

## Penny Readings

### **“Merthyr Express” 17 March, 1865**

Editorial: Penny Readings A month ago a few gentlemen introduced to the Merthyr public, without any ostentation or flourish of trumpets, but with an outward show as humble as the subject which they took in hand, Penny Readings. A great deal had been said of Penny Readings in other towns, every where around us they were starting into life, and why should they not have an existence in Merthyr also? Our Library Readings met with the hearty approval of the upper strata of local society, but they excluded the great mass of the working people from participating in the enjoyment which they gave, for the reason that only members of the library and their friends were allowed to attend, and from a still more potent cause, that they occurred on a night unsuited to the conveniences of the working people. Why, then should they not have an evening of their own to spend at these pleasant entertainments? There was nothing to prevent them enjoying themselves for a couple of hours in the same rational ways as their superiors in life, beyond the absence of a room and the lack of readers and singers. Fortunately, these wants were soon supplied, and the Committee after securing the Temperance Hall on Saturday evenings lost no time in introducing their protégé to the public of Merthyr. A better thing could not have happened, for a place where healthy amusement and recreative intelligence could be obtained at a cheap rate has long been a crying want in Merthyr – something to entice the crowds of young men and women from their Saturday evening street parades, and what is worse, spending precious hours and hard-earned shillings in low pot houses, to their moral and physical degradation and ruin. Any person on standing about the Market Square for the first time during the noisy hours of a Saturday night, would exclaim with wonderment, “What on earth can all these people that are walking to and fro find here to entertain them?” Simply nothing. After six days’ heavy toil, they leave work at an early hour on Saturdays, they go home and change their habiliments, and then sally forth with a few shillings or pence in their pockets in search of something the innate craving for amusement and entertainment. They tramp the High-street to and fro, for the High-street in Merthyr is the great artery through which its stream of life is ever flowing, and by and by having failed to find anything to attract their attention and interest them there, they repair to the beer-houses as a last resource, and there, yielding to the insinuating strains of a harp, or decoyed by the lively airs of a fiddle and the animation of the dance, they spend their time and money, and consider themselves fortunate if in reeling homeward they escape the argus-eyed policeman. Those who have resided long in Merthyr know that this is not by any means an overdrawn picture, and various remedies have been applied for the cure and extinction of the evil. Twelve months ago a series of cheap concerts were given, at which ladies and gentlemen of considerable talent performed, and the working classes showed their appreciation of these concerts by attending in large numbers every night. Nobody can doubt for a moment that a vast amount of good was accomplished by these entertainments, and it has often been wondered why nothing of the sort was set on foot in the early part of the winter that is just leaving us. Towards its close the Penny Readings came; but, to use an old adage, better late than never. And the result has proved how true this is. On the first evening not quite a hundred and fifty people were present; on the second night these were more than doubled, and so each succeeding entertainment has drawn together a larger audience than its immediate predecessor. Last Saturday evening the body of the hall was crowded, and the gallery also was nearly filled, showing that the Readings were gaining favour with the people every week. The rapidity with which they have

spread, and the cordial support which they have invariably received from the upper classes, demonstrate most satisfactorily their useful character; and every well wisher of his country will say God speed to this or any other movement whose object is the improvement of our working classes. In Merthyr our worthy stipendiary magistrate when he became acquainted of the fact that they had started, recognized their importance at once and presided over the second meeting, at which he read in his turn like the rest. Following his example, other leading gentlemen in the town have taken the chair at these meetings, and thus imparted to them a character which places their respectability at once above suspicion. We hope to see the era thus successfully inaugurated long continue, for we are persuaded that simple as Penny Readings may at first thought appear to be, they are a means by which a great social and moral revolution may be accomplished with the most beneficent consequences to the sons and daughters of labour.

#### **“Merthyr Express” 9 December 1865**

The Vochriw Our friends here have determined upon trying a course of Penny Readings, and without much a-do, inaugurated the series. They deserve to be successful, and we trust that the many celebrities here will occasionally lend them a helping hand. The proceedings were nearly entirely in Welsh. The attendance and success of the first “essay” was very encouraging.

Vochrhiw Penny Readings The first of a series of Penny Readings was held at the National School, on Thursday week. This proved a decided success. The Rev. T. L. Davies presided as chairman, and after a short and appropriate address, the Misses Edwards and Thomas, and Messrs. Thomas and Williams sang “Llwyn On” and “Ar hyd y nos,” followed by a reading in English, by the Rev. H. Lewis. Mr. W. Richards sang “Rhyn Mind,” after which the chairman read a Welsh dialogue, entitled “Morgan a Shan,” which kept the audience in convulsions of laughter. Mr. J. W. Thomas and party then sang “Gwenith Gwin,” which was highly appreciated by the audience; Mr. Jones followed with a reading “The Gypsy in the thorn bush.” Mr. J. W. Thomas, who was in capital voice, then sang “Ellen Bayne,” followed by Miss Thomas singing “O peidwch a dweid wrth fy nghariad,” and a duet by the Misses Edwards and Thomas, “Goddess Diana,” all of which were vociferously encored. Master D. Evans then recited “The little sweep,” followed by a duet by the Misses Edwards and Thomas, and a trio “Farmer’s girls,” by the Misses Edwards and Thomas and Mr. J. W. Thomas, which was loudly encored, the choruses being taken up by the audience. The National Anthem was then sung, and the audience dispersed highly pleased with the evening’s entertainment. Mr. T. Jones accompanied the singing on the harmonium. Great credit is due to the Rev. T. L. Davies and Mr. T. Jones for their combined exertions in forming the readings; also to Mr. J. W. Thomas who conducted the singing, and to the two young ladies, the Misses Edwards and Thomas, for their able assistance rendered in the musical part of the programme.

#### **“Merthyr Express” 16 December, 1865**

Vochrhiw Readings Another reading came off here last Thursday evening, and in no way was inferior to its predecessor. The Rev. H. Lewis made a very able chairman. The room was crowded to excess. Mr. Jones presided at the harmonium.

#### **“Merthyr Express” 31 March, 1866**

Penny Readings at Pantywaun Following in the wake of their neighbours, the villagers of this thriving neighbourhood inaugurated their Penny Reading season on Tuesday last. Every seat was taken at the National School and many were standing. The readings were a triumphant success. Rev. Goyne, Home Missioner, who organized the readings, was chairman.

### **“Merthyr Express” 1 December, 1866**

Vochriw Penny Readings We are happy to say that the first of a series of amusing and instructive Penny Readings was held at Vochriw on Monday evening last. It is proposed to continue these meetings fortnightly. The Rev. D. Morgan was the chairman, and the following programme was carried out to the entire satisfaction of a large audience: Welsh reading, “Ifor Glan,” Mr. Hughes; duet, “A, B, C,” Mr. & Mrs. Harris; Welsh reading, Mr. Evans; Song, “The Farmer,” Mr. Hughes; Welsh reading, Rev. Morgan; Song, “Janet’s Choice,” Mrs. Hughes; Welsh reading, Mr. W. Richards; Song, Rev. Morgan; Reading, Mr. W. Richards.

### **“Merthyr Express” 22 December, 1866**

Vochriw Penny Readings The second meeting was held on Monday evening last. The programme on this occasion was far superior to that recently recorded. Rev. D. Davies, curate, Cwmysgwyddgwyn, was chairman, and the following was most warmly received: Welsh reading, Mr. W. Richards; duet, “The Gypsy Countess,” Mr. & Mrs. Harris; reading, “Badwyr Cwmtawe,” Mr. T. Evans; Song, “Y Gwenith Gwyn,” Rev. D. Davies; reading, “The Cockney Sportsman,” Mr. J. Jones; Song, “Smile and Fear,” Mr. M.A. Richards; Welsh recitation, Mr. W. Williams; Song, “Milly’s Faith,” Mrs. Harris; reading, “Y Llong ar Dan,” Rev. D. Davies; Song, “The Murmur of the Shell,” Miss Croft; reading, “Fy Anwyl Fam Fy Hunan,” Rev. D. Morgan; duet, “All’s Well,” Rev. D. & M.D. Davies; song, “Y Fwyalchen,” Mrs. Harris.

### **“Merthyr Express” 20 November 1869**

Vochriw Penny Readings The first meeting of the season was held on Tuesday evening in the National School room under the presidency of M. Turner, surgeon. The Deri Glee Party contributed. Mr. W. A. Hopkins of Pontlottyn was on the harmonium.

### **“Merthyr Express” 25 February 1871**

Benefit Concert A grand complimentary benefit concert was given to Mrs. Harris of Vochriw on Thursday evening at the National School Room, Pontlottyn. Mrs. Harris has rendered great assistance at Penny Readings and other entertainments in the neighbourhood, and the committee determined on getting up this concert on a grand scale, and we are happy to say that it proved a decided success. The principal performers were Mr. & Mrs. Frost, Cardiff; Miss Annie Evans, Rhymney; Mrs. Harris, Vochriw; Mr. Robert Rees (Eos Morlais), Swansea; and the Bethania Glee Party, Dowlais. The whole of the pieces were given remarkably well, many of them being encored. Mr. Frost’s harp solos were considered the gems of the evening, as such no harp playing has ever been heard before at the place. There was a crowded assemblage, and we have no doubt that a handsome sum has been realized.

### **“Merthyr Express” 23 September 1871**

Fochriw Popular Readings On Monday evening, a very interesting entertainment of the above kind was given at the National School Room. Mr. B. Jones, Rhymney, was chairman. The proceedings commenced with an overture on the piano, ably rendered by Mr. Theophilus, after which, a variety of readings, recitations, songs, voacal and instrumental duets, followed in fast succession. It is pleasing to observe that out of the lengthy programme there was not one piece left out through the performer not being present. Among the parties who rendered great assistance were Mrs. Harris, Misses Jones, Meredith and Richards; Messrs. Phillips, Richards, Owen, D. James, T. Jones, and Clarke. Another meeting will be held on Monday week.

**16 January 1909** Penny Readings A "penny reading" was held at the Nazareth Chapel on Tuesday evening week. The chair was taken by the Rev. Isaac Roderick.

The programme was contributed to by the following: a Chapter was recited by Miss Katie Jones Davies; duet, Miss Edith Parry and Miss Lily May Rees; recitation, Miss Elizabeth Evans; song, Miss Annie Maud Jones; recitation, Miss Katie Jones Davies; song, Miss Doris Davies; colloquy, Miss Edith Parry and Miss Elizabeth Gwen Jones. An excellent scriptural address was delivered by Rev. Isaac Roderick.