

Carlyle's Attitudes on Dicken's Hard Times"

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Carlyle (1795–1881) was one of the major writers who lived in the nineteenth century. In this century, which was popularly known as the Victorian age, England witnessed great changes. This age was not only the longest but the greatest in the history of England because it was a period of such social and political problems. No doubt, the bitter sufferings and the gloomy reflections of this period seized Carlyle's imagination. His influence over the mind of his time was so partly because the earlier writings were felt to be greater than his doctrines. There was a misapprehension which remained an impediment to the understanding not only of him but of the literature of a whole age.¹ At the end of the century, it was a customary to measure Carlyle by the content of his teaching, and especially by its potential dangers and distortions. Clearly, it was not Carlyle's specific doctrines, or even his powerful and influential way of expressing them, but the general quality of his response to nineteenth century life that fostered his immense status among his contemporaries. He dealt with mechanism and the effect of machine on mankind in his age which is consequently called "The Mechanical Age".²

One of the major influences of the Victorian life was the Industrial Revolution .It had not brought changes on modes of production only but also on the habits of thinking, individuality, morals and feelings. These changes were the deepest note of Carlyle's criticism .According to him, excessive cultivation of mechanism would end by destroying moral force. Much of the recent criticisms took their notions from his recognition that mechanism would badly bring about the whole manner of human existence leading to corruption and alienation.

In Carlyle's major dramatization of this new and distinctive feeling of alienation, he portrayed profoundly the link "between the typical emotional crises of the age and industrialization"³ . Definitely, the application of machinery had begun to transform the land into the blackened England .⁴ He says:

It is the age of machinery in every outward and inward sense of that world and men are grown mechanically in head and in heart, as well as in hand.⁵

What Carlyle meant by men having" grown mechanical in head and heart" was that their behavior was determined and regulated by external force which often ran counter to their innermost impulses.⁶ According to him, the physical changes had their counterparts in the

minds and hearts of people. The outer world had been dramatically changed by the new technology but more significantly the inner world had become enslaved by mechanical habits.

Significantly, Carlyle was aware that changes in society made great changes in hearts and what he visualized was that a change of heart amplified to cosmic proportions. For Carlyle, a material conversion expanded to include the whole of society by conventional political means. This Phoenix – like society rising from the ashes of outworn institutions , which Carlyle pictured at the end of The French Revolution , was the equivalent on the large scale of the twice – born man who freed himself by undergoing the experience of conversion.⁷

Many who lived through the early years of the Industrial Revolution shared Carlyle's sense that the external signs of prosperity were a skeletal appearance covering an actual impoverishment in the texture and quality of life. Some of this concern originated from the perception that enormous wealth existed side by side with degradation and suffering. Actually, Carlyle raised the odious disparity between the private wealth and public welfare expressing another major influence of the Victorian Age. The vast accumulation of wealth associated with mid– Victorian prosperity. In spite of being prosperous, the country seemed to be dying and the electrifying progress represented" a strange success since in the midst of enormous plenty, the people perish and no man feels himself safe or satisfied".⁸ It seemed to Carlyle and others that the empire of the Victorian wealth was founded on the oppression and denial. As in most societies, the rich got richer and the poor got poorer. Carlyle observed this development and the tendency of new found wealth which increased the distance between the rich and the poor.⁹

Significantly, his objections to Mammonism were, however, moral rather than economic. The wealth, that was one of the products of the Industrial Revolution, was being misapplied. He persistently attacked the worship of wealth, which had become one of the preoccupations of society, and in consequence the petrifying of human impulses. In the competitive atmosphere of nineteenth– century capitalism, hell had become" the terror of not succeeding; of not making money"¹⁰ as Charles Dickens (1812–1870) sarcastically reminded his readers in "Hard Times" .

Carlyle criticized the breakdown of the traditional belief denoting that "there is no religion; there is no God"¹¹. What followed into the void created by skepticism and disenchantment was a belief in money, progress, science, and success;

Oh, it is frightful when a whole nationhas forgotten

God; has remembered only Mammon, and what Mammon leads to!¹²

Thus, nineteenth-century Mammonism was born out of a spiritual dissatisfaction and in consequence "supply –and –demand, competition, Laissez– Faire, and derail take the hindmost".¹³ Much of Carlyle's criticism of Mammonism was clearly remarked by Dickens' "Hard Times". Carlyle's conception of what he called giganity rushing greedily to possess itself of filthy lucre reminded one of Dickens' picture of a society almost hypnotically impelled to possess vast heaps of wealth which were simultaneously represented as piles of ordure¹⁴. Both writers presented a society demonically led by a primary misconception of human goals.

Undoubtedly, universal education, general emigration and dwell engaged all thinking heads in England. To these compelling priorities, Carlyle paid a great attention to the need for sanitary reform and factory legislation. Neither Dickens nor Carlyle, however, was particularly sanguine about the means of carrying them into effect because of their profound contempt for Parliament and much of its recent legislation. They saw the futility of Parliament scorned attempts to reform it and other institutions as advocated by the Benthamites. United by an anti– scientific prejudice, they reserved their most savage sarcasm for Utilitarians and their methods, and were quick to sense the fundamentally unchristian tendencies latent in the dismal science. They were, in the broadest sense, inheritors of romantic ideal of an organic society by something higher than the cash – nexus and enlightened self – interest.¹⁵

A growing sense of alienation, disaffection and hostility was created with the delays and irrelevancies of Parliamentary government. Carlyle and Dickens were the mouthpieces in the sense that they rebelled consistently for the existence of sham governors and the absence of real leadership. Sham was one of Carlyle's favorite words in the Past and Present saying "we are governed, very infallibly, by the sham – hero whose work and governance is plausibility"¹⁶.

To Carlyle, the Laissez–Faire system represented a virtual abandonment on the part of the governing classes to govern responsibly. At the same time, England could not live in peace until some guidance and government was found for the working classes. In a state of virtual disguised anarchy, Carlyle did not hope to find only an increasing democratic Parliament made in the image of the people, but in some sort of King, made in the image of God, who could a little achieve for the people.¹⁷

Carlyle's primary recognition was the way in which hardheaded business practices and wrongheaded economic theories came together to turn society into a battle ground for the abrasive hostilities of the class war. In Past and Present, he depicted fundamentally the

anti- social nature of the Laissez- Faire policy of free competition as the sole means of regulating wages. A strange conclusion was ensued and this conclusion was:

We call it a society; and go about professing openly the total separationOur life is not a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due laws- of -war, named fair competition and so forth, it is a mutual hostility. We have profoundly forgotten everywhere that cash payment is not the sole relation of human being; we think, nothing doubting, that it absolves and liquidates all engagement of man.¹⁸

Significantly, Carlyle's fear of the tendency of commercialism and industrialism to alter human thought and sensibility had many corresponding echoes in Dickens' writings. The tendency for treating people as things, that could be acquired or manipulated, was an almost obsessive preoccupation of the later novels. In "Hard Times", Louisa Gradgrind was sacrificed by her father in a business alliance with Mr. Bounderby. As an accepted wooer Mr. Bounderby prosecutes his romance with the mercantile energy befitting a self - madman.¹⁹ This was an example that illustrated one of Carlyle's central objections to nineteenth- century Mammonism the extent to which calculation and the ethics of business had replaced spiritual guides to the conduct of human affairs. Dickens observed that:

Love was materialistic on these occasion in the form of bracelets; and, on all occasions during the period of betrothal, took a manufacturing aspectthe business was all facts, from first to last.²⁰

Dickens was not prepared to launch into what ought to have been his great novel of Industry. At the end of January 1854, he went up to Preston so that he might see at close quarters, not only an Industrial town, but also a strike. However, industrialism was not the only factor responsible for damaging the humanitarian spirit of the early nineteenth century carrying ugliness to the landscape, or illness to society and despair to man's soul. The new scientific theories were also responsible for the drastic change in man's view of himself and of the world outside himself.

Dickens sought to link up, in Hard Times, several issues that at first might seem unrelated. These included: the grinding ugliness of Industrial development; the abstract theory of Utilitarianism; shallow of self- interest; the anti- social force of the capitalists; the miserable working classes; and the abstract education. These themes were characterized through various places or figures in the book itself, for example, Coketown, Gradgrind , Harthouse , Bounderby , and Stephen Blackpool.²¹

A- The grinding ugliness of Industrial development:

The Industrial development in the Victorian age caused a lot of ugly results concerning almost all the aspects of the Victorian life. In Hard Times, Dickens stressed the results of

the Industrial development upon the architectural aspect taking Coketown a representative place to the architectural life in England. _This was powerful according to Carlyle's sense of massive assertion.²²

What we do see was a town of red brick and black soot, full of monotonously similar streets, with interchangeable buildings that could, respectively, be jail, infirmary or town hall. It was a smoke blackened industrial town whose people knew little relaxation and pleasure a part from that which had to be taken furtively or illegally. Coketown on a hot day is hell since

the whole town seemed to be frying in oil. There was a stifling smell of hot oil everywhere. The steam – engines shone with it, the dresses of the Hands were solid with it, the mills throughout their many stories oozed and trickled it. The atmosphere of those fairy palaces was like the breath of the simoom: and their inhabitants, wasting with heat, toiled languidly in the desert. But on temperature made the melancholy made elephants more made or more sane!²³

B- The abstract theory of Utilitarianism:

It was, however, powerfully backed by the figure of Thomas Gradgrind to the principle of Utilitarianism .He was a retired manufacturer of hardware, the Member of Parliament for Coketown, the governor of a school and the father of five children²⁴. The Victorian philosophy was based mainly upon Bentham's dictum (1748–1832) concerning social legislation: the government should aim towards the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people.²⁵ Carlyle and Dickens refused to assess the qualities of life in terms of quantity. In other words, the greatest amount of pleasure, the greatest good and the satisfaction of more appetencies rather than fewer tended to be a mechanistic view of human potential. Value could not be decided by majority vote; and imagination, poetry, sensitivity and discrimination were left out of the Bentham.²⁶ In Hard Times, Gradgrind's view of life was materialist, and therefore he was limited for the moral and social judgments: Teach these boys and girls nothing but facts, facts alone are wanted in life.

C- Shallow of self – interest:

The imaginative truncation created by Gradgrind's system was seen in his children's lives. His daughter "Louisa" had no outlet for her emotional life but her brother. Her brother "Tom", in his turn, found consolation only in compulsive gambling. He robbed his employer to pay his debts and laid the blame on an honest working man. After discovering him, he told his father that he was governed by the system.²⁷

Thus, individual's responsibility was diminished in favour of conformity to abstract rules of statistics; human choice is limited under the bonds of mechanical determinism. Gradgrind's system would claim to judge human behaviour rationally and to hold in check the defecting force of emotion. Nevertheless, in Utilitarian maturity, when Bitzer, a pale and a lifeless boy in Gradgrind's school, seized Gradgrind's son for his theft, he found himself questioned by his old master in terms oddly reminiscent of the lessons at Gradgrind's school.²⁸ The Gradgrind's system acted against itself because there was no Utilitarian who did not experience an emotional situation.

A parallel failure was seen in Gradgrind's daughter when she refused to marry his friend, Tom's employer, "Mr. Bounderby". This man was the most representative figure of Capitalism. In economic terms, it was a very good match because he required nothing immaterial as feeling from her. Indeed, the whole match was unsuccessful since her father had not taken into account this human factor and what he could say, after Louisa's returning to his house, was that he meant to do right.²⁹

D- The anti – social force of the Capitalists:

Mr. Bounderby was an appliance man, full of interest in himself in the sense that he had a habit of speaking of himself. He was integral to Hard Times because, in truly sensational details, he was just like a coarse material stretched tight or a balloon puffed up, and therefore, the inference was ripe to be deflated.³⁰ He knew none of the human ties of affection or compassion. According to him, people existed as hands to be dismissed. They were presented to his mind only insofar as they were extensions of him. He did not exist with any of our normal associations. In place of what is a normal human being would be an autobiographical history, Bounderby had projected a fiction which was no more than get another extension of his personality. That fiction was an account of a past life without any human contact. He claimed to have been deserted by his mother, to turn out of doors by his grandmother, to have slept in the gutter, to live on rain water and chance scraps, and to have been glad of an occasional job.³¹ Actually, this was an attempt to subjugate the outside world to the needs of his ego.

The psychological portrait worked very well within the moral framework of Dickens' fable. Bounderby was an individual capitalist and Capitalism itself personified while Gradgrind, a desiccated calculating machine, might be cleverer. It was Bounderby who was Utilitarian in practice. Acting completely out of self – interest, which was not for him acquisition of money only but of power, he was able to represent such self – interest in terms of Bentham's greatest happiness principle.³²

E – The miserable working classes:

Dickens chose Stephen Blackpool to stand for the working class in Hard Times. His employer Mr. Bounderby dismissed him so arbitrarily. He was a mill operative in Coketown saddling with a drunken wife. He was supposed to be the social victim. One might feel that the odds were biased too heavily against him. Indeed, some of them had nothing directly to do with society at all. Moreover, he was put under suspicion of perpetrating a robbery completing by falling down a disused mine – shaft and breaking his back.³³

Significantly, there were so many things that Dickens could have done with Stephen. In other words, Stephen's scantily income and the conditions of labour at the mill. In fact, Stephen was dramatized as an archetypal working man, a social victim and a victim of a broken – down marriage. His contrast with Bounderby was not that between master and worker only, but rather it was between a husband rich enough to free himself from his wife and one too poor to do such thing.³⁴

F– Utilitarian education:

Dickens ' portrayal of Gradgrind's school at the beginning of Hard Times introduced education as one of the central themes in the novel. There was a comparison between two schools; the first one was Gradgrind's ideal and factual school whose pupils were Bitzer, Tom, and Louisa, while the simple social life school, whose heroine was Sissy Jupe, was presented to be the second school. The first school was based on abstract facts which were without any imaginations and feelings. When the ideal pupil "Bitzer" was asked by his teacher, he answered without thinking whether his answer was correct or not, but he knew that his teacher wanted facts only. Tom, who despite of the system, had grown up hypocritical and selfish person.³⁵ The third pupil was Louisa who discussed with her father the question of her possible marriage to his friend, a match that would also be to the advantage of her brother. As a result, Bitzer was flatter, Tom was a thief hiding himself in the most inferior environment in the terms of his father "the circus" and Louisa was taking care for the children of others. That was the result of a school based on insensitive facts.

The second school was the simple social life. It included very simple facts with feelings, imaginations, emotions and sensitivity. Its heroine was Sissy Jupe whose father had left her to learn in Gradgrind School, but she failed to communicate with the facts and the principles of that school. She was humiliated by the teacher and the pupils of that school yet she helped them at the end. Hiding Tom in the circus and helping Louisa in her problem with Harthouse, Sissy could affect on Gradgrind. She became the main person in the family and they became in need for her because she could destroy Gradgrind's harsh facts and principles. Finally, she married making a good ordinary life, and that was the result of the

simple social school.³⁶ In explaining the results of both schools, Dickens successfully demonstrated the effects of Utilitarian education.

Generally, these powerful aspects made Dickens think that Hard Times was a Carlylean novel and almost every aspect of its satire had a counterpart somewhere in Carlyle's writings.³⁷ In content, this novel bore the distinctive impression of Carlyle's influence. In addition to his dominant satire on Utilitarians, Dickens followed Carlyle in his scorn of "sham and cant" and his anger at the apparent absence of leadership. He castigated the influence of realistic and logical methods in education adopting a romantically inspired plea for the sense of wonder and imagination.³⁸

Actually, the characters in the novel might be considered personifications of Carlylean criticism. In other words, Gradgrind embodied the personality of mechanist, and his relationship with Bounderby, a Victorian man of industry, revealed how easily Utilitarian ideas accompanied in practice with Philistinism. Bitzer exemplified the moral results of getting on in the world, which was reminiscent of Carlyle's attacks on the self-interest principle of the Laissez-Faire economists, while Harthouse strolled out of the pages of Carlyle's gospel of dilettantism.³⁹ With Gradgrind's insisting that in a mechanical age the one thing needed was facts, we were dramatically introduced, as in Carlyle's essay "*Signs of the Times*", to the spirit of the age. All the mechanical signs of the times were evident in Coketown. It was a town of machinery, it was a triumph of facts and it had no greater taint of fancy in it than Mrs. Gradgrind herself.⁴⁰

Being the controlling concept of Hard Times and "*Signs of the times*", mechanism took different forms as it attacked itself to different areas of human life and thought. It determined Gradgrind's philosophy and the educational system of the Coketown School criticizing the relations between masters and workers, children and parents, and the quality of religion. In addition, Carlyle viewed the science of the age as physical, chemical and psychological: in all shapes mechanical. He stated that:

The metaphysics is not a philosophy of the mind: it is mere discussion concerning the origin of our consciousness-----a genetic history of what we see in the mind.⁴¹

Naturally, a mind formed on that intellectual bias would be both practical and logical. Lacking imagination or reason, it would insist on verifiable truths and it would generally be found doing the work of the faculty of understanding.⁴² Mr. Gradgrind was the main representative of the intellectual tradition. He was a man who proceeded upon the principle that two and two were four and nothing over. There were numerous similarities between Dickens' treatment of Gradgrind and Carlyle's mocking notes of the intellectual Euphuist whose powers of logic led him to discover the principle of cause and effect and the dynamic

process of history by means of circumstantial theories flattering himself that he dwelled in the daylight of truth.⁴³ For Gradgrind, the ciphers and numbers replaced the human individual and all social and moral questions were resolved merely by correct arithmetic.⁴⁴

Carlyle and Dickens both criticized the results of statistic inquiry. This criticism was that statistics were an abstraction remote from the actual complexity of human affairs, and that their value was determined only by the quality of mind that employed them.⁴⁵ In Hard Times, Louisa discovered the truth when she visited Stephen Blackpool's lodgings and for the first time in her life she became aware of individuality in connection with the Coketown workers.

Carlyle's criticism of prevailing methods of education in "*Signs of the Times*" anticipated Dickens' satires by more than a decade. In the period of Hard Times, his views reflected an exact correspondence with those of Dickens.⁴⁶ Significantly, sharing with Carlyle, Dickens' view of education was a natural consequence of his treatment of childhood and, as an inseparable aspect of the romanticism, it is an organic part of his mature thinking about society as a whole. Their attacks on wrongheaded schooling, abstract theories about human welfare and the faulty arithmetic of social salvation were ways of dramatizing his profound disquiet about the dominant shaping forces of his civilization.⁴⁷

Notes:

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- 3- Hazell Watso, The Pelican Guide to English Literature from Dickens to Hardy (Britain: Penguin books, 1985), pp. 84-85.
- 4- Ibid.
- 5- Shelton, p. 263.
- 6- Watso, p. 93.
- 7- Goldberg, p. 214.
- 8- Alan Shelton ed., Carlyle's "Past and Present" in Thomas Carlyle: Selected Writings (London: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 6.
- 9- Walter Allen, The English Novel from The Pilgrim's Progress to Sons and Lovers (Great Britain: Pelican Books, 1958), p. 60.
- 10- Ibid., p. 65.
- 11- Goldberg, p. 159.
- 12- Ibid.
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- 18- Ibid., p.137.
- 19- Ibid., p.177.
- 20- Charles Dickens, Hard Times (London: Everyman's Library, 1907), p.107.
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- 22- Ibid., p.48.
- 23- Ibid., p.44.
- 24- Margaret Atwood, The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.111.
- 25- Hobsbaum, p.61.
- 26- Goldberg, p. 59.
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- 28- Atwood, pp.78-79.
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- 32-David Daiches, A Critical History of English Literature (London :Pelican Books,1978), p.73.
- 33- Hobsbaum, p.28.
- 34- Atwood, p.90.
- 35- Daiches, p.80.
- 36- Ibid., p.p.90-91.
- 37- Goldberg, p. 79.
- 38- Ibid.
- 39- Ibid., p.80.
- 40-K.Pati, Studies in English Literature, Eds. J. Fisiak and P. Tajsner (New Delhi: Aurti Books, 1984), p.27.

- 41- Alan Shelton ed., Carlyle's "Signs of the Times" in Thomas Carlyle, Selected Writings, p.68.
- 42- Goldberg, p. 81.
- 43- Ibid.
- 44- Ibid., pp.82-83.
- 45- Ibid., p.84.
- 46- Ibid.
- 47- Allen, p.68.

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