspondent is at present overwhelmed with proposals to go and read in America. Will never go, unless a small fortune be first paid down in money on this side of the Atlantic. Stated the figure of such payment, between ourselves, only yesterday. Expects to hear no more of it, and assuredly will never go for less.¹⁸³

He did not mention a figure in this letter, nor did he reveal who had mentioned it. But soon after, George Dolby estimated a potential intake of two million dollars coaxed him to embark on the 1867 voyage to the United States.

George Dolby credited the “Jerrold Fund” readings for expanding Dickens’ fame as a reader beyond England. He also had his sights set on his own profit; Dolby earned a ten percent commission on Dickens’ earnings from his readings.¹⁸⁴ Dolby recounted in his memoir: “The fame of these Readings spread everywhere, and was so great that Mr. Fields, of Boston, although he had never heard him read, sent an agent to England to negotiate with Mr. Dickens for a series of Readings in America, Mr. Fields being anxious that his countrymen should participate in an enjoyment of which report spoke so favorably.”¹⁸⁵ James Fields was an American publisher who first met Dickens during his visit to Boston in 1842; the two remained friends throughout Dickens’ life.¹⁸⁶

In the meantime, Dolby organized the British tour. Dickens’ public performances in his home country set the stage for his American readings. The tour included thirty readings through London, Portsmouth, Birmingham, Clifton and Manchester in England; and Glasgow, Aberdeen

¹⁸² Ibid, 87.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Fred Kaplan, *Dickens: A Biography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 390.

¹⁸⁵ Dolby, *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him*, 88.

¹⁸⁶ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 343.

and Edinburgh in Scotland.¹⁸⁷ Chappell and Company agreed to pay Dickens fifty pounds per reading.¹⁸⁸ That would be the equivalent of approximately six thousand, five hundred dollars in modern value.¹⁸⁹ The tour began on April 10, 1866, in St. James's Hall in London with Dickens performing scenes from the novel he had published that year, *Doctor Marigold's Prescriptions*, for the first time.¹⁹⁰ Dolby recounted the enthusiastic response in London:

Doctor Marigold as a reading more than realized the anticipations of even the most sanguine of Dickens' friends, whilst the public, and those who in various ways were more immediately interested in the Readings, were convinced that up to that time they had had but a very faint conceptions of Mr. Dickens's powers either as an adapter or an elocutionist.¹⁹¹

Dickens and Dolby continued their British tour with readings of *Doctor Marigold*, adding *David Copperfield* and *The Pickwick Papers* in Manchester in April 1866.

Launching a theatrical spectacle was a natural step from novel writing for Dickens, according to one scholar who studied the culture of celebrity that Dickens created through his reading tours. "As a once-aspiring professional actors and an avid fan of both the circus and the theater, Dickens was acutely aware of how celebrity, performance and exhibition could be transformed into mass entertainment and self-promotion and how rewarding it could often be."¹⁹² After the successful charity readings in London, Dickens realized the potential for profit. He also set the agenda with his choice of material. *A Christmas Carol* was the work he performed most often, in Great Britain and the United States, with its vivid descriptions:

Once upon a time—of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve—old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside, go wheezing up and down, beating

¹⁸⁷ Dolby, *Dickens As I Knew Him*, 4.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁸⁹ Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "MeasuringWorth," *Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present*, (2014), www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/.

¹⁹⁰ Dolby, *Dickens as I Knew Him*, 8.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁹² Helms, "Performing Authorship in the Celebrity Sphere: Dickens and the Reading Tours," 129.

their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already—it had not been light all day—and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms.¹⁹³

His performance often lasted three hours, and usually featured *A Christmas Carol*, an interval, then a performance of the trial scene from *The Pickwick Papers*. During the first New York City reading of his U.S. tour on December 9, 1867, every seat in Steinway Hall was filled, and others bought tickets for standing room places, a common practice during his tour.¹⁹⁴ The *New York Times* reported that Dickens read the opening descriptive passages of *A Christmas Carol*: “distinguished only by admirable utterance and enunciation, and a most discriminating and effective emphasis.”¹⁹⁵

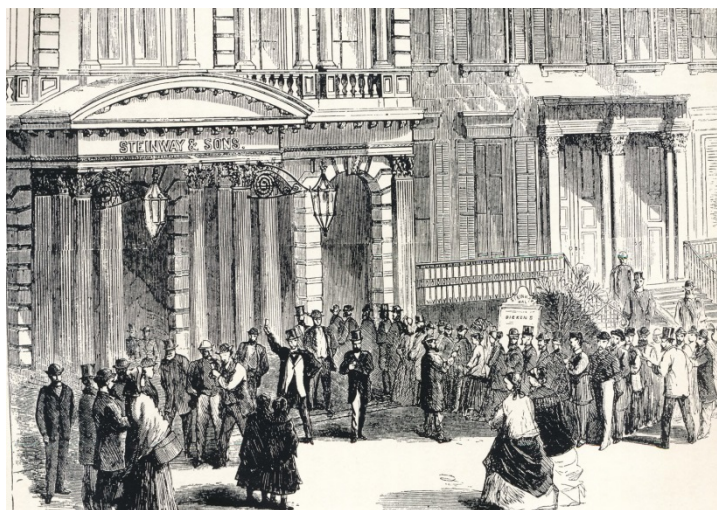


Figure 4.1 Crowds Herald Dickens' Arrival in Boston
Reproduced by Courtesy of Charles Dickens Museum, London

As soon as he had set the scene of his novella, his tone shifted, and took on the roles of his characters and his readings became performances. Dickens imitated each character's voice, from Tiny Tim's high-pitched trill, to Ebenezer Scrooge's surly growl:

¹⁹³ Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1843), 2.

¹⁹⁴ "Mr. Dickens' First Reading." *New York Times* (1857-1922), Dec 10, 1867.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!” cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge’s nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach. “Bah!” said Scrooge, “Humbug!” He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge’s, that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again. “Christmas a humbug, uncle!” said Scrooge’s nephew. “You don’t mean that, I am sure?” “I do,” said Scrooge. “Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You’re poor enough.”¹⁹⁶

The *New York Times* writer noted that, “Mr. Dickens makes the muscles of his face do their full duty in the work of imitation, so that the audience see as well as hear the characters that are brought before them.”¹⁹⁷ He recited his work without looking at the page, from memory. The performance evoked tears from the audience, particularly during Dickens’ rendition of Tiny Tim’s famous concluding toast, “God bless us, everyone!”¹⁹⁸ Dickens’ manager Dolby recalled the audience’s frenzied reaction to his first reading in Boston of *A Christmas Carol*. After Dickens delivered Tiny Tim’s famous last line: “... a dead silence seemed to prevail—a sort of public sigh as it were—only to be broken by cheers and calls, the most enthusiastic and uproarious, causing Mr. Dickens to break through his rule, and again presenting himself before his audience, to bow his acknowledgements.”¹⁹⁹

The emotion provided an apt foil for the comedy Dickens often performed on the tour, the trial scene from his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*. He switched back and forth between befuddled characters as they struggled their way through confusing courtroom proceedings. A *New York Times* reporter marveled how: “Mr. Dickens fully proves in these readings the truth of what has often been said: that he is one of the best living actors.”²⁰⁰ One historian compared his

¹⁹⁶ Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 11.

¹⁹⁷ “Mr. Dickens’ First Reading.” *New York Times* (1857-1922), Dec 10, 1867.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Forster, *Dickens as I Knew Him*, 174.

²⁰⁰ “Mr. Dickens’ First Reading.” *New York Times* (1857-1922), Dec 10, 1867.

readings to spectacles worthy of the contemporary showman P.T. Barnum.²⁰¹ These readings became performances. George Dolby, as part of the planning for a profitable tour, had conferred with Barnum.²⁰² P.T. Barnum was an excellent source of advice for Dolby on how to promote events, and make money from entertainment. Dolby recalled that interaction with the impresario with reverence, describing him as: “the evergreen showman, whose opinion on all matters of public life is priceless.”²⁰³ P.T. Barnum had a natural genius for advertising, as the *New York Times* noted: “No man knew better than he the value of printer's ink.”²⁰⁴ George Dolby's research helped to assure that Dickens' American reading tour was ground-breaking. To optimize the entertainment value of his readings, Dickens determined to depict multiple characters in deeply physical performances, making his 18-city tour wildly successful financially, though disastrous for his health.²⁰⁵

Charles Dickens never fully recovered from the physical toll of seventy-six U.S. readings. He wrote to friends: “The work in America has been so very hard, and the winter there has been so excessively severe, that I really have been very unwell for some months.”²⁰⁶ His health deteriorated further after he returned home.

²⁰¹ Helms, “Performing Authorship in the Celebrity Sphere: Dickens and the Reading Tours,” 129.

²⁰² Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 1003.

²⁰³ Dolby, *Dickens as I Knew Him*, 125.

²⁰⁴ “The Great Showman Dead,” *New York Times (1857-1922)*, April 8, 1891.

²⁰⁵ Barnett, “The Late Dickens: Mourning the Memory of the Early Dickens in the Reading Tours,” 234.

²⁰⁶ Charles Dickens, Mamie Dickens, and Georgina Hogarth, *Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. 2*, 226

5 Dickens at Home: The Final Chapter

Dickens seemed to have a sense of his waning life before he left America. His farewell speech in Boston was one of the most poignant of his career, and helped to cement his fans' appreciation. "Let it, putting a girdle round the earth, comprehend both sides of the Atlantic at once in this moment, and say, as Tiny Tim observes, 'God bless us every one.'"²⁰⁷ Cheers and applause greeted his farewell, particularly the final line, with its invocation of Tiny Tim from *A Christmas Carol*. His literary and public persona solidified his role as a beloved celebrity.

On April 20, 1868, Dickens departed Boston on board the steamship, *Russia*.²⁰⁸ Few people outside of Dickens' inner circle realized how sick he was when he returned. He resumed his hectic reading schedule, despite his maladies. "The actual state of Dickens's health was so very little known outside the circle of his immediate friends, that his rapid recovery and resumption of his ordinary mode of life, gave rise to the belief in the public mind that the medical men had exaggerated the dangers of his case," George Dolby wrote.²⁰⁹ His manager monitored his blood pressure during his final readings in Great Britain, noting that Dickens' pulse rose to one hundred and ten, from its usual state of seventy-two at the end of his readings of *A Christmas Carol*. Dolby wrote that the emotion Dickens' performances evoked within himself caused his heart to race.²¹⁰

Charles Dickens' U.S. reading tour netted £19,000, according to Dolby.²¹¹ That would equal approximately three million dollars in U.S. currency today; Dolby himself earned

²⁰⁷ "Farewell Dinner to Charles Dickens," *London Times via New Hampshire Statesman*, November 29, 1867, Issue 2426; col E.

²⁰⁸ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 1026.

²⁰⁹ Dolby, *Dickens as I Knew Him*, 415.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 444.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 332.

approximately one million dollars.²¹² Altogether, under Dolby's management, Dickens earned nearly £33,000 from two hundred and forty-two readings in Europe and America.²¹³ That is the equivalent of more than four million dollars in today's money.²¹⁴ But they came at a cost.

The misfortune was Dickens' failing health, for which Dickens considered himself blameless. Dolby noted: "Handsome as these results were, and of course highly satisfactory to Mr. Dickens, they were purchased at the dear cost of the sacrifice of his health. But his career as a public reader was his own choice, and setting aside his pecuniary profits, the pleasure he derived from it is not to be told in words."²¹⁵ While Dickens' visit to the United States was arduous, he clearly enjoyed his work, and relished the opportunity to profit from his popularity.

In 1867, Dickens praised the moral and physical changes he saw in the post-Civil War United States. In April, 1868, in a speech to two hundred people gathered to hear him speak in New York City, he said there were only a few instances in which he was misrepresented in the press. He concluded: ".....in the smallest places equally with the largest, I have been received with unsurpassable politeness, delicacy, sweet temper, hospitality, considerations, and with unsurpassable respect for the privacy daily enforced upon me by the nature of my avocation here and the state of my health."²¹⁶ Charles Dickens seemed to view his final trip to the United States as the highlight of his illustrious career.

In his last year, Dickens continued with readings in England, Scotland and Ireland. His mistress, Ellen Ternan, might have attended some of his readings in the North of England,

²¹² Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "MeasuringWorth," *Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present*, (2014), www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/.

²¹³ Ibid, 451.

²¹⁴ Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "MeasuringWorth," *Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present*, (2014), www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/.

²¹⁵ Dolby, *Dickens as I Knew Him*, 451.

²¹⁶ Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, 344.

according to some historians' accounts.²¹⁷ Because letters between Charles and Ellen were presumably burned, much of their relationship has been conjecture. But historians who studied Dickens' last will and testament and his funeral believe that at the time of his death in 1870, she was still significant in his life.

Charles Dickens was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey, and was mourned by a small group, which some say included Ellen Ternan.²¹⁸ Dickens left her one thousand pounds in his will,²¹⁹ the equivalent of approximately \$125,000 today.²²⁰ That was the same amount he left his daughter Mamie, with an extra annuity of three hundred pounds per year if she were to remain unmarried.²²¹ To his "dear sister-in-law Georgina Hogarth" he left "the sum of £8,000 free of legacy duty."²²² Dickens added: "I leave her my grateful blessing as the best and truest friend man ever had."²²³ Dickens left his books, engravings and prints, along with a trust of £8,000 to disburse to his estranged wife, Catherine Dickens, and to his eldest son, Charley. He also bequeathed to Charley his share of the weekly journal, "All the Year Round." Dickens signed his will on June 2, 1870. That was the last day George Dolby saw him alive. The two met for their weekly lunch, when they discussed plans for improvements at Dickens' Gad's Hill home in Kent. Dolby remembered the end of their final encounter: "We shook hands across the office-table, and after a hearty grasp of the hand, the words from him, 'next week then,' I turned to go, though with a troubled sense that I was leaving my chief in great pain."²²⁴ Dickens died just one

²¹⁷ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 1040.

²¹⁸ Barnett, "The Late Dickens: Mourning the Memory of the Early Dickens in the Reading Tours," 234.

²¹⁹ Robert Garnett, "The Mysterious Mourner: Dickens's Funeral and Ellen Ternan," *Dickens Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (June 2008): 109.

²²⁰ Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson, "MeasuringWorth," *Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present*, (2014), www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/.

²²¹ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 515.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Dolby, *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him*, 463.

week later.

On June 9, 1870, a little more than two years after his return to Great Britain, Charles Dickens collapsed in his family home with his sister-in-law, Georgina Hogarth, after experiencing “...some kind of fit.”²²⁵ He lost consciousness, and passed away a few hours later, apparently of a stroke.²²⁶ George Dolby recounted: “His death closed the brightest chapter of my life, and the warmth and vividness of my recollections of that period of his career in which I was privileged to be very close to him, are the main explanations and excuse I have to offer for attempting to tell the story with which these pages are concerned.”²²⁷ Dickens’ country mourned his death. The *Times* of London wrote: “The loss of such a man is an event which makes ordinary expressions of regret seem cold and conventional.”²²⁸ Thirty years later, George Dolby died destitute at the Fulham Infirmary in London in October, 1900.²²⁹

Dickens’ two trips to the United States were both integral to his career, as well as the highlights of Dolby’s life. The first tour showed his social conscience; the second revealed his entrepreneurship. During a “splendid”²³⁰ Boston dinner in 1842, Dickens had characterized the good will of his hosts, and concluded: “America and England, and may they never have any division but the Atlantic between them.”²³¹ While he had enjoyed financial success in his home country, he wanted to cash in on the fame and recognition he enjoyed in the United States. Both visits gave him the opportunity to offer social commentary, as well as to profit from fame across the ocean.

²²⁵ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 1079.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Dolby, *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him*, viii.

²²⁸ “Mr. Charles Dickens,” *The Times*, 10 June, 1870.

²²⁹ Frederic George Kitton, *Charles Dickens, His Life, Writings and Personality* (Edinburgh: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1902), 390.

²³⁰ “Speech of Charles Dickens, Esq.,” *Scioto Gazette*, 17 February 1842, Issue 45, col D.

²³¹ Ibid.

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