

Examining the Effects of the Ragged School in Literature

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Abstract- *The ability to educate all children, despite social class was an important responsibility. However, some of these problems included social problems that had been faced by poor children during this Victorian Era. Charles Dickens encountered the ragged schooling, which made a lasting impact upon him and is said to have been a significant element in his writing of A Christmas Carol. It was through Charles Dickens' legacy was using his novels and other works to reveal a world of poverty and unimaginable struggles. His vivid descriptions of the life of street children in the city, workhouses and Yorkshire boarding schools lead to many reforms. Although "Ragged" Schools began to grow and were seen as a movement. For many who would not have been able to have an education, authors such as Charles Dickens, was able to receive a free education and a betterment of life for the poor, that would and will, even today, inspire others to do something to help those suffering in oppression and poverty.*

Keywords- *Charles Dickens; Ragged Schools; Literature*

The ability to educate all children, despite social class was an important responsibility. Free education was provided to poor and destitute children in the 19th Century. "Ragged" Schools were known for being charitable organizations had a mission to educating a social class that could not afford to send their children to schools that provided education that was often only heard of by the wealthy social class. However, the 19th Century had its share of problems. Some of these problems included social problems that had been faced by poor children during this Victorian Era. Often "Ragged" Schools were found in metropolitan areas that had a high population of density that were often founded by religious organizations. However by 1870, there "were approximately 400 schools established with more than 300,000 poor children receiving free education" ("British Library"). Although "Ragged" Schools began to grow and were seen as a movement. For many who would not have been able to have an education, authors such as Charles Dickens, was able to receive a free education.

Lasting Effects of Ragged Schools

Charles Dickens encountered the Ragged Schooling, which made a lasting impact upon him and is said to have been a significant element in his writing of A Christmas Carol. Here we reproduce a letter describing a visit to Field Lane Ragged School, which was established in 1841 as a Ragged School and Sabbath School by a Christian missionary. Field Lane was located in an area of great poverty, chosen by Charles Dickens as the setting of Fagin's den. A second piece discussing Ragged Schooling- 'A sleep to startle us' - appeared in Household Words in 1852. However, on September 16th, 1843, Charles Dickens wrote a letter to Angela Burdett-Coutts in Broadstairs, Kent.

Dickens opens a letter by remarking on his current progress writing Martin Chuzzlewit, but the majority of the letter meditates on the condition of a particular the Ragged School in London, probably the Field Lane Ragged School. Ragged Schools were charitable organizations that offered free education for the destitute children of 19th Century England's struggling working class. Often run by working class people in their own neighborhoods, the schools offered instruction during the evening, after the children had been working or begging during the day. In the letter's second paragraph Dickens describes the school he had visited a few days prior:

"On Thursday night, I went to the Ragged School; and an awful sight it is. I blush to quote Oliver Twist for an authority. . . The school is held in three most wretched rooms on the first floor of a rotten house: every plank, and timber, and brick, and lath, and piece of plaster in which, shakes as you walk. One room is devoted to the girls: two to the boys. The former are much the better-looking — I cannot say better dressed, for there is no such thing as dress among the seventy pupils; certainly not the elements of a whole suit of clothes, among them all. I have very seldom seen, in all the strange and dreadful things I have seen in London and elsewhere anything so, shocking as the dire neglect of soul and body exhibited in these children. And although I know; and am as sure as it is possible for one to be of anything which has not happened; that in the prodigious misery and ignorance of the swarming masses of mankind in England, the seeds

of its certain ruin are sown, I never saw that Truth so staring out in hopeless characters, as it does from the walls of this place. The children in the Jails are almost as common sights to me as my own; but these are worse, for they have not arrived there yet, but are as plainly and certainly travelling there, as they are to their Graves..." (Dickens 1-2).

From this heartwarming opening, Dickens continues to explain the poor physical condition of the school, the struggles of its young inhabitants and teachers, their devotion to prayer and knowledge of God, and its significant lack of funding.

Why mention all this to his dear friend Angela you might ask? Well, for one thing, she happens to be popularly known as "the richest heiress in England". In 1822 Angela Burdett-Coutts became one of the wealthiest women in England after inheriting £1.8 million pounds sterling from her grandfather, Thomas Coutts, founder of the banking house of Coutts & Co. Towards the closing of the letter then, its purpose becomes quite clear: "I need not say, I am sure, that I deem it an experiment most worthy of your charitable hand" (Dickens 8).

In order to show his gratitude, Dickens would dedicate the 1844 monograph of Martin Chuzzlewit to Miss Burdett-Coutts herself. A prodigious philanthropist, Burdett-Coutts would work with Dickens on a number of charitable enterprises until his death in 1870. Famously, the pair would found the Urania Cottage, a home for young women who had "turned to a life of immorality", in 1847.

In the last paragraph of the letter Dicken's explains that he will soon be leaving for a visit to the Manchester Athenaeum. In Edgar Johnson's exhaustive biography: Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, Johnson explains that this visit, and the audience that Dickens would encounter there, would provide the author with his inspiration for perhaps, his most well-known work: A Christmas Carol.

Dicken's Writings and the Ragged School

Charles Dickens' legacy was using his novels and other works to reveal a world of poverty and unimaginable struggles. His vivid descriptions of the life of street children in the city, workhouses and Yorkshire boarding schools lead to many reforms. His works describing the corruption of the politics and justice system put the system under intense scrutiny. His strongly written characters inspired people, whether to found orphanages for children whose mothers could not care for them, to found schools to educate the underprivileged, or to set up hospitals for those who were sick. Dickens himself worked to help many charities, setting up homes for women and lending assistance to organizations that helped educate and provide medical attention to the children living in the slums of London. Ultimately, Charles Dickens was a leader who's writing and deep-seated hatred of oppressors bettered the

lives of the poor and would and will, even today, inspire others to do something to help those suffering in oppression and poverty.

The closing of the Yorkshire boarding schools was perhaps the most direct change caused by the writing of Charles Dickens. The conditions in these schools were abysmal. As the children sent to these schools were generally wanted out of the way by their guardian, they were often denied the respite of vacation. Students were given insufficient food, and often the food was unsuitable to be eaten. They were beaten and had to live in very poor conditions, often sharing beds with other boys. Many vermin frequented the schools, and other pests like fleas afflicted the children. Students were also often denied basic medical care, meaning that many died or were permanently disabled due to their maltreatment in these schools. Charles Dickens heard about these schools and went to observe the conditions himself. He was inspired into action, and the book Nicholas Nickleby was born. This novel is the story of a young teacher who receives a job in one of these schools. The fictional teacher was horrified by the mistreatment of students in the school, and so were the readers of Charles Dickens' new novel. Parents rushed to pull their children out of these schools, and within a year, there were few Yorkshire schools left open. By the time the government began school inspections in 1864, the abuses of the boarding schools were no more.

Workhouses were common at the time to help those who needed money, but the work was so harsh that the poor would often prefer to go to jail than work in one. Even so, young mothers with nowhere else to go would often go to one and give birth. Then they would have the option of either staying or leaving, and often they chose to leave, many leaving their children behind. Other parents would simply leave their children there because they could not provide for them, and still other children came because there was no one to care for them. These children had to work in harsh conditions with insufficient clothing and little food. Many died long before they reached adulthood. Those who survived were often given dangerous or harsh jobs in order to maintain their keep. This angered Dickens. The plight of poor children had always had a deep impact on him from his own experience with the hopelessness of life among the poor, and the injustice of workhouses struck a chord with him. He wanted others to see the struggles of these children, and so he created a character that everyone would love, that everyone would be impacted by; the famous workhouse orphan, Oliver Twist. The novel Oliver Twist was a huge success with its twisting plot and lovable characters. It caused a public outcry about the conditions in workhouses. While this may not have caused any immediate and obvious change to conditions in workhouses, it did something even longer lasting; it opened the eyes of those who were privileged and highborn to the life of the poor, and it made them understand the pain and struggles that people had to go through in order to survive. This was a wake-up call to

many, showing that the poor were human beings in need of love and care just like anyone else.

A recurring theme in many of Charles Dickens' novels is the plight of the unwanted and abandoned children who lived in poverty. The children who lived on the street and in the slums struggled every day to find food, to survive in the dangerous, polluted and squalid London. With no one to teach them what was right and what was wrong, these children often fell to crime in order to survive. If they were caught, they were thrown into prisons with adult criminals. The system was unfair to these children, who needed to survive and who had no other recourse but to steal. Charles Dickens saw this and wrote about it in one of his novels. It is most strongly emphasized in the book *Oliver Twist*, where young Oliver is starving and is saved by a group that teach young children how to steal. Oliver did not want to steal, but he was left with few other options. Dickens wanted the world to see how they struggled. He believed the only way to stop children from entering an endless loop of poverty and crime was to educate them. He was a strong supporter of "Ragged Schools" which were schools that helped educate the poor in the slums, and his writing often inspired people to support these institutions. His assistance with these schools helped a number of poor children go to school, and his loud vocalizations of the problem brought the attention of the upper classes to the education of the poor.

One of Charles Dickens' greatest influences on society can be seen in the world of medicine. He was an influential supporter of many different health institutions. Due to his emphasis on its importance with the use of magazine articles and a novel, and how he raised money for the institution by using book sales, the first pediatric hospital in England became a success, helping many children survive diseases and conditions that previously had no respite. He also supported groups that tried to bring medical attention to the children and others living in the slums where any form of healing was rare. Of course, his impact was not limited to vocal and financial support. Charles Dickens is also famous in the medical field for his character descriptions. In his very first published novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, a character named Joe is described as a fat boy who falls asleep at the strangest of times. This, and many other symptoms mentioned show that the fictional character had a very real sleep disorder that was not recognized until over a hundred years after the time of Charles Dickens. To this day, sleep disorders like the conditions exemplified by Joe are still called the Pickwickian syndrome.

Charles Dickens did not only write books about social injustices. He also lent a hand to many organizations that were trying to alleviate the poverty in London. Most often he would send anonymous donations to individuals and groups that were working to better the life of the lower class, but he also helped more directly. He would respond personally to any letters sent to him asking for assistance, knowing that even if he did not send money, the person could sell his signed letter. He would hold public readings

with extremely reduced pricing so that anyone who wanted to hear his novels could afford to do so. He worked with Ragged Schools to help with education, and he aided in arranging medical care for those in the slums. One of the organizations that he is well known for helping create is *Urania Cottage*. *Urania Cottage* was a home for abused or homeless women. There, the women were rehabilitated and provided with education. Many were able to move to new places to start new lives after they got out. Charles Dickens worked as hard as he could to initiate the change he wanted to see in society, and he succeeded, even if the effect was not obvious.

Pollution was a growing problem in London in the early eighteen hundreds. All of the factories and all of the coal-fueled machines filled the air with a thick and unhealthy smog. People threw trash into the streets and dumped raw sewage into the *Thames River*. The ground was covered in filth and horse manure from the carriages used by the upper classes to navigate the streets. This is not to mention the horrible sanitation of the slums, where people had to live in close quarters, often sharing the same beds. Fleas were everywhere and rats and other vermin crawled in the streets. This was where the poorest of the poor had to live. Disease was rampant, especially as they breathed in the polluted air and drank the water of the *Thames*, the same water where all of the sewage was dumped. Charles Dickens often in his books noted the horrible conditions in which the urban poor lived. The book that delved into this pollution the most was *Bleak House*. One of the most memorable characters was Jo, a crossing sweep who earned the little money he received each day by clearing a path in the filthy streets for people walking or climbing down from carriages. The descriptions of the living conditions of the poor and Jo's death from terrible deprivation shocked the readers. People clamored for action to be taken. The novel inspired the cleaning of one of London's worst slums, and for the first time people began trying to save London from the seeping filth and disgusting hygiene that permeated it everywhere.

These are only a few of the greatest influences Charles Dickens had on society. He also showed the world the terrible conditions workers suffered in factories in the book *Hard Times*, and called attention to the unjust justice system that was riddled with corruption and gave little leeway to the poor. Almost every one of his books had a message for the world to see, and to find inspiration in. Charles Dickens showed that he was a leader, as all of his works were a call to action, a declaration of war on the poverty and unjust systems that forced the poor to continually suffer. Any politician could make speeches about the harsh life of the poor and fail to make so much as a dent in the minds of the people, but the writing of Charles Dickens got through to them and forced them to really see the suffering of the poor, and that is his legacy. He made people realize that they could not simply ignore the problems of the world and hope they would go away. He made them sympathize with those who suffered, and this spurred them to do something to help. Charles Dickens

has changed the world by making them see that people struggling to live are people just like them, and that anyone can make a difference by speaking out against injustice.

Early Years of Dickens and Influence on Writing

Evidence of Dickens's interest in the important subject of education appears in his fiction, journalism and public speeches. While he was sensitive to the various educational developments which occurred in his lifetime, he stopped short of offering practical solutions to problems, and his work only reflects a selected range of issues and institutions. He was a strong believer in universal, non-sectarian education, though not necessarily under a state system. He never joined any of the reforming societies, and seemed more comfortable dealing with particular cases and large principles, rather than legislation and administration. His general outlook on the subject is encapsulated in a speech he gave in Birmingham in 1844; he said, "If you would reward honesty, if you would give encouragement to good, if you would stimulate the idle, eradicate evil, or correct what is bad, education, comprehensive liberal education -- is the one thing needful, and the one effective end" (Speeches 63).

Dickens's early years coincided with the state's growing sense of responsibility for the instruction of its citizens. Access to education varied tremendously, according to location, gender, and class. Those who could pay for their schooling had access to several types of institutions, though quality was by no means guaranteed. Dickens's own experience is case in point: his education, which he acknowledged to have been "irregular," and relatively slight, Dickens found that some of the formal education he received, a provision for the poor was far less readily assured. Wider access was facilitated by the non-sectarian British and Foreign School Society that was founded in 1808, and the strongly religious National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church; were both used the large-scale monitorial system, and between them they administered over 18,000 schools by 1851. Dickens objected to the National Society's insistence on church intervention in education, declaring that the "Catechism is wholly inapplicable to the state of ignorance that now prevails" (Dickens). This comment is characteristic of a larger controversy: for much of the nineteenth century the issue of religious education proved to be the key obstacle in developing a pervasive national school system. Dickens developed this idea imaginatively in *A Christmas Carol*, which contains a portrait of priests and teachers arguing over, but never agreeing on, what to teach.

Dickens found an ally in his promotion of non-sectarian education and concern for the poor and deprived in James Kay-Shuttleworth, a former assistant poor-law commissioner, statistician, and critic of the monitorial system, who in 1839 became the first secretary of the Committee of the Privy Council on Education, and laid the

foundation for a national system of popular education. He opened the first teacher training college; reported on the training of pauper children; instituted the pupil-teacher apprentice system to counter the shortage and poor quality of elementary teachers; and developed an inspectorate for those schools which received government grants. Dickens made his acquaintance in 1846, and found that they shared an interest in Ragged Schools, those institutions which, as their name suggests, accepted the raggedness of children. It was in 1843, when Dickens began his frequent visits to these schools, and became one of their most prominent supporters, though he was also aware of their limitations, particularly the lack of qualified teaching staff. Ragged Schools found their way into his journalism and his fiction, where Charley Hexam calls his first school a "temple of good intentions." Dickens even wrote to Kay-Shuttleworth proposing that they establish a model Ragged School; he enthusiastically declared, "surely you and I could set one going."

While Kay-Shuttleworth's influence and expertise were recognized by both Dickens and Angela Burdett-Coutts, who enlisted the reformer's aid in developing the mark system for Urania Cottage, there were other issues on which he and Dickens diverged, particularly educational methods, school inspections, and teacher training. One strategy singled out by Dickens for criticism in *Hard Times* was the object lesson, originally conceived by the Swiss educationalist Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827) as a method of instruction deriving from children's own experiences, and suited to their particular stage of development, but distorted in its translation to England by Charles and Elizabeth Mayo, particularly through the latter's *Lessons on Objects* (1831). Form acquired ascendancy over subject matter, producing lessons whose vocabulary and content, including Latinate phrases and scientific jargon, were not suited to children's experience. Kay-Shuttleworth helped to popularize the object lesson by including it in the curriculum for his Battersea teacher training college, which then became the model for many others. Dickens's critique is embodied in the exchange between Gradgrind, Bitzer and Sissy Jupe over the proper definition of a horse. Bitzer, who has learned a definition by rote, classifies it as a "Quadruped" and "Gramnivorous," whereas Sissy, the horse-breaker's daughter dubbed "Girl number twenty," is reprimanded for possessing "no facts, in reference to one of the commonest of animals." The object lesson is also recalled in *Nicholas Nickleby*, where Squeers describes a horse as "a quadruped, and quadruped's Latin for beast, as everybody that's gone through the grammar knows."

The educational critique in *Hard Times* shows Dickens's familiarity with pedagogical developments. He had read Kay-Shuttleworth's *Public Education*, and lamented the "supernatural dreariness" of its supporting tables and statistics; also, Dickens asked W.H. Wills to obtain for him a copy of the Education Committee's examination for teachers, for use in the opening chapters. The novel's depiction of the government inspector, identified as the

"third gentleman" (Dickens), owes its inspiration to the art critic and designer Henry Cole (1808-82), one of the prime movers behind the Great Exhibition of 1851, who had recently been appointed Superintendent of the Department of Practical Art. Dickens reflected the recent introduction of elementary drawing into the curriculum, and satirized direction of industrial design for consumer goods, by having this "professed pugilist" test the children's judgment about whether or not to "paper a room with representations of horses. The decidedly negative response, and the equation of taste with fact, which Cole may have received with good humor confirms Dickens's disapproval of such unimaginative exponents of rational aesthetics.

The presentation of Mr. M'Choakumchild is further evidence of Dickens's interest in contemporary developments. The schoolmaster is the product of Kay-Shuttleworth's pupil-teacher system, which apprenticed proficient boys and girls to school managers for five years, before allowing them to enter the training colleges for a maximum of three years, and then to graduate as certified teachers; the scheme produced its first "Queen's Scholars" in 1853. While Dickens had argued against the employment of unqualified individuals as teachers, he also presented M'Choakumchild as one of those who had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs. The list of subjects mastered, ranging from "Orthography, etymology, syntax, and prosody" to "all the productions, manners, and customs of all the countries" left little time to develop teaching skills. As Dickens noted, "If he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more" (Dickens).

While M'Choakumchild features only briefly in *Hard Times*, in *Our Mutual Friend* a teacher occupies a far more prominent position in the narrative. Bradley Headstone, described as a "highly certificated stipendiary schoolmaster" is also a product of the training college system, and his conception follows the 1861 report of the Newcastle Commission, appointed to examine the possibility of extending sound elementary education to all classes. Its investigations revealed that the basics of education were being neglected, as Kay-Shuttleworth's colleges emphasized academic endeavor to the extent that graduates became out of touch with their pupils, and thus could not do their job properly. *Our Mutual Friend* considers the sociological development of the new generation of teachers: Headstone, and his pupil-teacher Charley Hexam, are products of the best education available to individuals from poor backgrounds, who are encouraged to rise above their social origins in their quest for respectability. The training college experience is again presented unsympathetically by Dickens: Headstone "had acquired mechanically a great store of teacher's knowledge," to the point where his mental "wholesale warehouse" was "always ready to meet the demands of retail dealers;" though relatively well paid, and thus reflecting the enhanced status of qualified teachers, he

displays a vicious temperament, which proves to be his undoing.

Headstone's respectability is precarious. He falls for Lizzie Hexam, but because of his obnoxious behavior is rejected. Dickens exacerbates this feeling of injustice by positing as his rival Eugene Wrayburn, the indolent, and a less brief barrister, who has the benefit of a public school education. Their confrontation serves as an indictment of the whole teaching profession. Dickens continually takes Wrayburn's side in the rivalry over Lizzie, stressing the "boyish weakness" and "great selfishness" of Headstone's speech, and presenting his short temper and "consciously bad grace" as evidence of unworthiness. While Headstone declares that he has a "right to be considered a better man" than Wrayburn, with "better reasons for being proud, the latter calmly counters, "How I can reproach you with what is not within my knowledge, or how I can cast stones that were never in my hand, is a problem for the ingenuity of a schoolmaster to prove. By making the character of Headstone a significant element in the plot, Dickens highlights several considerations for the new generation of teachers: the struggle to achieve the essential certificate and the conceit prompted by the achievement of this status; the temptation to disregard their roots as a safeguard of respectability; and their jealousy of social groups who enjoy privilege without having to work for it.

Because the middle-class fee-paying institutions of Dickens's day did not depend on either charitable subscriptions or state funding, there was greater variation in standards and conditions, there was more opportunity for imaginative expression. Many of the establishments for girls, about which Dickens knew relatively little, are presented comically, including Minerva House, in which the pupils acquired a smattering of everything and a knowledge of nothing; Westgate House, to which Mr. Pickwick is lured by the threat of Jingle's elopement; Mrs. Wackles's day school, where "writing, arithmetic, dancing, music, and general fascination" are taught; Miss Monflathers's Boarding and Day Establishment, into which "nothing in the shape of a man, no, not even a milkman, was suffered, without special license, to pass," (Dickens, and the "Lilliputian College" in "Tom Tiddler's Ground" run by Miss Pupford, who gives a lecture on the mythology of the heathens, "always carefully excluding Cupid from recognition" (Dickens). The perspective adopted in these portraits is that of a casual adult observer, who visits an establishment generally kept by a mature, narrow-minded spinster. The humorous character of these vignettes is evidence of a typically patriarchal perspective: Dickens shared with most men of his time an ideal of femininity which emphasized the teaching of domestic crafts and responsibilities, rather than imaginative or intellectual pursuits.

When Dickens turns his attention to fee-paying establishments for boys, they are treated far more seriously, and the perspective is generally that of the anguished pupil. Such is the character of Dotheboys Hall in *Nicholas Nickleby*, run by the sadistic Wackford

Squeers (Dickens). The novel served as a vehicle for exposing the dreadful conditions in the Yorkshire schools - those private venture boarding schools which catered for unwanted -- often illegitimate -- children, who were kept throughout the year at cheap rates. Dickens travelled under a pseudonym to visit these establishments with Phiz in 1838, and denounced them as examples of "the monstrous neglect of education in England"; he claimed that Squeers and his school were faint and feeble pictures of an existing reality, purposely subdued and kept down lest they should be deemed impossible. In Nicholas's first sight of the "bare and dirty" classroom the hopeless situation of the boys is highlighted: "With every kindly sympathy and affection blasted in its birth, with every young and healthy feeling flogged and starved down, with every revengeful passion that can foster in swollen hearts eating its evil way to their core in silence, what an incipient Hell was breeding here!" (Dickens). Pathos is elicited through the character of Smike, a "crushed boy" whose "long and very sad history" is punctuated by "stripes and blows, stripes and blows, morning, noon, and night" (Dickens); his suffering and eventual death are directly attributable to Squeers's sadistic regime. This formidable -- and largely undeniable -- attack on such schools lent imaginative weight to indictments which had been circulating about such places as William Shaw's Bowes Academy at Greta Bridge, and helped to speed their demise.

While Squeers's designs are undeniably malevolent, in *Dombey and Son* Dickens focused on a well-intentioned schoolmaster whose shortcoming were of a deficient methodology. Little Paul progresses from Mrs. Pipchin's, where the system was "not to encourage a child's mind to develop and expand itself like a young flower, but to open it by force like an oyster" (DS 8), to Dr. Blimber's academy, where he is sent by a father impatient for his son's advancement. The pompous Blimber runs "a great hothouse, in which there was a forcing apparatus incessantly at work," assisted by his daughter Cornelia, "dry and sandy with working in the graves of deceased languages," and Mr. Feeder, BA, the "human barrel-organ" (Dickens 8, 11-12). Dickens seized the opportunity to offer a critique on the premature acquisition of mathematical skill, but more importantly of classical languages, which were not only essential for university entrance, but were seen as valued culture-tokens for increasing self-respect. The boys' plight is communicated through Mr. Feeder's method of instruction: "They knew no rest from the pursuit of strong-hearted verbs, savage noun-substantives, inflexible syntactic passages, and ghosts of exercises that appeared to them in their dreams" (Dickens 11). They reach the conclusion that all the fancies of the poets, and lessons of the sages, were a mere collection of words and grammar, and had no other meaning in the world.

Conclusion

While most of his fictional portraits are of children's schools, Dickens was also a strong, vocal supporter of

adult education, particularly mechanics' institute, those establishments offering instruction to subscribing artisans and skilled workers; by 1850 there were about 700 such foundations, claiming a membership of 100,000. Dickens was elected president of mechanics' institutes in Chatham, Birmingham, and Reading, and gave readings to raise funds for them; despite this seriousness of purpose, he was not averse to offering a comical account in "Dullborough Town" (Dickens 12). He was also present at various foundlings, soirees, and prize-giving's from 1843 onward, giving speeches which reviewed resources and achievements, fees levied, number of volumes in the libraries, and courses offered. In 1844 he proclaimed of the Liverpool Mechanics' Institution: "Every man who has felt the advantages of, or has received improvement in, this place, carries its benefits into the society in which he moves, and puts them out at compound interest, and what the blessed sum may be at last, no man can tell" (Speeches 54).

Dickens believed in the extension of education on sound principles to all citizens; yet he did not offer specific strategies for achieving this aim. He exposed what he considered abuses and deficiencies, and praised what he believed were positive developments. He was a pioneer in introducing the theme of education into prose fiction, and proved, in his correspondence, journalism and speeches, that he had greater familiarity with the subject of the "Ragged School." It was through the writings of Dickens that provided the moral sense of feeling and momentum for change.

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