What follows is a complete transcript of the article on Charles Dickens in the December 3, 1867 issue of the *New York Daily Tribune*. On your private guided walking tour, you'll hold the original newspaper; learn about Dickens' second visit to America; and view an authentic autograph of Charles Dickens as you enjoy complimentary Boston Cream Pie and Parker House Rolls at Parker's Restaurant in the historic (and haunted) Omni Parker House Hotel.

Charles Dickens

His First Reading in America

By Telegraph to the Tribune

Boston, Dec. 2, 1867

Ever since it was announced that Mr. Dickens would give his first Reading on this side of the Atlantic in Boston, the inhabitants of our quaint, old-fashioned sister city have been in a state of feverous excitement. No sooner was the news flashed along the Cable, that he was coming, than everything was immediately put in apple-pie order. The streets were all swept from one end of the city to the other, for the second time in twenty-four hours; the State House and the Old South Church were painted, off-hand, a delicate rose-pink; a new statue of Edward Everett was put up in the Public Garden, in the attitude of throwing up his hat and shouting "Hurrah!"; every bookseller's window was stacked up with copies of Ticknor & Fields's new edition of "Dickens," to the temporary displacement of Longfellow's "Dante" and Dr. Holmes's "Guardian Angel;" the cigar-shops came out as one man with their brands all new-christened, and nothing is smoked, chewed, or taken in snuff today but "Little Nell Cigars," Mr. Squeers Fine Cut, the Mantilini Plug and the "Genuine Pickwick Snuff;" while at every turn, in the illustrated newspapers, in the hotel office, and in all the shop windows, the new portrait of Mr. Dickens is to be seen, showing as a man somewhat past middle life, with thin, gray hair, a scanty beard, and eyes downcast reading on a book; a striking contrast to the boyish face of twenty-five years ago, with its large eyes full of wonder and sensitive feeling, its delicate, almost girlish contour, and its long locks of dark, abundant hair. The younger portrait was, perhaps, a little flattered; but the older one is as good as a quiet, impassive, picture of a face full of life and expression, and rarely at rest, can be. We had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Dickens at dinner a few days ago, and, of course, it was not difficult to recognize him, even though seeing him for the first time; but this portrait would, we think, have helped us but little. All we can say is, to those who wish to know beforehand how so famous a man will look when they see him, is that this portrait prepares the mind to recognize him, but that is all its office. It shows us all that time, and labor, and care, have done, to batter down the beautiful house of youth and haunting fancy, but it gives no gleam of the radiant spirit that still lights up the enchanter's face.

Meanwhile, until tonight, Mr. Dickens has kept himself strictly secluded from all but one or two old and intimate friends. His rooms are at the Parker House, and there he has remained, busily engaged all day, in writing and study, excepting when he is taking his daily eight-mile "constitutional" walk with his publisher, Fields, and steadily declining all the invitations to breakfast, dinner, tea, supper, parties, balls, and drives that hospitable Boston pours in upon him in an unfailing stream. Much of his time is spent in the most laborious pains-taking study of the parts he is to read. Indeed, the public has but little idea of the cost—in downright hard work of mind, and body, and voice—at which these readings are produced. Although Mr. Dickens has read, now, nearly five hundred times, I am assured, on the best authority that he never attempts a new part in public until he has spent at least two months over it in study as faithful and searching as Rachel or Cushman would give to a new character. This study extends not merely to the analysis of the text, to the discrimination of character, to the minutest points of elocution; but decides upon the facial expression, the tone of the voice, the gesture, the attitude, and even the material surroundings of the actor, for, *Acting it is, not Reading*, in the ordinary sense, at all. Mr. Dickens is so essentially an artist that he cannot neglect the slightest thing that may serve to heighten the effect of what he has undertaken to do. And he is as conscientious, so strict in all his dealings—a very martinet in business and thorough man of affairs—that he will leave nothing undone, that time and labor can do, to give to the public that pays so much for the pleasure of hearing him, the full worth of its money. This is the reason why he is a man of the world, greatly delighting in society, thoroughly fitted to enjoy it himself, and to make others enjoy it—deliberately cuts himself off from it, until his task shall be done. "I am come here," he says, "to read. The people expect me to do my best, and how can I do it if I am all the time on the go? My time is not my own, when I am preparing to read, any more than it is when I am writing a novel, and I can as well do one as the other without concentrating all my powers on it until it is done." Whoever, then, fancies that the crowd that packed the Tremont Temple tonight, that the crowd which, after the splendid success of this first Reading, will continue to pack it till the Readings are all over—have given their money for a bagatelle, an hour's careless play of genius—whoever thinks this, is quite mistaken. This wonderful two-hours performance—so full of varied power: brim-full, from end to end, of feeling, pathos, mirth, and fun, a sunlit shower of smiles and tears, not to be described in words, hardly to be comprehended by the mind; all this—if it be not the pure result of unremitting study, and thought, and physical labor, would, at least, not have been the perfect thing it is, without these helps.

Although the tickets for the readings carry twice repeated on their face the request that "the audience would all be seated punctually at 8 o'clock," it was nearly 8:15 before the vast crowd had simmered down to a state of comparative quiescence. And it was indeed a vast audience—such a crowd as is seldom gathered in a single hall to meet any single man. The line of carriages ran down all manner of streets and lost itself in the suburbs. All the cars leading from the outlying towns brought in fresh recruits to the great army, and the snow that had been falling all the afternoon at last gave up trying to get to the pavement, and went to some other place, while the moon shone out and helped the gas lamps light the gay, struggling, swarming multitude that was trying to get inside the doors—watched by a long faced silent multitude that crowded round the doorways without tickets and no hope of getting in at all. Inside the house, the scene was striking enough. Few cities, anywhere, could show an audience of such great character. Hardly a notable man in Boston, or 50 miles about, but was there, and we doubt if in London itself Mr. Dickens ever read before such an assemblage. There sat Longfellow looking like the very spirit of Christmas with his ruddy cheeks

and bright soft eyes looking out from the vest of snow white hair and snow white beard. There was Holmes looking crisp and fine like a tight little grape-skin full of wit instead of wine. There was Lowell, as if Sidney himself had come back with his poet's heart smiling sadly through his poet's eyes. Here too was the older Dana, now an old man of 80, with long gray hair falling round a face bright with shrewd intelligence, as able now as 30 years ago to write *Paul Felton* or *The Buccaneer*. Running the eye over the hall one saw other men widely known. Charles Eliot Norton, whose translation of Dante's *Vita Nuova* may well stand side by side with his master Longfellow of the grander song. There in the gallery is Edwin Whipple. Yonder is Fields, to whom all owe this great pleasure, for he suggested, urged, and made this visit of Dickens easy to him. Bishop Eastburn, over on the other side, seems thankful that clergymen have yet some pleasures left. There is Poole, the librarian of the Athenaeum, one of our men who knows most about books, and Samuel Eliot, the President of the Social Science, and George Green, who recently crossed blades with Bancroft. Emerson's face I could not catch. Concord is far away, and snowstorms no joke to travel in. Nor did Whittier come as was promised,—Whittier who has never in his life been present at an evening entertainment of any description, concert or opera, or even, strange to say, a lecture. He promised, but at the last his heart failed him, and the "good gray head that all men know" did not bless our eyes tonight.

I have said that Dickens is an artist in all he does and seldom have I seen a more finished piece of work than this whole reading. So careful is he of every point, that nothing shall go amiss, that he has brought with him from England all the appointments by which he is surrounded, when he reads at home. At the back of the platform is stretched a long screen covered with dark red cloth—red at least it looked by gaslight, though Fields told me it was purple—and in front of it stands a table with square legs covered with rich crimson velvet—the top, also, covered with the same, hanging over the edge, and bordered with a heavy fringe. At one side of this table projects a little shelf, also covered with velvet, on which are a water bottle and glass, and at the left hand corner is a square block about eight inches high—that also covered, top and sides, with velvet, like the rest. On this block the reader rests his book, and uses it, beside, as an accessory in his by-play. Now it is *Bob Cratchite's* desk in *Scrooge's* office. Now it is *Mr. Fezziwig's* desk, from which he looks benignantly down on his apprentices. Now it is the desk on which rests the Christmas goose of the *Cratchite* family. A very useful little velvet box Mr. Dickens makes it, I assure you, and the audience gets to look upon it as quite a delightful piece of furniture.

Mr. Dickens is not quite as rigid in his punctuality as dear Fanny Kemble used to be, who began like a beautiful fate, the minute the clock struck 8, no matter whether people had come or not, and treated the laggards to bewitching frowns as they crept belated up the aisles. But at last he comes! He enters, holding the book in both his hands; comes up the steps with a quick, springing walk, and, standing at his velvet desk, proceeds to work, like a man of business. He is dressed with perfect neatness and simplicity, not a trace of the old foppery—the Autumn's flower of all the youthful dandyism—is seen in his buttonhole in the shape of a white carnation, and a pink rosebud on his shirt front. There is nothing more pretending than a plain gold stud. He has, to be sure, considerable watch-chain, and on his finger a diamond ring—but nothing is noticeable in his dress. He stands there a quiet gentleman, plain Charles Dickens, and that name is grace and ornament enough.

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For a Boston audience, his reception is remarkably enthusiastic. Seldom does the proper ice of this polished community crack as loudly, and as cheerily under the thawing beams of an intellectual sun, as it did tonight when Dickens stood before them, and while cheer after cheer broke forth, and cries of welcome and clapping of innumerable kids, rose and fell and rose again in a friendly roar, tried to speak and was defeated, and returned gallantly to the charge again, but had scarcely got as far as "Ladies" when he was obliged to succumb, and made another dash at "Gentlemen," and gave it up, and at last saw that one Englishman was nothing to so many hundred Yankees, and waited smiling and bowing until they had had their will, and were ready to let him have his.

The very first words "*Marley* was dead, to begin with! That was certain,"—settled the question of success. The way in which those words were uttered, showed also that the reading was to depend for all effect upon the worth of what was read, and upon the sincerity of the reader. From first to last there is no trickery in it,—full of action, abounding in gesture, with a voice for every character in every mood; with a face for every man, woman, and child, reflecting every feeling. There is no straining for stage effect, no attitudizing, no affectation. The most effective reading we ever listened to—it was the most beautifully simple, straightforward, hearty piece of painting from life. Dear *Bob Cratchite* made twenty-five hundred friends before he had spoken two words, and if everybody had obeyed the impulse of his heart, and sent him a Christmas goose, he would have been suffocated in a twinkling, under a mountain of poultry. As for the delightful *Fezziwigs*, not the coldest heart in the audience, but warmed to them at once. Probably never was a ball so thoroughly enjoyed as the one given by these worthy people to their apprentices. The greatest hit of the evening was the point where the dance executed by *Mr.* and *Mrs. Fezziwig* to *Miss Fezziwig* was described. The contagion of the audiences laughter reached Mr. Dickens himself, who with difficulty brought out the inimitable drollery: after which *Mr. Fezziwig* cut positively—cut so that a light seemed to shine from his very calves, and he actually WINKED with his legs. This was too much for Boston, and I thought the roof would go off. Next to this, the most effective point, was *Tiny Tim*, whose plaintive treble, with *Bob Cratchite's* way of speaking of him, brought out so many pocket handkerchiefs that it looked as if a snowstorm had somehow got into the hall without tickets. Seldom do we hear such genuine pathos as that with which Mr. Dickens read the poor father's lament over his little lame child, and great was the genius which enabled him to walk so safely on the dangerous edge that separates nature, pure and simple from mere travestie.

The Christmas party at the house of *Scrooge's* nephew, where *Tuppins* plays blind man's bluff with the plump sister in the lace tucker, was a thing never to be forgotten. When Dickens said, "I no more believe that that man was blindfolded than I believe that he had eyes in his boots," his facial expression—indignant as of a man who is being put upon, and yet with a consciousness of the absurdity of the statement that makes him laugh in spite of his anger—was inimitable, and it was long before the audience would let him get on. At last we had it and the plump sister with the lace tucker to become immortal. There was an intermission of about ten minutes between the reading of "The Christmas Carol" and "The Trial Scene from Pickwick," and as he closed the book with *Tiny Tim's* "God bless us every one," the enthusiasm of the vast assembly broke forth in such expressions, as to those who know the impassive nature of Boston audiences, showed plainly enough, that the heart under all their silk and broadcloth was fairly stirred and beating with warm goodwill. But Dickens was plainly not to be persuaded into a speech. For all the uproar, he did not appear again, until the court called up the case of *Bardwell* versus *Pickwick*. It was easy to see that the reader himself had a peculiar affection for this part—a leaf torn from a book that is associated with

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the beginning of his fame, the end out of which this splendid tree-stock, set with flower and fruit, has grown. He read it with full force, throwing himself into it with all his heart, and, I may add, with all his body, for he put much more acting into this part of his reading than into the first part. *Sergeant Buzfuz's* speech to the jury was without a flaw, a pearl of the art of acting, and no words of mine or anybody could express the way in which *Nathaniel Winkle* was before us. Not less excellent was the Judge—the sourest, driest, most cross-grained piece of legal stupidity that ever was seen or heard of. Talk about facial expression, nothing more wonderful was ever seen than the change from the Judge who seemed to be smelling something disagreeable, to the frank, cheery face of *Samuel Weller*, as fresh as a rose and as good to look at. Here was a scene: The minute the Court said, "Call up *Samuel Weller*," that friend of near 30 years' standing was recognized by all Boston at a glance, and his mounting the stand was a signal for such a hand-shaking (speaking in a figure) that he will never forget. And wasn't it jolly to see him, jolly to hear him, and, jolliest of all to hear that deep, rich voice of his old father, deep and rich as the foam on his quart pot of ale, calling out from the gallery "Put it down with a *we*, my lord, put it down with a *we*."

In reading these works of his, Mr. Dickens neither follows the original text, nor adheres closely by any means to the text of the pretty and convenient handbooks which he has himself condensed and prepared. He leaves out a good deal, changes words, mistakes words sometimes, and really much of it seems impromptu. I thought, now and then, that he was thinking of his present audience, and putting in what he fancied would suit better here than in London. His delivery has marked peculiarities, and is thoroughly original. He deals much in the rising inflection at the end of sentences, is sometimes monotonous, and keeps up old pronunciations that we seldom hear on this side of the water: *"Clark"* for clerk, "wind" with a long "*i*," *"Ojus"* for odious, are a few. But, on the whole, his accent and pronunciation are not, what we call, English. The great difference between his delivery, and that of our best Americans, is in its slow, deliberate, clear-cut distinctiveness. This is in the descriptive parts. Where it suits the occasion, his delivery takes every shape, and is good for all needs. *Scrooge's* growl,—*Bob Cratchite's* trembling appeal,—the pompous bluster of *Buzfuz,— Mrs. Cluppin's* maundering whine, and *Sam Weller's* manly yeoman's shout are all echoed by that magical voice which will be recognized wherever it is heard in America as the voice of a great author, and of the greatest, perhaps (certainly in versatility of power the greatest), that has ever charmed our Western World.