

SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it”. (Prov. 22:6)

Our English word “school” comes from the Greek word “schole” which means “leisure”. When the industrial revolution hit England there was little time for leisure and children left school and were made to work. The first law regulating work hours for children in England was in 1802 limiting their work day to only 12 hours. The next law limiting the work of children was not passed until 1844.

Minister Robert Raikes (1725 – 1811) saw the need for education among these poor children. As they didn’t have to work on Sunday, Raikes used this day to teach them to read and write. He wisely used the Bible as his text. Thus the Sunday School movement began in England in 1780.

Unfortunately, there were other children too ragged and unkempt for Sunday School. So “The Ragged School” was started for them. In 1843 Charles Dickens visited the Field Lane Ragged School and the appalling conditions he saw became an integral part of his writing. The first Ragged School in London was not established until 1844. From 1844 – 1881 some 300,000 ragged children received a free education in London. The Ragged School Museum was established in London in 1990.

Charles Dickens was born to a middle class family in England Feb. 7, 1812. Unfortunately, in 1824, his father John was committed to the Marshalsea, which was a debtors' prison in Southwark, London. Consequently, Charles Dickens at the tender age of 12, was forced to pawn his collection of books, leave school and work at a dirty and rat-infested shoe-blacking factory.

Here is the way Dickens described the place where he worked: *“The blacking-warehouse was the last house on the left-hand side of the way, at old Hungerford Stairs. It was a crazy, tumble-down old house, abutting of course on the river, and literally overrun with rats. Its wainscoted rooms, and its rotten floors and staircase, and the old grey rats swarming down in the cellars, and the sound of their squeaking and scuffling coming up the stairs at all times, and the dirt and decay of the place, rise up visibly before me, as if I were there again. The counting-house was on the first floor, looking over the coal-barges and the river. There was a recess in it, in which I was to sit and work. My work was to cover the pots of paste-blackening; first with a piece of oil-paper, and then with a piece of blue paper; to tie them round with a string; and then to clip the paper close and neat, all round, until it looked as smart as a pot of ointment from an apothecary's shop. When a certain number of grosses of pots had attained this pitch of perfection, I was to paste on each a printed label, and then go on again with more pots. Two or three other boys were kept at similar duty down-stairs on similar wages. One of them came up, in a ragged apron and a paper cap, on the first Monday morning, to show me the trick of using the string and tying the knot. His name was Bob Fagin; and I took the liberty of using his name, long afterwards, in Oliver Twist.”*

At the risk of being misunderstood please remember that the primary responsibility of educating children was given by God to parents. Please consider again these inspired words from Scripture: **“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates.” (Deut. 6:4 – 9).** Since the Hebrew word for “hear” is “shema” the Hebrews call this passage the “Shema”. It is customary for the devout Jew Jewish to recite this prayer twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening.

Note that God did not give the job of training children to politicians or preachers, but to parents. Sunday School teachers only have our children for one day of the week but we have them the other six. Sunday School today usually does not involve an hour of teaching. Invariably role calls and class business take away precious time from the Bible. God’s instructions to parents, however, involve school every day and in every activity. Let’s take advantage of our “leisure” to “school” our children!