

The Role of Charles Dickens in Victorian Social Development

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Abstract—*This research paper will attempt to show that Charles Dickens was an impressive participant in the social reform and development of Victorian England. This idea of social development demonstrated itself through Dickens' novels; his magazines Household Words and all the year round; and his many lectures on social injustice. Though he preached social development, he did not advocate specific social reform legislation. Eventual betterment of the working classes in Victorian England was through his huge popularity as the topmost British author of his day. The current paper will also focus on Dickens most famous novel Hard Times which is based on and took its tone from the great labour dispute within the weaving industry in Victorian England which has come to be known as 'The Preston Lockout of 1853-54'. Dickens being a follower of Thomas Carlyle and dedicated Hard Times to Carlyle. It is not beyond the ordinary limit of imagination to accept that Carlyle, and Dickens, would believe that unions, far from providing a cure for social ills, are merely another symptom of the disease. But whatever one's view point, Dickens is generally considered to have been a radical and certainly a revolutionist. At last, by employing the works of Carlyle and other contemporary writers and comparing them to Hard Times, the reader will see the influence that his peers had in the development of the socio-political philosophy of Dickens.*

Key words: *-Victorian England, working class, social development, education, working-class revolution.*

Charles Dickens *Hard Times* deals with those aspects which were a matter of worry for Dickens throughout his career: the right of common people to entertainment, industrial relation, education and class. It also concentrates on Victorian problem with improving divorce laws, colored by his own sadness at the time with his marriage, which shattered down in 1858.

The brutal phase in Dickens childhood produced a shock from which he suffered a lifetime. Dickens father John Dickens was under a huge debt and he was sent to prison. Due to the shortage of food at home they sold all household items. During this tuff phase Dickens even sold his books, he was removed from school and forced to work in a Cousin's 'blacking shop' pasting labels on the blacking bottles for six shillings a week. Dickens as a young child was so embarrassed of this situation that he never forgot the situations faced by him and it became the productive and rich seeds from which his novels grow up.

In 1838 Dickens announced his indignation over proponents of the factory system and the suffering conditions under which cotton-mill workers undergo.

Dickens was no proponent of Working-Class revolution like his contemporaries. All the time, Dickens stick to the Carlylean view that enlightened moral outlook is necessary to heal social divisions. Dickens balms these divisions on Mr. Gradgrind's philosophy of "Fact ", which conflates two prominent social theories of the age, utilitarianism and political economy. Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian doctrines suggested bringing about greatest happiness for the greatest number through government intervention, on the other hand Adam Smith's followers held that national prosperity, being governed by immutable economic laws, required a *Laissez- faire* approach from the state.

The declaration that Dickens was influenced by Carlyle depends for its credibility on what is claimed for the word 'influence', and on how we establish it. To compare either the whole social theory, or the attitude to specific issues, of the two men, to produce the biographical evidence Of Dickens admiration for the sage of Chelsea, and then to arrive at the looked- for conclusion, is not a productive procedure. As much as the existence of the phenomenon, we need to know it's character. What, precisely, we are claiming, when we say that certain of his works, and during a certain period of his life, Dickens was influenced by the works of Thomas Carlyle?

One statement can be dissolved, despite what might be considered as proof to the contrary; the opinion that Dickens was a humble follower of Carlyle, who sat his master's feet, and carefully evolved his own view of society from a study of a Sage's social theory. Curiously enough, this is a view that Dickens himself can be seen to promote, and his own professions of faith to the master. Dickens mostly praised Carlyle and was curious and anxious for his approval. Few people praised, and many disliked, the *Later- Day Pamphlets*; but public honor for Carlyle, nevertheless, remained remarkably unshaken after their publication.

If we can reject the more or less direct transport of ideas from one mind to another that is implied by the opinion of master-disciple relationship, how, then, can we identify the operation of Carlyle's influence over Dickens? The answer to this question is difficult to give in an organized manner. Though we can produce a list of Carlyle's headings that seem to contain much of Dickens' response to this world (the fear of Mechanism, mistrust of Parliamentary Government, impatience with administrative inefficiency, concern with the condition of England Question, awareness of the potential destructiveness of mob, etc), the primary source is the Dickens topical reactions and emotional life of all these notions are, nevertheless scattered and various; we form them into a coherent body of opinion at our peril.

It is noteworthy that, in constituting the various essential reasons why Dickens should respond to different areas of Carlyle's vision, it has often times been possible, even necessary, to do so without actually referring to Carlyle's works. What we can say, therefore, is that Carlyle offered an imprecise but consistent structure of ideas and opinions that happened to overlap (give a little unconscious adaptation) with many of Dickens' disparate and disorganized feelings about particular issues and about life in general. Backed by a personality that Dickens found worthy of admiration and respect and by Carlyle's massive reputation, this structure of ideas presented him with a nucleus around which his own ideas could form and also, perhaps, with a mirror by which he could recognize their shape.

Hence, it is comfortable to mention that Carlyle did not exhibit new ideas; he formulated what many contemporaries, including Dickens himself, already felt in a living form. Dickens, on the other hand, can be considered highly influential through his novels and his magazines, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* due to his vast readership. By popularizing the ideas of Carlyle, Ruskin and himself he was able to bring the desire for social reform to the common individual in a way that everyday people could not only understand, but also relate to their own circumstances.

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