RAGGED SCHOOLS: SCHOOLS FOR DESTITUTE CHILDREN

A Thesis by

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ABSTRACT

Throughout most of the 19th century, school was not mandatory for children living in the United Kingdom and only available to those who could afford the fees. Ragged schools were some of the very few institutions available where destitute children could earn a basic education before 1870. The goal of this research was to understand why philanthropists found it necessary to provide these children with a free education. Many philanthropists wrote about ragged schools between the mid-19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. All these sources showed the problems 19th philanthropists saw and why they opened ragged schools to fix these problems.

Life had turned upside down for many people as a result of the Industrial Revolution, and they struggled to survive in a world that was unfamiliar to them. The curriculum of ragged schools was designed to help these children properly function in an industrial society. They focused on giving their students a religious and basic education and provided for their physical needs by giving them food, clothes, and shelter. They also offered industrial classes and helped their students find honest work. The children that ragged schools aimed to help were children who were at risk of becoming hardened criminals. They had no resources available to them and lacked the skills needed to survive on their own without begging, stealing, or receiving charity. All the resources that ragged schools gave to their students gave them an opportunity to elevate their lives by giving them the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the newly industrialized world.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Our society takes for granted that all children have access to an education. Before the Industrial Revolution, poor children did not go to school. Education was only accessible to upper-class children. Poor children, however, either worked on their family farms or got apprenticeships. During the Industrial Revolution, fewer people worked on farms and instead moved to cities to work in the factories. It was about this time when educating the masses became more of a controversial issue. Many disagreed with educating the poor, but some argued that for the United Kingdom to continue progressing, all citizens would need to earn a basic education. This was due to how much life had changed during the century. Industrialization had caused the need for a more skilled workforce, and thanks to newspapers society was more informed and reading became more of a necessity. The government in the United Kingdom would not make it mandatory for its citizens to receive an elementary education until the 1870s. However, until this happened, many children did not attend school.

During the 19th century, some poor children from respectable families could attend schools that only cost their parents a small weekly fee. However, destitute children who did not come from respectable families were not allowed to attend these schools because of the way they acted, dressed, or their inability to pay. Instead, they roamed the streets during the day, begging and stealing to survive. Troubled by the lives these children lived, many philanthropists sought to pinpoint the causes of these children’s predicaments and thought of ways to help them. Philanthropists began opening schools solely for the most impoverished children. These schools
charged no fee and relied on donations to stay open. These schools were commonly called ragged schools, named after the ragged children they aimed to benefit.

John Pounds, a poor shoemaker, started the first official ragged school in his workshop in the early 19th century. After his death, other philanthropists opened similar schools in the mid-nineteenth century, and these schools remained relevant until Forster’s Education Act of 1870. The name ragged school was coined in 1840, but they were also called free and charity schools. Ragged school teachers worked hard and selflessly to provide free education to children who desperately needed discipline and structure in their lives. Unfortunately, ragged schools are rarely spoken of today.

There are few books written on the subject. *Sixty Years in Waifdom: Or, The Ragged School Movement in English History*, was written by C.J. Montague in 1904 and republished in 1970. Montague’s purpose for this book was to show to what extent the Ragged School Movement had in England’s national history and how its principle values continued into the 20th century. More recently, Claire Seymour wrote *Ragged Schools, Ragged Children*, in 1995. In this book, Seymour credits ragged schools for leading to compulsory education. A similar sentiment is shared in an article written by H.W. Schupf, titled *Education for the Neglected: Ragged Schools in the Nineteenth Century England*. Schupf demonstrated how philanthropist took the responsibility for educating destitute children until the State swooped in and took it over.¹ While it is crucial to see how ragged schools helped lead to compulsory education for all, it is also important to understand why ragged schools had to step in and educate destitute

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children in the first place. Ragged schools gave destitute children the knowledge and skills necessary for survival after industrialization.

The curriculum of ragged schools focused on three aspects. First, they concentrated on providing religious education. It was hoped that this would improve their students’ moral character and hopefully save their souls. Students would also need an elementary education to learn how to read, write, and do some basic math. However, ragged schools quickly realized that nothing they taught their students would stick if they did not provide for their students’ physical needs. Therefore, ragged schools gave their students food, clothes, and shelter.

The most important thing ragged schools taught their students was to have a good work ethic and an industrial skill. Ragged schools strived to make their students more hirable and instill in them the work ethic needed to support themselves. Ragged schools held industrial classes to teach students a skill such as carpentry, tailoring, and shoemaking. Along with industrial classes, ragged schools came up with various other schemes, all designed to help their students succeed in the workforce. It would not be until the enactment of Forster’s Education Act of 1870, that all children were required to attend elementary school. After this, ragged schools began to quickly disappear.
CHAPTER 2

INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE FOUNDING OF RAGGED SCHOOLS

Before the Industrial Revolution began in Great Britain, life was entirely different for the working classes. Most of the working class, about 80 percent of them, worked in agriculture. Their co-workers consisted of their family members, and they managed their own work and product, producing only enough to support themselves. It had been like this for centuries. Life before the Industrial Revolution moved slowly, most farmers used equipment that had hardly changed in hundreds of years. Along with farming, many also participated in textile work to bring in extra income. This lifestyle, however, began to change in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century and drastically during the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. Advancements in agriculture made it possible to produce more food with fewer farmers, causing many to leave their homes in the country to look for work in the cities. \footnote{Charles Breunig and Matthew Levinger, \textit{The Revolutionary Era, 1789-1850: Third Edition} (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 127.}

As rural workers migrated to cities and towns, they entered a world that was unfamiliar to them. They lived in poorly built homes that were built too quickly to house the growing population. Homes in the countryside were nothing grand, but those in the cities usually gave families one room to live in, and it was not uncommon for multiple families to live in one room. The factories where they worked were not any better. They were crowded, unsanitary, and shifts could last for 15 hours. The spread of disease was common in both places, and food was difficult to afford. At the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, wages were low, and employment was uncertain. Unemployment was more likely for workers who were unskilled. When jobs were unavailable, the unemployed resorted to lying, stealing, and begging to survive. Unfortunately, this was a problem that was not only specific to adults. \footnote{Ibid., \textit{The Revolutionary Era}, 141-6.}
Many children also struggled with a lack of employment and spent their days roaming the streets doing whatever possible to survive. It was also common for children not to attend school. However, it was around this time that schools began opening for lower classes. While many Victorians were concerned that educating the poor would cause them to forget their stations in life, others saw the benefit of educating the masses and new methods were developed to be able to educate more people. Not only would it help an individual be able to better succeed in life, but it was also beneficial for the wealth of the nation. The biggest problem facing educating the lower classes was the cost. How would society pay for all the teachers and books to teach so many people? In the early 19th century two men, Joseph Lancaster and Andrew Bell, brought to Britain a plan to cut the cost of education while educating more students. This was known as the monitoring system. 4

Using the monitoring system, one teacher would instruct older students in the day’s lessons, and they, in turn, would teach the younger students. According to Joseph Lancaster, one teacher could run an entire school on their own, and only three different books were needed to teach the students reading, writing, and math. Being children, the monitors were cheap labor. Frederick Hobley, who had been a monitor as a child, explained that they were only paid a ½ penny a day. However, this job allowed him to go to Oxford once he was 16 to take the entrance exam for a teaching training college and was able to obtain a higher education. The monitoring system made schools cheaper, so more children could earn a very basic education.5

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In 1808, Joseph Lancaster founded the Royal Lancaster Society which worked to encourage the further expansion of these schools. Three other societies formed that also used the monitoring system: The British School Society and the Foreign School Society, supported by Lancaster and religious nonconformists, and the National Society for Education of the Poor in 1811, founded by Andrew Bell and supported by the Church of England. As different as these societies may have been, they all aimed to provide inexpensive education to the working classes. Along with private schools, working class children could also attend “Dame schools.” Dame schools were stationed in an individual’s home and are considered the forerunners of daycares. They were popular with working-class parents because they not only babysat their children but, also taught them reading, writing, and skills like sewing for a small price. However, as inexpensive as these schools may have been, many parents could still not afford to pay the weekly fees and their children were unable to attend. 

Some schools tried to fix this gap. Workhouse schools gave simple literacy lessons to their students while also teaching them an industrial skill. However, these schools were known for their low academic standards and for the physical abuse that was common. These schools were notorious for flogging their students over the smallest offenses such as mispronouncing and misspelling words. The famous newspaper reporter Sir Henry Morton Stanley had received his education from a workhouse school at St. Asaph. Stanley reported being flogged twice for mispronouncing the name Joseph, and for eating blackberries. Stanley also remembered there was a constant bombardment of slaps while at the institution. 

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Fortunately, a less violent type of school began to appear in the mid-19th century that helped those who could not afford to pay a weekly fee. These free schools were called ragged schools. Philanthropic and religious societies opened ragged schools, because they saw a large portion of destitute children not receiving an education and did what they could to help them. Though ragged schools did not take off until about 1840, their origins can be found long before that. Some of the first glimpses of ragged schools were in the late 18th century with the Sunday School Movement. ⁸

The Sunday School Movement was a movement which strived to give poor children a religious education and discipline. In the 18th century, there was a revival of religion. Evangelicals especially campaigned for education, starting with Sunday schools. Robert Raikes of Gloucester, England was a proprietor of the Gloucester Journal, and was the leading publicist of the Sunday School Movement in 1780. Raikes persuaded the children living in the streets to go to his schools, where they were taught to read and received Bible lessons. He claimed that the children became Christians, started attending church, and respected ranks, property, and good order. With Raikes’ publicity on the issues, the Sunday School Movement eventually became national. ⁹

In London, the first Sunday school was opened around 1784 at Surrey Chapel, by a man named Reverend Rowland Hill, who was a well-known English preacher and a supporter of the smallpox vaccine. After the opening of this school, more were opened across the city. One of the most notable and one famously known as another precursor of ragged schools was the Sunday school founded by Thomas Cranfield. When Cranfield returned to England after fighting in the

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⁸ Duckwork, Fagin’s Children, 215-16.
American Revolutionary War, his father introduced him to Reverend William Romaine. Romaine’s teachings were responsible Cranfield’s new-found devotion. Cranfield continued his work as a tailor but eventually opened a Sunday school in his own home in 1791. 10

Cranfield’s Sunday school quickly attracted 60 students. Due to a lack of room, Cranfield moved his school to a factory. He eventually left this school in the hands of other Christians and opened more Sunday schools elsewhere. Then, in 1797, he suggested that one of his friends write and publish a leaflet entitled Palm Sunday. To help circulate this leaflet, Cranfield focused on Whitechapel in the East End of London and then crossed the London Bridge towards Rotherhithe. It was at this time that he saw the depravity that was rampant there, and this convinced him to open a Sunday school at Rotherhithe on Easter Sunday in 1797. 11

At first the number of students that attended this Sunday school at Rotherhithe was 20, but eventually it had close to 100 students. Cranfield then opened another Sunday school in a brickmaker's house at Tottenham. The children that attended this school were ragged, but he quickly saw the benefits of teaching them. Some of these students had agreed to meet at each other’s homes after work each day and practice reading. Allegedly, four sinful boys had committed themselves to God. Once these schools were in the hands of others, Cranfield went on to open more Sunday schools that instructed children in various states of destitution. Before his death in 1838, Cranfield had founded nineteen Sunday, night, and infant schools in the worst parts of London. 12

11 Eagar, Making Men, 121; Watson, The First Fifty years, 46-7.
12 Eagar, Making Men, 121; Watson, The First Fifty Years, 47-8.
The man who has mostly received the honor of being the prime originator of ragged schools as we know them is John Pounds from Portsmouth, England. Pounds not only made his living making and fixing shoes, but he also volunteered his time to poor children by offering them an education and industrial training. Pounds was born in 1766 in Portsmouth. Before becoming a cobbler, he was a shipwright in a dockyard. Unfortunately, this did not last due to an accident which occurred when he was around 15 years old that caused one of his thighs to break, crippling him. This handicap caused him to look for other forms of work, which eventually led him to fixing shoes for a living. What eventually led him to educate children in his workshop was the experience he had with his young nephew.  

It was unlikely that Pounds’ nephew was going to be able to make much of a life for himself. Like Pounds, he was crippled. The young boy suffered from feet that began to twist inwards, making it very difficult to walk from one place to another. Being handicapped himself, Pounds was sympathetic to the boy’s plight and began thinking of ways that he could help him. He made an apparatus made from old shoes and leather which helped straighten the boy’s feet. Gradually, the boy’s physical health began to recover. With his nephew’s physical health improving, Pounds then wondered what he could do to expand the status of the boy’s mind.

Though Pounds never enjoyed the luxury of formal education, he could read, write, and knew some math. Most of what he knew was self-taught, but he did what he could to pass his knowledge down to his nephew. He began teaching the boy how to read, which soon became one of the boy’s favorite activities. Pounds’ nephew was a good student, but Pounds thought that it

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14 Cornwallis, *The Philosophy of Ragged Schools*, 42.
would be best for the boy if he had a classmate. So, he asked a poor neighbor if they would like him to teach their child in his workshop as well. The neighbor happily agreed, and before too long more and more poor children began appearing at Pounds’ little shop. Teaching soon became his passion. He taught these children in his tiny workshop, persuading some children to go to his school by tempting them with a potato. Pounds not only volunteered his time to help educate these children, but he also gave them clothes to wear to Sunday school and held a plum-pudding feast every Christmas Day. He kept up this work until his death on January 1, 1839, and during his life had helped about 500 children.  

Many of the earliest ragged schools to appear in London were opened by the London City Mission which was started in 1835 by David Nasmith and two of his friends to help and Christianize the poor. It was also the London City Mission that coined the name “ragged school” in 1840. Before this, Nasmith had formed the Glasgow City Mission in 1826, and the Edinburgh City Mission in 1832. He had developed his own style of Christian missionary in the big city, which was influenced by his time spent in Glasgow with Thomas Chalmers. Chalmers was one of the first Christians to come up with new ways to spread the Gospel for those living in destitution.

The first schools opened by the London City Mission were Sunday schools. However, starting in the late 1840s and early 1850s, many realized that these children needed much more than Bible study alone. Working together with the London City Mission, a gardener named Andrew Walker opened a ragged school in Field Lane, Smithfield in 1841. This school offered

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more than just Bible study. It offered weekday classes for children and industrial classes in the evenings for adults; men got three evening classes a week and one evening a week was offered to women. 17

Another ragged school in Aberdeen, Scotland went even further. Sherifff William Watson saw the same destitute children in his town as Pounds saw in Portsmouth. He formed a committee to raise funds to help give some of these wandering children an education and industrial training, as well as feed them. Watson called the school an Industrial Feeding School. This idea was not met with enthusiasm at first. Many people had never heard of such a thing. Nonetheless, the school opened in October 1841. Those involved had collected £100 and started with 20 students. Five months later, they had close to 60. 18

This scheme went further as time went on. The police in Aberdeen were instructed to patrol the streets and to bring begging children they found into the school. On May 19, 1845, seventy-five boys and girls were brought in. Bringing these children into the school was not an easy task. The children had lived their lives with no direction, did as they pleased, and proved to be difficult to handle. When the police brought these children into the school, they caused quite the scene by fighting back and cussing, but the school was able to calm them down eventually. The school informed the children that they were no longer allowed to beg on the streets, but they were more than welcome to come to the school to receive food. The next day, most of the children who had been brought in the day before returned. 19

17 Eager, Making Men, 122; Montague, Sixty Years in Waifdom, 36-7, 101.
19 Cornwallis, The Philosophy of Ragged Schools, 45-7.
Many from all social classes, especially the working class, donated to the school to help it with its mission. In one year, the working class had contributed at least £250, while the wealthier classes had donated £150. This was a very proud accomplishment for the town of Aberdeen. A few years before these schools opened, there were 320 children in the town of Aberdeen and around 328 children in the county who were roaming the streets, begging and stealing. After the school opened, it was rare to find a child roaming the streets, and juvenile crime was comparatively unknown.  

Another ragged school opened in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1847. Discussions about opening a ragged school in Edinburgh were started by Governor John Smith of the Edinburgh Prison. In 1842, Smith proposed opening a school of industry for juvenile delinquents to the prison inspectors. Then, on October 28, 1845, he wrote a letter to the Governors of Heriot’s Hospital about the problems Edinburgh faced regarding the children in their prisons. In the letter, Smith explained that in the previous three years, prisons in Edinburgh had incarcerated 704 children under the age of 14, of which 245 were under the age of 10. He believed that a school like Watson’s would be greatly beneficial. Though Smith campaigned for a ragged school in Edinburgh, it would be Reverend Thomas Guthrie who would make this idea a reality.

Thomas Guthrie first became aware of ragged schools while stopping for a beverage at a rundown township on the shores of Firth of Forth in Anstruther, Scotland. While in the inn, a picture above the fireplace caught Guthrie’s eye. It was a picture of John Pounds in his workshop surrounded by his ragged students. Pounds had done so much while having so little and had taught his students about God and the world. Guthrie felt ashamed of himself for doing so little.

20 Ibid.
Inspired by Pounds’ example, he became involved in ragged schools, and he eventually opened a ragged school in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1847. 22

Although Guthrie opened Edinburgh’s Original Ragged School, he is better well-known for spearheading the idea with his writings. His first book advocating for ragged schools, A Plea for Ragged Schools, Or, Prevention Better than a Cure, was written in 1847. This first book attempted to explain to its readers the terrible conditions these children lived in, while also promoting the motto of ragged schools, “prevention better than a cure.” He promoted ragged schools by explaining that not only would they benefit the children attending them but the rest of society as well. People were concerned that giving these children a free education would cost too much money, but Guthrie claimed that it would save society money in the long run. He argued that educating these children while they were still young would cost less than the money spent on the prison system.23

Guthrie did not realize at first how much of an impact his Plea would have on the movement. He saw the poor neglected children in the streets and saw how Watson’s school had been beneficial. He wanted to make this idea appeal to the public but, in all honesty, he did not believe people would take his first manuscript seriously. A year and a half after he published his first manuscript, he wrote to his friend Mr. Carment that he had published his Plea “in fear and trembling.” 24 He did not have much experience in writing before this and was insecure. After he took his manuscript to print, he believed he had made a fool of himself. However, the complete opposite happened. His manuscript had a positive and powerful effect on people. He even received letters of thanks and praise. More importantly, his manuscript achieved everything he

23 Guthrie, A Plea for Ragged Schools, 9.
had hoped for, if not more. His appeal had resonated with those who read it and further strengthened the Ragged School Movement (1840-1870). After his first Plea, Guthrie wrote more to advocate for ragged schools. He later wrote A Second Plea for Ragged Schools, Or, Prevention Better than a Cure, in 1849, followed by Seed-Time & Harvest of Ragged Schools, or, a third plea in 1860. All three of these writings helped further aid ragged schools as the movement progressed. 25

Charles Dickens has also been credited with helping popularize ragged schools with his writings. Mary Carpenter, who had herself opened a number of ragged and reformatory schools once stated, “The struggling efforts of a few individuals were brought into a striking and brilliant light by the magic pen of Charles Dickens who, by none of his writings, has reflected more true honour on himself, than those simple but touching columns in the Daily News.” 26 Dickens first became involved with ragged schools after he visited the Field-Lane Ragged School in 1843. Dickens was astounded by the condition of the school building, as well as the challenges the teachers faced regarding their students. Despite the school’s imperfections, he was thrilled with the good that they were doing. After his visit, he became a supporter of ragged schools. It had been this visit that inspired him to write, A Christmas Carol, in 1843. He then wrote about his visit to Field-Lane in the Daily News in 1846, a British newspaper that he had founded in 1846, urging Londoners to visit their local ragged schools and do what they could to support them. He also wrote letters to very influential individuals such as Angela Burdett-Coutts the richest

women in England at the time, in hopes that they would donate to these schools as well. Miss Coutts did indeed become a huge supporter of ragged schools after Dickens letters. 27

Another man who helped promote the Ragged School Movement was Lord Shaftesbury. Anthony Ashley Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, later known as Lord Shaftesbury after his father’s death in 1851, was born in 1801. Before getting involved with ragged schools, he had already made strides to improve the conditions of the working class. He joined Parliament at age 25, in 1826. From there he initiated legislation improving both health and working conditions for the poorer classes. His first goal was to improve the treatment of the mentally ill. In 1828, he helped pass of the County Lunatic Asylums Act and the Madhouses Act, both of which helped regulated the care of patients in these institutes, built and regulated more asylums, and provided help to criminals and destitute patients. He also helped to pass the Mines and Collieries Act of 1842, which prohibited children under the age of 10 from working in the coal mines and excluded women and children under 15 from working underground. However, Shaftesbury is best reconized for his involvement in the Factory Reform Movement. The Factory Acts that he supported improved the lives of both women and children. Shaftesbury was first introduced to ragged schools in February 1843, after seeing an advertisement asking for donations for the Field-Lane Ragged School in The Times. Shortly after he became interested in ragged schools, four other men created the Ragged School Union. 28

On April 11, 1844, S. R. Starey invited ragged school teachers to meet him in his room. Only three men arrived. These men were William Locke, Mr. Moulton, and Mr. Morrison. These men all wanted to find a more efficient way to save these impoverished and neglected children, and soon it was decided that they would create a union that would not only serve the purpose of uniting the existing ragged schools in London but would also encourage the creation of new ones. The first step in achieving this was to invite ragged school superintendents, teachers, and anyone else interested in these schools to meet at William Williams’ St. Giles Ragged School. This meeting occurred on April 26, and 40 superintendents and teachers attended. This group became known as the Ragged School Union, as it became properly named on July 5, 1844.

Locke became the Union’s first secretary and was the one who, six months after the Union was established, asked Lord Shaftesbury to help their organization by becoming its President.

Locke’s invitation to the Union pleased Shaftesbury, and he responded to his letter on November 21, 1844:  

Sir,-- At the instant I had the pleasure of receiving your letter I was contemplating a walk to Field Lane, that I might hear what progress was making in your admirable undertaking. I shall be happy to aid you to the full extent of my power, but I am disposed to advise a little deliberation before we set up a Society with all the apparatus as a President and Patron. I shall return to London, I hope, on Monday next; it will then give me great pleasure to see you and hear your report. We may, I think, do much for these poor children.  

As President of the Ragged School Union, Shaftesbury chaired the Union’s annual meetings, but this was only a small portion of his participation in the organization. He also attended numerous public meetings held in churches and chapels as well as quarterly meetings of delegates. He did whatever he could to assist the ragged school teachers and helped form new ideas to improve the schools. He met with ragged school students at their homes, sat next to them

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30 Hodder, *Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, 349.
in the classrooms, and allowed them to visit him at his home to vent their problems to him. At the House of Commons, the House of Lords, and public and religious gatherings he spread the word of their plight. Thanks to Shaftesbury, much of the country became aware of the difficulties ragged school children faced. ³¹

The Ragged School Union spread the word about ragged schools through publications such as the *Ragged School Union Magazine* and a *Quarterly Review*. Because of these publications, word spread, and ragged schools began to receive more in donations, and more people became interested in helping in any way they could. The Ragged School Union assisted those who came forth and wanted to open a ragged school of their own by offering them encouragement, money, and any other help they could. Organizations such as the London City Mission also worked closely with the Ragged School Union. London’s Ragged School Union made great strides in aiding ragged schools and helping to popularize the movement. In the end, what many philanthropists hoped to achieve with these ragged schools was to give these destitute children an education in hopes that it would prevent them living a life of crime and instead be productive members of society. ³²

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³¹ Ibid., 351.
CHAPTER 3
TRYING TO FIX THE “STREET ARABS”

Crime rates were a significant factor as to why many philanthropists opened ragged schools. The effects of industrialization had caused crime rates to rise, even among children. Ragged schools hoped that their institutions would give children the education and skill sets needed to live honestly and prevent them from living a life of crime. It would be best to help their students while they were young rather than attempt to fix their behavior as adults. By some accounts, it appeared ragged schools succeeded in helping some of their students. Nevertheless, especially when ragged schools were still new, many criticized them for enabling crime and vice by bringing these terrible children together under one roof and taking responsibility away from their parents. While this criticism had some validity, ragged schools were able to do some good. It was impossible for ragged schools to be able to better the lives of every single child who walked through their doors. These children came from rough backgrounds, and ragged schools had few resources to work with, especially when the movement was still new. If ragged schools had never opened in the United Kingdom, the children they did help would have been left to live their lives on the streets, and their situation could have never improved. Helping some was better than helping none.

Due to their circumstances, these children lacked any education, structure, or discipline. Instead, they were left to their own devices and found other ways to support themselves, often by begging and stealing. Many of these children did not realize their actions were wrong, because no one had taught them any differently. 33 Guthrie described these children perfectly:

Poor fellow! It is a bitter day; he had neither shoes nor stockings; his feet are red, swollen, cracked, ulcerated with the cold; a thin, thread-worn jacket with its gaping rents, is all that

33 Guthrie, A Plea for Ragged Schools, 9.
protects his breast, beneath his shaggy bush of hair he shows a face sharp with want, yet sharp also with intelligence beyond his years. That poor fellow has learned to be already self-supporting. He has studied the arts, he is a master of imposture, lying, begging, stealing; and small blame to him, but much to those who have neglected him, he had otherwise pined and perished. 34

Juvenile crime had been an issue since the 1700s, but industrialization worsened the issue in the 19th century. Stealing was a common crime committed by children, especially pickpocketing. Some children stole on their own, some were told to by adults. Lads-men were older men who trained young boys to steal for them and would then sell the stolen goods. Crowded areas like markets and public executions were favorite hunting grounds for young thieves. A common item stolen out of pockets were silk handkerchiefs, because they were easy to sell at a high price. In 1824, a 15-year-old boy named Joseph Mee was caught pickpocketing at a public execution. The magistrate described Joseph as a “hardened and unconcerned” criminal. In 1835, 13-year-old Robert Spence was caught attempting to steal a gentleman’s handkerchief. In 1840, 11-year-old Martin Gaven and another boy were also in court for stealing a man's handkerchief in a crowd. Stealing was an easy way to make money. 35

Juvenile crime showed no sign of lessening in the 1840s when the Ragged School Movement began. Many of the children arrested were too short for their heads to go above the dock where they stood to stand trial. England’s prison statistics showed that annually there were around 20,000 to 25,000 juveniles in the criminal population. In England and Wales, the yearly average of those committed to a trial in a court of law between 1838 and 1842 was 26,758, with more than 1/3 of them being under the age of 20. In London alone, there were around 30,000 children under the age of 16 who depended on begging and crime to survive. Applying this number to all the large cities and towns in England, there were possibly around a quarter of a

34 Ibid.
million children belonging to this class. This number of juvenile offenders created a constant supply of inmates for the penal system, costing the public vast amounts of money to pay for their sentences each year. This fact would become the main argument many advocates would use to support the need for ragged schools.  

Guthrie expressed what he believed needed to be done to reduce crime in his book, *A Plea for Ragged Schools; or, Prevention Better than Cure*. Guthrie and others like him could not believe that society allowed these children to continue living the way that they did. The penal system was the closest thing to a school these kids had attended. He claimed that it was best to prevent these children from becoming criminals while they were still young, rather than wait and attempt to break them of their bad behaviors as adults. Educating these children would enable them to support themselves, thereby their need to commit crime would lessen.  

Thomas Beauchamp Proctor agreed with Guthrie and advocated for his fellow countrymen to help support ragged schools, believing they were the key to decreasing juvenile crime. He wrote *Attend to the Neglected and Remember the Forgotten: An Appeal for the Ragged Schools* in 1849. He argued that education was necessary to help reform the lives of these children. “I do sincerely believe, that were these unfortunate creatures more cared for; were a general system of education adopted; were they shewn [sic] that a kindly feeling existed toward them on the part of their wealthier brethren; were they encouraged in the habits of cleanliness and industry, this moral blight upon society would, in a great measure, be removed.”  

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claimed that it would cost the community less money to support ragged schools than it would to pay into the penal system. 39

In some cases, ragged schools did decrease juvenile crime. For example, Sheriff Watson’s Industrial Feeding School appeared to have completely diminished child begging and crime on the streets of Aberdeen, as did Guthrie’s ragged school in Edinburgh. After the schools’ establishment, the number of imprisoned children between the ages of 14 to 16 decreased. In 1848, there was 532 inmates in this age range; 361 in 1850; 253 in 1854; and 130 in 1859. Offenders under the age of 14 also declined. In 1854 the number of these children put in prison was 103; 81 in 1855; 137 in 1856; 92 in 1857; 71 in 1858; and 56 in 1859. Many of their students found respectable positions once leaving school. Around 1858, invitations were sent out for a tea-meeting to former students of the Original Ragged School who still resided in Edinburgh. About 150 attended the gathering, some of the guests being the spouses of former students. Dr. Guthrie was pleased with the scene. “We lingered over the scene. Nor could I look on the gathering of young men and women -- so respectably clad, and wearing such an air of decency -- and think what, but for the ragged school, they would have been, without tears of joy, gratitude to God, welling up to the eyes. It was a sight worth living for. It was our harvest home.” 40

Not everyone shared in Guthrie’s optimism. Some critics believed that ragged schools produced more crime rather than reduced it. Popular opinion was that these children were too far gone to help, and it was a waste of time and money to try. These criminally bound children received benefits that should go to respectable poor children. Critics thought ragged schools were

39 Ibid., 3-4.
40 Anonymous, Companion to the Almanac, 79-80.
rewarding these children for their bad behaviors. As far as they were concerned, “it was offering a premium to vice,” 41 The poor, as far as many individuals were concerned, deserved to be destitute. “Misery is the appointed punishment of sin, and to attempt to rescue these children from the state into which their own and their parents misdeeds had brought them was detrimental to society by confounding the distinction of right and wrong, lessening the divinely appointed penalty of crime, and thus weakening the deterring force of such examples of suffering.” 42 It was also believed that ragged school contributed to the rise in juvenile crime because they provided a place where little degenerates meet other little degenerates. The latter opinion appeared to have some validation due to an investigation conducted by the journalist Henry Mayhew, whose investigation began due to an apparent increase in juvenile offenders in 1848. 43

Henry Mayhew was a British journalist whose letter was published in The Morning Chronicle, where he was the “Special Correspondent to the Metropolis,” and whose job it was to describe the condition of the “industrial poor.” The Morning Chronicle was a newspaper founded in 1770 by William Woodfall as a Whig mouthpiece. During its existence, The Morning Chronicle was the first newspaper to provide parliamentary reports, crime reports, reviews, fashion and more. It also employed important figures such as John Stuart Mill, Charles Dickens, and Henry Mayhew. Mayhew is best known for helping begin the satirical newspaper Punch and for his social investigations of London’s poor. On March 19, 1850, Mayhew launched an investigation into ragged schools and came up with some unfavorable results. After interviewing

41 Cornwallis, Philosophy of Ragged Schools, 48.
42 Ibid., 48.
43 Ibid., 49.
some ragged school students, it appeared students committed more crime than they had before going to the school.  

Mayhew interviewed two former ragged school students who were in prison at that time. These boys admitted to stealing with classmates while school was out. They also admitted to pressuring younger, innocent students to steal with them. One boy who was 12 years old told Mayhew that they “liked to teach very young boys best; they’re pluckiest, and the police don’t know them at first.” He told Mayhew that those boys were good until they came to the ragged schools and learned how to steal. Mayhew also interviewed a young girl who was attending a ragged school. This girl was a good girl who did not participate in bad behavior, but told Mayhew that she had seen her classmates leave together after school, many of them using foul language. She told Mayhew that she had “never done anything a modest girl mightn’t, though I’ve been tempted.” She also said that her brother had become worse since attending the school.  

Mayhew then interviewed the superintendent of police in the Westminster district who was well acquainted with the ragged school there. This man had known that district for about twenty years and remembered when the ragged school opened. The man had been involved with Westminster since 1829, which was reputed to be one of the worst areas and got worse after the St. Giles district, was “rookeried out” and thousands of its inhabitants moved to Westminster.

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45 Swindells, Classrooms in the Ragged Schools, 202, 206-207; Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, 14

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.
The lodging-houses became cramped. He told Mayhew, “Such places are the great facilities of crime,” and that, “lodging-houses are the policeman’s great hindrance. He needn’t look for criminals there -- they’re hidden.” 48 Another issue in these areas was the “general dealers” who would buy anything brought to them. Many children in these areas who were not raised as thieves by their parents would begin stealing at home to take to general dealers. 49

The superintendent noted that when the ragged school appeared in the area, the streets did seem to thin out. However, he also confirmed what some of the ragged school students had said:

But they want supervision. If poor bad children meet together, and go away together, they are sure to go to some mischief or some robbery. Without complete supervision, ragged schools are of no good effect -- nothing adequate to the good meant. -- No doubt there is a great risk run at these ragged schools; bad boys, in a cluster, will always corrupt good boys. Worse still with girls. A decent girl must be corrupted among bad girls. 50

The superintendent did not appear to blame ragged schools for what these children did and believed that with some help ragged schools could achieve their goals. Due to his experience with the ragged school in the Westminster area, he felt, “with proper supervision, and prudential training, ragged schools do good: without it, they are dangerous.” 51 He thought that to help ragged schools flourish best, citizens needed to register general dealers to prevent them from tempting children to steal. Also, they needed to license the low lodging-houses. Low lodging-houses were hotels where a bed of sorts was rented for as cheap as twopence a night. In these low lodging-houses, people of both sexes could share rooms and beds, and those running the houses did not ask any questions. Licensing low lodging-houses would allow the police to inspect them. General dealers and low lodging-houses were too much for ragged schools to handle alone, and without help, they did not stand a chance. These children mixing in such an

48 Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, 11.
49 Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, 11-12.
50 Ibid., 12.
51 Ibid., 13.
environment made them destined to become thieves or prostitutes, whether they went to a ragged school or not. However, he did believe that teaching these children how to read was not a good idea. 52

It was argued that teaching these children to read also caused more crime. The superintendent told Mayhew that teaching destitute children how to read turned them into smarter criminals. Young thieves who could read stole more boldly because they could read the price tags and see the true value of what they were stealing. Without proper moral training, these skills did more harm than good. According to the superintendent, the smartest thieves he met knew how to read and write, and many could defend themselves without an attorney in court because they studied the newspaper. His last remark to Mayhew was that “the nation is paying the penalty now for so long neglecting the care of the youth of London.” 53

Those invested in the Ragged School Movement took offense to Mayhew’s investigation. William Locke published a letter in response to Mayhew in the Morning Chronicle. In this letter, he explained that it was not fair to correlate the increase of juvenile offenders in 1848, with the rise of ragged schools in London. The real reason for the increase of juvenile offenders were other occurrences that happened around the same time. For instance, England’s population began to increase in the mid-1850s due to Irish immigrants escaping the Great Famine as well as the Commercial Panic of 1847. About 18,000 of these Irish immigrants, in one year, applied for help from the Mendicity Society, a society that gave food, money, and support to applicants and the Houses of Correction at Coldbath Fields and Westminster became crowded with 1,200 more than those in custody in 1847. However, despite the conditions being favorable for juvenile crime, Locke claimed there was still a decrease in the number of convictions. The argument was

52 Ibid., 5, 12-13.
53 Ibid., 13.
that because of this evidence, the attack on ragged schools by the public journal was unfair and that this showed the efficiency of ragged schools.  

Based on records and documents from ragged schools, Locke announced that in Birmingham,

“Some of these very boys we have succeeded in rescuing. I could tell of cases, not by tens, but by hundreds, in which boys and girls taken out of the mire and the gutter—the very sweepings of the streets, as it were—have become honest and useful members of society. Out of some 400 boys, every one of whom was training for transportation or the gibbet, and would have figured in our criminal calendar, whom we have sent out to the colonies from various schools, we have hardly heard of a single return to criminal practices; but on the contrary, we find in almost every case they are doing well, and earning an honest livelihood.”

The Recorder of Ipswich, the person responsible for dispensing justice in the courts, announced that even though the ragged school had only been open for two years, it had already made a remarkable improvement. The children were more humane, refined, and saw themselves as part of society instead of being severed from it.

Locke also compared the number of juvenile offenders five years before and after the establishment of ragged schools, to display that the number of juvenile offenders had declined since ragged schools began. “During the 5 years that preceded the establishment of ragged schools, the total number of juvenile offenders committed in the metropolises was 78,346, giving an average for each of those years of 15,669. Whereas, during the 5 years that succeeded the establishment of the schools, the total number of those committed was 76,895, giving an average for each year of 15,379; showing an average decrease of 290.” He also stated that in the five years before the establishment of ragged schools, on average one out of 47 children were

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56 Ibid.

57 Carpenter, *Reformatory Schools*, 129.
convicted of a crime, while in the five years after the establishment of ragged schools one out of 50 children were convicted of a crime. Locke hoped this would prove that ragged schools were not responsible for the increase in juvenile offenders in 1848, but rather they reduced it despite the population increase. 58

Regardless, ragged schools remained the target of criticism. Many did not like ragged schools because they took the responsibility of taking care of children away from the parents. With ragged schools providing for their students’ needs as well as trying to improve their moral character, this took the responsibility off the parent’s shoulders and they would become dependent on ragged schools. This criticism was not without reason. For instance, one ragged schoolmaster described one widowed mother who took advantage of the parish payments she received for her three children. She did nothing to provide for her children. Two of her children eventually found themselves in prison, and their mother still received parish payments for all three children. Ragged schools knew this could happen at their institutions but tried to help children nonetheless. 59

Despite their shortcomings, ragged schools did accomplish some good. Of the numerous children that passed through their doors, ragged schools appeared to be able to help a small few. One ragged school that opened in 1843 had a rough beginning. The school started as a Sunday school, and the first Sunday that they opened about 20 boys between the ages of 12 and 20 attended. This first night did not go smoothly and eventually broke out in a brawl between the teachers and the students after the students wished to leave and the teachers attempted to keep them there. 60

58 Ibid., Reformatory Schools, 129; Hill and Cornwallis, Two Prize Essays, 222.
59 Carpenter, Reformatory Schools, 42-3.
60 Anonymous, “FIELD-LANE RAGGED SCHOOL.” Times; Cornwallis, The Philosophy of Ragged Schools, 51.
Shortly after this on another Sunday evening, there were two teachers and a class of about 70 boys. Realizing they outnumbered the teachers, many of the boys turned out the lights and began stealing anything of value. One of the teachers was able to get a small portion of the bigger boys to help them protect the school and restore order. When the whole ordeal was over, the only ones left were the teachers and the 16 boys who had helped defend the school. These boys begged the teachers to let them stay for the prayer meeting that they held every Sunday. A large portion of the boys had gone to this school to cause trouble, but a small number of them had gone there to worship as the school intended. Ragged schools were far from perfect, but it is important to remember that these teachers had to deal with many troubled children, usually with few resources at their disposal.61

The lack of parental guidance and neglect were significant reasons why many of these children were so troublesome. Many were orphaned or abandoned; many came from single-parent households. For those who still had a parental figure, alcoholism appeared to be a prominent problem within these families. In Bristol and Plymouth, some ragged school teachers visited their students’ homes and found that more than half of the parents were alcoholics. These parents would rather spend money on gin than their children’s education or properly clothing them. 62

These children did what they wanted when they wanted, and no one forced them to do otherwise. This made school attendance difficult. Since ragged schools did not charge their students a weekly fee, the children had no incentive to make it to class every day, and at this time there was no law forcing them to go. Teachers feared that if they were too stern, the students

61 Cornwallis, The Philosophy of Ragged Schools, 52-3.
would stop attending altogether. One teacher at a larger ragged school tried an approach that gave students an incentive to make it to class on time. This teacher locked the doors at a certain time in the morning and afternoon so that no one could come in or out during lessons. This was an effective method because students feared being prohibited from coming in, giving them an incentive to arrive on time. However, this is only one such case. It would seem that most teachers allowed students to attend whenever they felt like it, and only a small number of students attended school regularly.  

These children were products of their environment. They lived in areas full of bad influences. Those involved in the Ragged School Movement often blamed businesses like saloons for enabling evil habits. An article published in the *Ragged School Union Magazine* worried about the many saloons getting licensed in Middlesex. In 1849, there were 87 new applications received by the courts asking for licenses for such establishments. These businesses were breeding grounds for immorality and crime. Mr. Wilks spoke of how these amusements impacted the children that would attend ragged schools and pleaded for the magistrates to see how horrible these places were for the community. Unfortunately, the more the population grew, the greater the demand for saloons. To show how these saloons negatively influence these children, Wilks described a visit to a saloon after visiting one of the ragged schools in Lambeth.

At the time of the visit, the school had just reopened. When entering, Wilks saw about 35 male students between the ages of 10 and 15, most of whom were attending for the first time. He described their behavior as being disruptive and rude. Knowing these boys spent their evenings at a saloon nearby, he decided to visit the saloon as well. The first thing he saw when entering

63 Ibid.
the saloon was a woman with a young child in her arms; her eyes bruised, most likely from a drunken brawl. Throughout the saloon, he found children of various ages and about ten mothers with infants in their arms. After seeing such a sight, it was no mystery to Wilks as to why the children at the Lambeth Ragged School acted the way that they did, being raised in such an awful place. 65

Upbringings such as these were what made these children difficult for their teachers to handle, and teachers could be pushed to their breaking point. Like many children today, these students did plenty to test their teacher’s patience. At times it was almost impossible for teachers to keep order in the classroom. Mr. Phelps, the first master at the Bristol Ragged School, wrote about his experiences in his diary. In a diary entry written on August 17, 1846, he described an incident where a group of large boys had done everything possible to disrupt the class and at one point succeeded in throwing each other across the forms. Phelps eventually regained order. By the time of his next entry on August 19, Phelps had nearly reached his limit and even contemplated passing the school off to someone else. 66

That was until a student referred to as P, reminded him why he started to do this line of work in the first place:

This is a trying day for me, and several times I had resolved to give up the school into other’s hands, To-day I saw P., the outcast of society, with a clean shirt, clean face and hands, seated beside his own father, hard at work, putting a lady’s shoe into welt. Did not my heart leap for joy to see one, forsaken by all parties, one who had been in prison, one from many long months had never slept in a bed, and who, as I was informed, the very night he went home was to have been taken up for sleeping on the stairs. 67

65 Ibid., 203-4.
67 Ibid.
Teaching these destitute children was hard work, but the teachers at ragged schools saw the potential in their students and knew that with the right teachings they could be viable members of society. 68

Since these students had rough backgrounds, ragged schools could not discipline their students like teachers at regular schools. Ragged schools intended to offer discipline and structure to their students, but they were not as strict as one would imagine a classroom to be during the 19th century. Guthrie was opposed to corporal punishment and advised that ragged school teachers win their students over with love instead:

These Arabs of the city are as wild as those of the desert and must be broken into three habits, -- those of discipline, learning and industry, not to speak of cleanliness. To accomplish this, our trust is in the almost omnipotent power of Christian kindness. Hard words and harder blows are thrown away here. With these alas they are too familiar at home and have learned to be as indifferent to them as the smith's dog to the shower of sparks. 69

Harsh punishments would be wasted on these children and could also cause the child to stop attending the school. On the other hand, soft words and kindness were alien to them, and Guthrie hoped this would positively affect the children. 70

For many children, attending a ragged school was the first time they had received any form of affection and friendship. One teacher at a ragged school in Bristol described how kindness changed his student’s behavior. “A change after a year’s kind and preserving instruction by a gentleman who devoted to them his evenings after a days toil, mixing with them as their friend, is almost incredible: they are orderly and respectful in their demeanor, and evidently prize the opportunity.” 71 Before attending these schools, these students lived in a world that was against them. When teachers gave them love and affection, this softened their

68 Ibid.
69 Guthrie, Seed, Time and Harvest, 25.
70 Ibid.
71 Carpenter, Reformatory Schools, 143.
demeanor, and their behavior improved. According to the students at the Bristol Ragged School, “Before, we did not know that anyone in the world cared for us.” Kindness helped win the respect of the students, and this could help make them easier to manage. However, these children needed more than just kindness to fix their situations; something had to be done to eliminate bad influences around them.

Young men teaching boys their bad habits remained a serious social issue. While most ragged schools focused on saving young children from a life of crime, there was one that focused on older boys and young men. The Ragged Dormitory and Colonial Training School of Industry opened in London in the spring of 1848, for young men who exhibited bad habits and lacked education, and who often led younger boys astray and taught them their bad habits. This school opened for a limited number of male vagrants and thieves between the ages of 16-20. This school was stricter than most ragged schools. When a student applied, they conducted a rigorous investigation of his past to make sure that the applicant was a good candidate for the school. If he passed, he was placed on probation for 14 days and given a limited diet of one pound of bread per day until the school was confident that he was serious about wanting to change his life. Even after being accepted, the school could place the student on another 14-day probation period if they had any suspicion that the student was not serious.

This ragged school also had harder rules and regulations that the students had to follow once admitted. These rules and regulations were needed to prevent the school from falling victim

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72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
to imposters. The school wanted to be sure that they were only accepting students who were serious about changing their lives. The students could not associate with anyone of questionable character in or outside the neighborhood. The school’s Governor oversaw when and where to have outside exercise, and no student could leave the school in the evening unless permitted to run an errand. Students were not allowed to smoke, drink, cuss, or fight. The Sabbath had to be respected, and full participation during worship was mandatory. 75

Students were expected to be clean and neat. The school gave them clothes to wear at the school, but if a student ever left school without returning the clothes, the school would report him to the police. Students were also held responsible for any school property that they wasted or damaged by losing a portion of their daily allowance until the school recovered the amount owed. If the students wished to leave the school for whatever reason, they needed to give the Governor a week’s notice and the reason they wanted to leave. Students had to attend the school for at least six months, and the school kept journals and logged their students’ merits and demerits. Those who strictly followed the rules were given a free pass to one of the colonies or placed in a respectable job to live an honest livelihood. After this, these young men were no longer a threat to little boys. 76

With the high rates of juvenile crime during the first half of the 19th century, ragged schools realized something had to be done to try and prevent as many children as they could from growing up to be criminals. It is not clear how successful ragged school were at achieving this, but it is possible that only a small handful of their students truly benefited. Regardless, ragged schools saw many hungry and homeless children on the streets and knew that they could easily be led to a life of crime if they did not help. It would not only benefit the children but the

75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 2.
public at large. Even if they could only save a small few, it was better than nothing. The way Lord Shaftesbury saw it, “If they can save 10 out of 100, they ought to rejoice that they had been called to such a work.” 77 Ragged schools achieved this by trying to improve their students’ souls, minds, and bodies. 78

CHAPTER 4
SOUL, MIND, AND BODY

Ragged schools knew that if they were going to help these children from becoming lifelong criminals, they had to focus on three different facets of their students’ lives. Ragged schools tried to elevate their students’ souls, minds, and bodies. Providing a religious education was important at ragged schools. Evangelicals are often the group credited for starting ragged schools. Evangelicalism significantly impacted the religious and moral codes of the 19th century, especially in the middle of the century. It also considerably affected philanthropy and social reform, including ragged schools. Ragged schools were one of the most successful schemes established by Evangelicals to convert the urban poor. 79

Historian David Bebbington identified four primary characteristics of evangelicalism. The first is the belief that lives need to be transformed through a “born-again” experience and living a life following Jesus Christ. Second, it is important to express and demonstrate the gospel through missionary and reform efforts. Third, the Bible is the highest authority. Finally, they taught the importance of Jesus Christ dying on the cross to save mankind from sin. All four of

these characteristics were apparent in ragged schools. It was hoped that this religious education would help improve their students’ moral characters. 80

One ragged school, a year and a half after opening, reported a wonderful experience with their students on Good Friday. The students had been there for two hours learning about the last day of Jesus’s life. The class was well behaved and paid attention to their lesson. “A year and a half ago there was scarcely one of these boys with whom I could have ventured to have read this sacred narrative, so wild were they, and untouched by religion; yet now they delight to understand every incident, and to realize the whole scene to themselves: by this means the living character of Jesus will, I trust, take hold of their hearts, and his commands and blessed promises be a guide and support to them.” 81 There was a similar occurrence at one of Thomas Cranfield’s Sunday schools. At first, managing the school was difficult. The children were rude, and those in the neighborhood disrespected the teacher. With time, the school saw progress, and their students’ terrible behaviors started to improve. The children became more teachable, clean, modest, and they found salvation through Jesus Christ. These teachings not only improved students’ behaviors, but it was also believed it could save their souls. Lord Shaftesbury stated that even if these teachings did nothing to better the lives of these children while they lived on Earth, they at least learned the truth and of God and their souls would have a chance. 82

Ragged schools also hoped their students would leave school and spread their lessons to their families and friends. This was evident in some of the evangelical literature of the time. The Religious Tract Society, which was founded by Reverend George Burden who wanted to convert

80 David W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London and New York: Taylor and Francis, 1989), 3-5.
81 Carpenter, Reformatory Schools, 140.
the masses by putting better literature in their hands. In 1879 the society published a story titled *The Old Stable; or, The Ragged School Boy*. In this story, a couple opened a ragged school in an old stable not far from London. There student named James became deathly ill in the winter months. The couple visited James at his home where he lay in a pile of dirty straw. He was dying, but he was not sad. James told the couple that “he hoped he was going to Jesus.”  

Before his death, James pleaded with his family to change their sinful ways and to read the Bible and go to Church so that he could see them in heaven someday. After James died, his family did change their bad behavior. James took what he learned in his ragged school and convinced his own family to change as well. In his third book, *Seed-Time and Harvest*, Guthrie stated that after a long day at school, ragged school students would return to their homes, “there, carrying with them a holy lesson, they may prove Christian missionaries to those dwellings of darkness and sin.”

However, ragged school teachers could not teach their students the gospel like a pastor or priest would in a normal sermon. They needed to speak in a way that kept their students’ attention. John MacGregor, also known Rob Roy, became involved in ragged schools in 1848. Not only was he a teacher and contributor to ragged schools, but he was a teacher to the teachers. MacGregor wrote in the *Ragged School Union Magazine* and explained to ragged school teachers that long sermons were an ineffective way to teach their students about the gospel. Many students knew little or nothing about Christianity. Therefore, teachers could not speak to

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84 Anonymous, *The Old Stable*, 1-8; Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness*, 42; Guthrie, *Seed, Time and Harvest of Ragged Schools*, 25, [https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044028988202;view=1up;seq=11](https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044028988202;view=1up;seq=11); Kidder, *Stories of Ragged School*, 58-64.

85 Thomas Guthrie, *Seed, Time and Harvest of Ragged Schools; or, a Third Plea with New Editions of the First and Second Pleas* (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1860), 25.
them as they would someone knowledgeable in the subject. Doing so would cause them to lose interest in the topic. 86

Ragged school children needed somebody that they could thoroughly understand. McGregor warned teachers not to ramble during lectures, and that they needed to speak with a sense of serenity. Regarding style, in every stage of a simile its meaning needed expanding, and teachers needed to use Saxon words when possible. In his lectures, McGregor used stories such as the wise man who built his house on stone and the foolish man who built his house on sand. He was able to sustain his students’ attention so well that it seemed they could hear the falling of the house on the sand during the storm and the feeling of safety when shown a picture of the house on the rock. McGregor was a great storyteller and understood the importance of keeping his students’ attention by speaking in a manner that they could understand. 87

The Bible was the main book in ragged schools. The Bible was used to teach the students moral lessons, reading, and spelling. However, this method of teaching often caused conflicts with Roman Catholics who believe that only a priest should be allowed to read from the Bible. The Edinburgh Original Ragged and Industrial Schools incurred quite the controversy about their use of the Bible in their schools. While reporting on the schools’ progress, the Committee of Management mentioned there had been a misunderstanding with the Roman Catholics. 88

Some were under the impression that Roman Catholic children were excluded, which resulted in fewer students coming into their schools. This, of course, was not the case. Roman Catholic children were more than welcomed to attend their schools if they wished. In the report, the Committee of Management explained that they did not favor any denomination and did not

87 Hodder, John MacGregor, 57-8.
88 Altick, Victorian People and Ideas, 165-6.
base their teachings on any one religion. At a meeting held at the Music Hall in Edinburgh on April 8, 1847, Guthrie discussed the controversy and stated that this battle had first begun in Aberdeen and Dundee. Such tension started a debate on whether ragged schools should use the Bible in their lessons. 89

Guthrie explained that he would never deny helping a child simply because their religious beliefs differed from his. However, the Bible was the most important teaching tool in ragged schools, and that was not going to change. Guthrie’s proclamation was easy to make considering almost no Roman Catholics came to the meeting to dispute him. He explained in his speech, “I rejoice that the cloud which hung over the ragged schools is now dispelled. There were some that doubted before whether they would have a decidedly religious school, of a decidedly Bible character. Thanks be to God for this storm, it has cleared the atmosphere. Above the door of these ragged schools men shall henceforth see an open Bible; --this glorious text upon its glorious page, -- ‘Search the Scriptures.’” 90

The Bible controversy in Edinburgh and Aberdeen was not the only instance when ragged schools clashed with Roman Catholics. Many Roman Catholic clergymen made attempts to prevent Catholic children from attending ragged schools. At the Edward’s-Mew Ragged School in London, Lord Shaftesbury briefly discussed the opposition from Roman Catholics towards this ragged school, which was in the center of a large Roman Catholic population. The Ragged School Union felt that the school was of great service in saving these children from vice

90 Ibid., Report of a Discussion, 30-37.
and error, but Roman Catholics had done everything in their power to make sure the school failed. Catholic clergymen did not give any absolution to the parents of these children and tried to stop the children from attending the ragged school and go to a Roman Catholic school instead. The Edward’s-Mew Ragged School had to close for a short time because they were not receiving sufficient funds, but it eventually reopened. In both Scotland and England, these occurrences were frustrating but non-threatening. However, in Ireland, the tension between Roman Catholics and a ragged school turned into a series of riots.  

The Coombe Ragged School in Dublin, Ireland opened in 1853. The school was started by the Irish Church Missions to the Roman Catholics which was founded in 1846 and became an official organization in 1849. The organization’s goal was to bring the word of God to destitute Irish citizens in hopes that they would convert to Protestantism. Shortly after the school was opened, the local parish priest, Father Matthew Flanagan, opened up his own Catholic ragged school in opposition. This ragged school did not do as well. The Catholic Church panicked as the Coombe Ragged School continued to attract more children. Thus started the competition for the souls of the Irish poor. Between the years of 1853 and 1857, the Coombe Ragged School dealt with constant opposition from Roman Catholics, ranging from verbal abuse and stones thrown at the school. Flanagan died in 1856 and was replaced by Rev. Edward (Canon) McCabe. McCabe caused further tension between the Coombe Ragged School and the Roman Catholic citizens who lived in the area.  

This first crisis started with the building of new Catholic schools located very close to the Coombe Ragged School. Then, on March 30, 1857, a group gathered outside the school and forcibly prevented children from attending Sunday school. This opposition escalated in April.

Priests, nuns, and a group of religious men sparked anger among people in the community by insisting that something had to be done to stop this “new religion.” At first, the mob simply surrounded the school and angrily shouted and prevented students entering the school, but after a week the mob became violent. They began furiously attacking those who worked at the school. The female teachers were rolled in mud and had their bonnets yanked from their heads. On another day the teachers had to hide in a store and be taken home in a cab for their safety.  

On May 13, 1857, the worst of the riots took place. The rants from the local priest intensified the mob's anger. It all started when a large crowd gathered at the Francis-street Chapel led by McCabe and other priest to create a mission to stop the evil proselytizers. It was at this gathering, that a Catholic man by the name of Joe Redmond passed the railing separating the chapel and the altar, and upon reaching the alter kissed it. The crowd shouted “Souper!” (a derogatory name given to those that converted to avoid starvation) before dragging Redmond to the chapel yard where they beat and spit on him. The police saved Redmond, and he went to the hospital. Word got around that soupers had attacked and desecrated the chapel. With this, a mob went to the Coombe schoolhouse and tossed stones at it and damaged other buildings in the area. This riot had a few more waves before the police were finally able to get the situation under control. Other than the man sent to the hospital, the mob did not injure anyone else. The riots finally subsided in June.  

Though ragged schools claimed to not favor one denomination over another, Roman Catholics had a reason to worry. During the riots, a boy who had entered the school during the height of the violence told the school he only did so “to see if we were the sort of devils he heard

94 Davies, St. Patrick’s Armour, 26-8; Preston, Charitable Words, 72.
we were.” It appeared that the ragged school was able to get the boy on their side rather quickly. “After a few days he began to listen earnestly to the Scripture lessons and seemed anxious to hear all that could be said against the doctrines of Rome.” The boy attended the school regularly, arriving before the other boys and eventually asked for a Bible to take home. A Bible was given to him by the teacher, and the boy exclaimed that “he thought it was his duty to go home to his friends, who lived in the country, to teach them the ‘true way to salvation.’”

It appears that in this case, this ragged school was indeed hoping to convert Roman Catholic children.  

Other ragged school in Ireland were not shy about the fact that they aimed to convert Roman Catholic children to Protestantism. Ellen Smyly from Dublin, Ireland, opened a ragged school for boys in 1852, and opened numerous other schools in 1853, including a ragged school for girls and infants. Smyly also founded numerous homes for the children to live in that became known as the Smyly Homes. These institutions provided children with all their necessities as well as an education and job training. However, records show that Smyly did intentionally convert Roman Catholic children into Protestantism. One such record was from a Home that specialized in helping older boys with housing and employment. Records show that they admitted a young man who was according to them “a bigoted Roman Catholic. But he found out the truth as it is in Jesus, and became truly converted to God.” Despite the tension between Roman Catholics and Protestants concerning ragged schools, religion would continue to be the most important facet of these schools’ curriculum.

Religion was not all that ragged schools taught their students. Ragged schools taught their students the three “R’s,” reading: writing, and arithmetic. Some teachers went even further. Mary

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95 Davies, St. Patrick’s Armour, 31.  
96 Ibid.  
97 Preston, Charitable Words, 79.  
98 Ibid., 75,79.
Carpenter, well known for her work in correctional education, taught students at her ragged school about models of the solar system, maps, and plants. According to Carpenter, the mechanical model of the solar system delighted her students, and they were able to grasp concepts such as the Earth’s axis being responsible for the changing seasons. The students took an interest when she showed them a map, but it was difficult for them to understand it. No one in her class had seen a map before. However, one student she referred to as T. took great pleasure in finding familiar places like Bristol, Keynsham, and Bath. Mary Carpenter explained that she “always began with the known,” before leading them to the “unknown.” 99

The following week, Carpenter took her students some ferns gummed onto white paper. Her students found them very interesting, but none of them knew what they were. One student thought he had seen them growing before, and another student thought they were palm trees. The next week she brought a piece of coal-shale that had impressions of ferns on it. She asked each of her students if they knew what the impressions were. Out of all her students, only one could tell her what they were. This student she referred to as W told her that they were the ferns they had learned about last week, but he thought someone carved the ferns into stone. The class was intrigued when Carpenter explained the matter to them. 100

Ragged schools realized that if they were to have any success at preventing these children from living a life of crime, they also needed to take care of their physical well-being. The most important thing that many ragged schools offered was the promise of food. Destitute children struggled with hunger, and providing food was an excellent way to convince them to attend. Going back to Pounds’ example, he did not forcibly pull his students into his workshop. Instead, he used potatoes to persuade children to go to his workshop. Guthrie described in his first *Plea*, a

100 Ibid., 53-4.
conversation with an impoverished young boy on the street. The boy was asked, “Would you go to school, if, besides your learning, you were to get breakfast, dinner, and supper there? It would have done any man’s heart good to have seen the flash of joy that broke from the eyes of one of the little boys, -- the flush of pleasure on his cheeks, -- as, hearing of three sure meals a day.”

Other than hunger, destitute children were filthy, and this kept many of them from being accepted into other schools. Cleanliness was very important to Victorians, who deemed it was next to godliness. According to Mary Carpenter, personal neatness and cleanliness had a major impact on people’s moral character. Ragged schools taught their students how to take better care of their physical appearance the best they could, believing that what showed on the outside would thus reflect their character on the inside. The theory was that improving students’ appearances would teach these children the value of self-responsibility and strengthen their self-esteem. Others would then perceive these values and allow more doors to be open for them in the workforce. Some ragged schools even taught students of both genders how to make and repair their clothing, so that they could replace the rags they wore and take better care of the garments they owned. While at a festival, a journalist commented on the impressive appearance of the ragged school children: “The general appearance of the children was such as, at first sight, to make us doubt if they were of the class for whom the school was intended.”

Some ragged schools also provided shelter for their students. Mr. Bromley was a superintendent of a Sunday school who opened a ragged night school, as well as a shelter for orphaned boys in 1846. Bromley gave these boys jobs printing and making paper bags. Shortly after this, Bromley opened a dormitory and lodging house for boys who found steady work and

102 Ibid., 15, 41.
103 Carpenter, *Ragged Schools*, 41.
could afford to make a small rent payment. These refuges not only gave these children a safe place to stay, but they got them away from bad influences. 104

The Field-Lane Ragged School in London, opened in 1841, and started as an ordinary ragged school. However, as time passed, it extended its charities. By the 1850s, Field-Lane had two night schools, one of which was for adult men, as well as parental lessons for mothers and Bible Study on the weekend. The Field-Lane Ragged School also offered shelter to students and others in need of a place to sleep at night. Eventually, the school became known as The Field-Lane Ragged School and Night Refuge for the Homeless. Here, homeless children and others could find shelter at night and be offered bread to eat before bed and again in the morning. It had three different buildings to house people. One was a servants training home, and the other two were for boys and girls in the industrial schools. This charity offered food and shelter which many in the metropolis needed. As much as Field-Lane Ragged School did to help people, it still had its limitations and was not always able to help everyone in need. 105

The refuge did not always have enough room for all those seeking shelter. The desire to help as many people during the night as physically possible often caused those in charge to allow too many people in and the dormitories became overcrowded. Though done with good intentions, this proved to be dangerous. In the early spring months of 1852, there was an outbreak of typhus at Field-Lane. An Officer of Health went to inspect what had caused the outbreak and reported that even though the authorities of the school had done their utmost best to

105 Ibid.
ensure that the institution was clean and well ventilated, the overcrowding was what caused the outbreak of the disease. The Officer of Health offered suggestions on how to prevent this from happening again in the future. One suggestion was, of course, to restrict the number of people allowed to sleep in their dorms each night. Though this restriction was made to protect the well-being of the visitors and staff, it did cause heartache in the years to come.\footnote{Anonymous, “City Sewers,” \textit{Times} (London), April 29, 1852, The Times Digital Archives.}

For instance, in the winter of 1858, temperatures dropped to 10 degrees below freezing, and many attempted to stay at the Night Refuge to avoid the bitter cold. Unfortunately, the school could not allow everyone in without risk of overcrowding and had to turn away many. After this incident, the institution called on the public for donations so that they could help more people in need, and many donors eagerly gave to the school. These donations allowed the school to help more people and avoid such a situation from happening again. During the year of 1859, the refuge had 30,302 lodgings available for 6,785 men and young boys and supplied 101,193 loaves of bread, 6 to 8 ounces each, to feed them. At the same time, 10,028 lodgings were available to assist 840 women who on average would stay at the institution for 11 days straight and consumed 14,755 loaves of bread that year. The building was, of course, nothing fancy and was not what one would call inviting, but for many these charities gave at least temporary relief from their suffering.\footnote{Anonymous, “The bitter frost.”}

Field-Lane did a lot to relieve people’s suffering, but more importantly, it found ways to help people find honest work and become independent. The school gave new clothing to those who needed it, which allowed them finally to discard the worn-out rags they had been wearing for too long. The school gave women a new article of clothing and assisted them in finding continuous work after they left, either as needlewomen, servants, or something of the sort to
prevent them from resorting to prostitution. For boys, industrial classes during the day taught them skills such as tailoring and shoemaking, and night classes taught them reading, writing and ciphering. Ragged schools like the Field-Lane Ragged School not only helped these people with temporary relief from poverty but helped them find a source of income as well.  

CHAPTER 5

READY FOR THE WORKFORCE

It was vital that ragged school children learned to earn an honest living and not have to depend on petty crime or charity to survive. Ragged schools had to prepare their students for the workforce. The first hurdle ragged schools needed to tackle was their students’ poor behavior and attendance, characteristics that employers would not find favorable. Such qualities not only affected their education, but it also affected their ability to enter the workforce. Therefore, ragged schools started persuading students to fix their behavior and attend school regularly by offering them rewards. These rewards also exposed them to a form of “respectable” entertainment, rather than the saloons and lodging houses to which they were accustomed. ¹⁰⁹

Some ragged schools treated their students to some fresh air. One ragged school in Dublin, Ireland took its students to a park every year. At the Barnsley Ragged School, students would participate in a parade. The parade would stop at a church where they held a small service before heading to some nearby fields and having a picnic. Ragged schools also had Lending Libraries. To be able to borrow a book a student had to have good attendance for at least six weeks, and a teacher had to attest that they had behaved themselves. By 1871, London had 95

¹⁰⁹ Bartley, 388; Seymour, Ragged Schools, 28.
Lending Libraries containing a total of 17,000 books. Students could borrow a book for one week, and reborrow the book if they wanted. However, if a student misbehaved, they would lose their library privileges until further notice.  

Students at the Field-Lane Ragged School could win cash prizes if they attended school regularly and showed good character. For example, a student could receive a prize of 10s. with a card affirming the student had good attendance and character for a whole year. The next year, if the same student continued to do well, they would receive only 5s. However, no reward would be handed to them for the third year regardless of how well they did, and eligibility for cash prizes stopped when the student turned 17. The Ragged School Union also rewarded former students for continuing to do well. When students left school and entered the workforce, they could win prizes from the Ragged School Union if they continued showing good character and held the same job for at least 12 months. Ragged schools kept records of former students to see how well they were doing after leaving school.

Starting in 1866, the Field-Lane Ragged School added another branch to their institution called the Field-Lane Youths’ Institute. Its goal was for former students to have some form of sophisticated and intelligent entertainment once they got off work. This institute would hopefully prevent them from going to lower-class theatres called penny gaffs, low chanties, and dance-halls. All these places had horrible reputations for being places of evil and vice. Instead, for the cost of a penny a week for membership fees, former students of Field-Lane could frequent the Field-Lane Youths’ Institute where they could enjoy the commodities of a well-lit reading room and the free use of a restroom. For an extra fee, they could also enjoy some tea and coffee, and rolls with butter. In the winter months, many gentlemen offered to hold lectures. This addition to

110 Ibid.
the Field-Lane Ragged School reassured that the work put into turning students into respectable members of society did not unravel once they left school to enter the workforce.  

Ragged school students also learned industrial skills. In 1855, 50 ragged schools in London offered industrial classes. In these classes, ragged schools taught their male students a variety of skills such as tailoring, carpentry, shoemaking, making and fixing clothes, wood-chopping, horsehair picking, making mats and fishnets, paper bag printing, and decorative leather work. They taught their girl students how to sew, knit, embroider, and other domestic work. The East London Ragged School and Refuge’s primary objective was to give shelter to homeless young boys and help find them employment. This ragged school opened in September of 1854 and added a refuge in March of 1856. The school taught their students skills such as brush making, tailoring, and shoemaking. Within the first three years of the school’s opening, they had found employment for 412 of their students. 

Other than industrial classes, ragged schools formed other schemes to train and employ students. John McGregor spearheaded the Shoeblack Brigade during the Great Exhibition in October 1851. The idea was first put into motion on November 28, 1850, during a meeting where ragged school teachers discussed how they could help their male students find employment during the Great Exhibition. When the meeting was over McGregor was walking with two other teachers, R.J. Shape and J.R. Fowler, when one suggested that they have ragged school boys work by shining the shoes of those attending the Great Exhibition. All three men endorsed the scheme, formed a committee and raised funds. In January of 1851, they held a demonstration at the Field-Lane Ragged School during a public meeting. A young man, the first recruit of the

Shoeblack Brigade, showed what he had learned. That next month, a training station was set up. By the end of March, five boys started training as shoeblacks. 114

Twenty-five boys from three different ragged schools in London became shoeblacks for the Great Exhibition. Since McGregor was interested in juvenile reform, the early members of the Shoeblack Brigade were boys with criminal records. McGregor hoped this chance would turn their lives around. The shoeblacks had to attend prayer in the mornings and classes in the evenings but worked as shoeblacks during the day. In 1851, the brigade cleaned a total of 165,000 pairs of shoes and made £650. The Shoeblack Brigade would continue to prosper after 1851. In 1853, the Ragged School Union announced during an annual meeting that on average 37 boys were employed by the Shoeblack Society, by which time they had cleaned 182,537 pairs of boots. 115

After the Great Exhibition, the Shoeblack Brigade became well-known in London and other brigades developed. Shoeblack Brigades appeared in towns such as Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Brighton, and Dublin. William Quarrier started a Shoeblack Brigade in Glasgow in 1864, and another brigade was started by a Catholic Priest in Liverpool. The Metropolitan Police and Home Office in London favored the boys in the Shoeblack Brigades over independent shoeblacks, who the public treated terribly, and would keep in contact with the Shoeblack Society about where they could expect to see their boys’ assigned locations. Only boys with good behavior could become shoeblacks, and some brigades did their best to include those with disabilities. Ragged schools reserved the best positions for the best boys, who could earn up to

115 Anonymous, “SOUTHHAMPTON, Monday, May 9.-The Royal,” Times (London), May 10, 1853, The Times Digital Archives; Bradley, The Call to Seriousness, 122; Eagar, Making Men, 138; Higginbotham, Children’s Homes, 19; Sanderson; The British Empire in the Nineteenth Century, 218; Seymour, Ragged Schools, 31; Stanley, “Ragged and Industrial Schools” 18.
12-15s a week. Each shoeblack received a uniform, number, designated badge, and equipment. In some cases, these boys lived together in a refuge provided by the Shoeblack Society where the boys paid a matron a fixed amount each week to cover their lodgings and meals. In 1857, there were four Shoeblack Brigades in London wearing their red, yellow, blue, and dark blue uniforms. By 1873, the number had expanded to eight Shoeblack Brigades in London. 116

The routine of these shoeblack boys was straightforward. They started their morning at 8 a.m. to get ready for breakfast. They ate breakfast in the “great room,” and sang a hymn and prayed before eating. When they were done eating the boys would go to their assigned stations in the city to work. Sunny days were the most profitable. Officers of the brigade managed the boys and made sure they did their jobs. The boys would then finish their work at 6 p.m. The boys received all the money they earned that day, but they had to put a portion of their earnings in a bank to teach them the importance of saving money. These banks were particularly useful for shoeblacks during rainy days, because on wet days, “no pedestrians has his boots blacked.” 117

The Shoeblack Brigade scheme was not intended to give these boys permanent work shining shoes, and they eventually grew too old for the brigade. Ragged schools used the Shoeblack Brigades to teach their male students good work ethic and money-saving habits. Shoeblack Brigades stayed relevant for about 50 years. Due to inadequate records, it is uncertain how many of these boys involved in the Shoeblack Brigades turned out to be successful once


they left. However, in 1902, Arthur Maddison of the Reformatory and Refuge Union stated that the Shoeblack Brigades had helped a great number of young men, one being Mark Knowles, who after leaving the brigade became a barrister and temperance campaigner. 118

In 1862, due to the success of the Shoeblack Brigade, the Ragged School Union created the Rag Collecting Brigade. This brigade not only gave jobs to ragged school boys, but it also helped ease London’s current waste problem by reusing items that people would normally throw away. They supplied these boys with carts, weights, and scales to go to houses and ask for rags, office supplies, worn and broken metals, and bones. With the items collected, the boys were given a written memo with the weight and the price filled in. This brigade eventually consisted of 34 boys and seven carts. The brigade stored the collected items in a storeroom to prepare them for the wholesale dealers. In one year, this brigade collected 80 tons of waste. As with the Shoeblack Brigade, the boys were dressed in uniform and well taken care of and managed. The Ragged School Union used London’s waste problem to find another way to find employment for male students. 119

The Ragged School Union also gave male students the chance to receive training that made them eligible to work in the merchant or royal navy. The Ragged School Union procured two training ships, the Chichester and Arethusa, where well-behaved boys who were part of The National Refuges for Homeless and Destitute Children could receive naval training. The National Refuges for Homeless and Destitute Children was an organization that evolved from the Ragged School Movement. The organization originated from William Williams’ ragged school

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that opened in 1843. Williams opened his ragged school after a train ride he had taken with a group of boys who had been convicted of crimes and sentenced to Australia. In hopes of helping prevent other at-risk boys from getting in the same situation, Williams opened his ragged school in St. Giles in Field district of London. The school flourished and joined the Ragged School Union in 1844. 120

In 1850, the school merged with other ragged schools and was renamed the St. Giles and St. George, Bloomsbury, Ragged Schools. Three years later they converted one of the properties into a night refuge for children. It was eventually known as the National Refuge for Homeless and Destitute Children. Here, they taught their female students domestic services, while they taught their male students carpentry, tailoring, shoemaking, and seamanship. Williams eventually gained Lord Shaftesbury’s support, and the two worked together once Shaftesbury procured the first training ship. Lord Shaftesbury was not the first man to come up with the idea of training destitute boys for a life at sea. Richard Birnie had thought of it 38 years earlier in 1828. Birnie suggested that an old “Indiaman” ship should be used to train street boys for three years to prepare them for a life at sea and to make them more hirable for merchantmen. Unfortunately, Birnie did not get to see his plan put into motion. Lord Shaftesbury, however, had dreamed about this for 15 years before making it a reality for ragged school boys in 1866. 121

On Valentine’s Day that same year, Lord Shaftesbury held a supper at the Broad Street Refuge and invited boys under the age of 16 who used the refuges in the area. Two-hundred boys attended the supper for the promise of a warm fire and meal. After feeding the boys, Shaftesbury went around the room asking the boys about their lives. Once finished, he addressed them all and

120 Higginbotham, Children’s Homes, 50; Rose, The Erosion of Childhood, 118.
asked, “Suppose there were in the Thames a big ship, large enough to contain a thousand boys, would you like to be placed on board to be taught trades or trained for the navy and merchant service?” 122 The boys appeared enthusiastic about the idea.

On April 14, 1866, 150 boys between the ages of 13 and 16 gathered at St. Gail’s Refuge to be trained as seamen. The Chichester was the first ship purchased for this scheme in 1866 and opened in January of 1867. On August 3, 1874, Lady Burdett Coutts spent £5,000 to procure the Arethusa and donated it for the same purpose. Both ships were placed in the Thames River. By 1874, the Chichester had trained 1,300 boys, being able to accommodate 250 boys at one time. The total number of boys received on the Arethusa between 1874 to 1877 was 659, with it also able to house 250 boys at once. 123

On the Chichester, there were six staff members, all of whom always lived and worked on board. The Commanding Officer was a retired Captain named A.H. Alston, and William McCarthy was the Chief Officer. There was also a schoolmaster and two teachers. William McCarthy’s wife was paid £20 a year to teach the boys to cut and make their clothes with supplies provided by the Navy Yard at Deptford. However, McCarthy and his wife were fired in 1868 for being drunk. The staff taught their students skills important to a life at sea, the first skill being swimming. Unfortunately, some boys had fallen overboard and drowned, so the institution took preventative measures to avoid this from occurring again. A barge was moored to the front of the ship and filled with water, and this was where they taught the boys to swim instead. 124

124 Higginbotham, Children’s Homes, 53-54.
They were taught how to use a compass and lead, knotting and splicing, sail making, knowing all the parts of the ship and its running gears, reefing and furling sails, rowing, and eventually steering once the ship obtained the proper equipment. At first, the Chichester was not suitable for teaching boys how to steer a ship. Therefore, the editor of The Times published a letter from the institution on September 10, 1867, asking for donations to be sent to William Williams to procure a smaller vessel to attach to the Chichester as a tender. Reverend C. Harrington, Rector of Bromsgrove, answered this request and offered the institution a 20-ton sea-going yacht called the Dolphin as the Chichester’s tender. ¹²⁵

The Ragged School Union emigrated many students to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and America in hopes they would find employment there. The Ragged School Union devised this plan in 1848, after Lord Shaftesbury discussed it with the House of Lords. Emigration seemed like a good idea because ragged school students could go to places like South Australia where labor was desperately needed instead of struggling to find employment in England. In a speech to the House of Commons, Lord Shaftesbury asked for financial aid to help fund the transportation of 500 boys and 500 girls each year to Southern Australia, so that they could find work as well as help balance out the sexes in Australia’s population. The expected expense to the government for this endeavor would be about £20,000. Lord Shaftesbury tried to persuade the House of Commons by stating that emigration would only be for those students who deserved it, and that the government could test students to decide who was the most qualified. ¹²⁶

This scheme was met with some opposition, and the number of children the government agreed to send was drastically smaller than the number Lord Shaftesbury had proposed. The

government did grant a total of £1,500, £10 per child, to the Ragged School Union in 1848. This was used to pay for the uniforms and traveling expenses for 150 students to Southern Australia. The Ragged School Union and the Emigration Committee worked together to determine which students were the most qualified for emigration. To be considered, students had to have good character, educated, and have some industrial training. Unfortunately, this would be the only year that the government assisted with the emigration of ragged school students.\(^{127}\)

In 1849, the government did not grant money to aid in the emigration of ragged school children for three reasons. One of the reasons was because they had not received any positive feedback about the students they helped emigrated to Southern Australia the year before. When Lord Shaftesbury again asked for financial assistance for emigration in 1849, he presented a similar argument to the one he had used the year prior but failed to show that sending students to Southern Australia in 1848 had reaped any benefits. The House of Commons did not want to give the Ragged School Union any more grant money for emigration without proof that they had made a good investment. Another concern was that ragged school boys lacked training in farming and animal husbandry, a skill that was useful in the more rural parts of Australia. Most ragged school children had learned industrial stills, but because many lived in the city, they had little to no exposure to farming or animal husbandry.\(^{128}\)

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Finally, the biggest concern held by the House of Commons was that ragged school children received better treatment than poor children who came from more respectable backgrounds. They thought it unfair to pay the way for ragged school students to emigrate to the colonies, but expect other poor children to pay for it out of pocket. There were other boys more deserving, many who lived in rural areas, and who by the ages of 14 or 15 had already put in five years of good service to their country and lived honest lives. These boys also wished to go to the colonies for more opportunities and deserved to do so. For these reasons, the government denied the Ragged School Union any more financial assistance. 129

Due to the government's refusal to grant any more money towards the emigration of ragged school students, the Ragged School Union created its own Emigration Fund. Within one year the Ragged School Union saved £1,229 and sent 27 boys to Australia. In 1850, they sent 11 boys and three girls to Australia, followed by 81 boys sent to both Australia and America in 1851. The Emigration Fund, unfortunately, began to wane in the late 1850s and early 1860s, because the Ragged School Union could not raise adequate funds. Fortunately, people like Thomas Barnardos, a doctor who would eventually open a ragged school in London, saw the benefits of emigration and continued to send ragged school students to the British colonies. The emigration scheme did not work out as well as the Ragged School Union had hoped. The Times reported in 1850 that some of the ragged school boys sent to Australia had behaved terribly on the voyage and became petty thieves once they arrived at their destination. Nevertheless, emigration did benefit some students. One former student wrote from Australia in 1904, that he had become President of the Trade Union and was involved in the Co-operative Movement. He

129 ibid.
also had a family and was the father of nine children. Some students may not have appreciated the chance to start a new life in a foreign country, but others did.  

Ragged schools were willing to go to great lengths to find honest work for their students, which was the end goal for many of these schools. The Smyly Homes worked hard to get the most deserving children employment in Ireland. In 1889, 37 boys left Smyly’s Ragged Boys’ Home, most of whom found employment: seven found service work, four emigrated, three became clerks, one joined the Army, and three joined a trade. Most of Smyly’s children found work in Dublin as either factory workers or domestic servants, jobs that were considered appropriate for their social class. However, the Home was able to assist some children in finding better employment. One girl was recommended for a teaching position, and another girl got a job as a governess at a nursery. Unfortunately, situations such as these were the exception and not the norm.

Many ragged schools kept records of where their students ended up. At the St. Giles Ragged School, out of the 543 boys at their school, 172 of them were recorded as runaways, while 99 boys emigrated, 55 went into the Navy, 113 had jobs or apprenticeships, and 104 were still in school. In 1859 the Field-Lane Ragged School had 27 students in the Shoeblack Brigade, 31 joined the Navy, 18 became servants to officers, and others found service work. The Ragged School Union claimed to have helped find honest employment for more than 34,000 students between the years 1853-1874. Their students prospering in life was what ragged school teachers had always hoped to achieve. One teacher who had worked at the Field-Lane Ragged School, Mr. M— was approached by a good-looking young man exiting a Hansom cab. This young man

131 Preston, Charitable Words, 76-7.
was well dressed and wore a gold chain and other such appendages. The young man ran up to Mr. M—and told him he was glad to see him, but Mr. M—had no idea who this young man was. The young man told him he was one of his former students at the Field-Lane Ragged School. “It was you who got me a situation in Mr. G—‘s office, when I was a lad, houseless and homeless. Well, sir, I’ve risen in the world since those days, and am now a partner in that firm.”

All these schemes taught ragged school students how to be independent and support themselves, which many children may not have learned if it were not for ragged schools. However, with everything ragged schools attempted to do to help destitute children elevate their lives, more help was still needed. Unfortunately, ragged schools did not have the resources to do this themselves.

CHAPTER 6
FORSTER’S EDUCATION ACT OF 1870 AND THE DECLINE OF RAGGED SCHOOLS

In London, according to the Ragged Schools Union’s yearly report from 1857, out of the supposedly 500,000 children in need, only about 21,500 of them were using their services. Despite the incentives ragged schools offered to motivate children to attend school, regular attendance remained low. At the Field-Lane Ragged School, out of the 536 students registered, only 275 of them attending school regularly. Not even the Ragged School Union was under the impression that they had come close to fulfilling all the needs of impoverished children in London. It would not be until the enactment of Forster’s Education Act of 1870, and other successive acts, that the government began to take responsibility for educating the nation and made elementary education mandatory and accessible to all children in the United Kingdom. Though this was everything that the Ragged School Movement had hoped for, it led to their downfall. ¹³³

Before Forster’s Education Act, laisse-faire ideals kept the government from getting too involved in education, which William Forster had always found abhorrent. Most of the government's input in education was in the form of grants which started in 1833. The Treasury was responsible for distributing these grants worth £20,000 to the National Society and the British and Foreign School Societies for the sole purpose of building new schools. The

Committee of Privy Council on Education was put in place in 1839 and became the first established branch of government responsible for education. They gave these grants only to schools that followed specific qualifications and to schools where students’ parents paid weekly fees. For the most part, the government excluded ragged schools from these grants. The government denied grants to ragged schools for two reasons: there were sums paid in relief of the poor rates, and they were considered unfair competition for fee-paying schools. 134

Forster’s Education Act passed on August 9, 1870, which made school mandatory for all children between the ages of 5 to 13 in England and Wales. This Act was named after William Edward Forster, a Liberal MP, proposed dividing the country into school districts. Once forming the school districts, officials from each district had to give the government information on how many schools they already had in their district, the number of students, and the number of children currently not attending school. With this information, the Education Department would decide the efficiency of that district’s existing schools. For those districts lacking schools or whose existing schools were not considered adequate, the government provided new buildings and accommodations. Ratepayers in these school districts would elect a School Board. If they failed to do so, or if the appointed School Board failed to perform their duties properly, the Education Department would select one for them. It was the responsibility of these School Boards to establish educational standards, build schools, train teachers, and hire officers to enforce school attendance. 135


Scotland enacted a similar law. Scotland’s Education Act of 1872 followed suit with Forster’s Education Act. A Board of Education was created and was responsible for managing the schools, and school became mandatory for all children aged 5 to 13. Just like in England and Wales, this Act negatively impacted ragged schools in Scotland. Further legislation would continue to hurt ragged schools. After 1870, the government passed more legislation that further improved and broadened the educational system, the most significant one being the Education Act of 1891. One problem that persisted after enacting Forster’s Education Act was that parents were still expected to pay weekly school fees. These fees were the main reason many ragged school children had not attended school in the first place. The Education Act of 1891, also referred to as the Free Education Act, went into effect on September 1, 1891, and abolished weekly fees. This Act offered a fee grant to schools who qualified. Schools received up to 10s. for each child between the ages of three and 15 who regularly attended their school. The abolishing of school fees eliminated one of the final barriers to receiving an education for destitute children.  

The downfall of ragged schools started with the competition from the Schools Boards. With the creation of the School Boards, the Ragged School Union received fewer donations. Many citizens thought that Forster’s Education Act made ragged schools redundant, and they did not want to pay towards both the School Boards and the Ragged School Union. Lord Shaftesbury wrote a letter to the editor of The Times, on November 13, 1871, pleading to its readers to continue assisting ragged schools for a bit longer. Shaftesbury claimed that the need for this aid was for the transitional period between the old and new school systems:

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The London Board is making very extensive arrangements for the education of large masses of children within the metropolises. However, a considerable time must elapse before the buildings and teachers can be ready for them; and meanwhile, the subscriptions for ragged schools are rapidly falling off, some persons believing that all has been supplied which can be wanted, some being unwilling to pay both a rate and a voluntary contribution for the same purpose.  

Lord Shaftesbury worried that if this continued, many ragged school students would find themselves back on the streets. He hoped that ragged schools would continue to receive support until the School Boards could better accommodate ragged school children. Despite Lord Shaftesbury pleading to the community, ragged schools continued to struggle to survive.  

Destitute children still attended ragged schools after 1870, but it became more difficult to do so as time passed. Not only were ragged schools receiving fewer donations, but government regulations forced many ragged schools to close. In 1871, the Privy Council Code banned teachers with a third-class certificate from supervising schools with more than 59 students. In 1873, night schools were not allowed to open unless there were at least 40 students registered. By 1873, six ragged schools could no longer offer their services for free and had to start charging fees, and 39 ragged schools with approximately 8,871 students were absorbed into the London School Board. The Ragged School Union in 1874 reported a total of 26 schools with a total of 3,000 students had closed due to their lack of financial assistance.  

Many ragged schools closed because of the School Boards’ regulations on buildings. For instance, the Lancaster Street Ragged School had operated in a building that was previously used to hold cows, and the School Board found it unfit for educational purposes. The Bermondsey Square Ragged School was held on the ground floor of a poorhouse and lacked furniture,  

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adequate space, and proper ventilation. The School Board considered it a health hazard to both the teacher and students and shut it down. The Bermondsey Railway Arch Ragged School was the worst case. At this ragged school, 300 to 400 children assembled in a narrow dark tunnel with no desks, no books, and no other necessary appliances and it had to close as well. When the School Board condemned a ragged school, they transferred the ragged school students to one of their schools. As more School Boards formed, the number of ragged schools continued to decline. Thomas Barnardo’s Copperfield Road Ragged School was the last ragged school to close in London in 1908, after the School Board declared it to be unsuitable. 140

The closing of ragged schools by the School Boards angered Lord Shaftesbury, and he took the shutdowns personally. He also wondered how many of their former students the School Boards had successfully transferred to new schools. On December 23, 1875, Shaftesbury wrote a letter to The Times in response to a court case it reported on involving the Ogle-Street Ragged School in which the School Board summoned nine parents for not sending their children to a certified school instead. The Ogle-Street Ragged School was not certified because even though the School Board decided its building was adequate, the education it provided was not. During the case, Mr. Howard, the Officer of the Metropolitan Board, wanted to clarify that “the School Boards were not opposed to ragged schools – they were not proceeding against the Ogle-Street Ragged School’s children because they attended that particular school, but because the school was believed to be inefficient.” 141 Lord Shaftesbury argued otherwise. “The ragged schools,

141 Anonymous, “AT MARLBOROUGH-STREET, the parents of nine children,” Times (London), December 20, 1875, The Times Digital Archives.
with very few exceptions, are extinct; they have sunk under the combined pressure of the public rates, and the high standard of education demanded of them.”

Five days later Charles Reed, the Chairman of the London School Board, wrote a reply to Shaftesbury in The Times. Reed had sympathy for Lord Shaftesbury and his ragged schools and admired what ragged schools had done for impoverished children. However, he needed to defend the School Board. He did not appreciate Shaftesbury’s remarks referring to the impending extinction of ragged schools as though it was caused by a wanton act by the School Boards to destroy them instead of it being the natural consequence of Forster’s Education Act. For starters, Reed explained that Shaftesbury was focusing his anger on the wrong department. The Department of Education dictated which schools were or were not efficient; the School Boards simply executed these standards. School Boards had also given some ragged schools the chance to correct their errors. One case he mentioned was that of the Ogle Mews Ragged School. In 1871, the School Board listed this school as inefficient because their teachers were not qualified. In 1872, the School Board gave them the chance to comply and to hire better teachers, but they declined. Reed also clarified that the London School Board had successfully transferred 12,000 to 15,000 former ragged school students into their schools.

Some of the ragged school offshoots began to disappear in the late 1800s as well. The well-known Shoeblack Brigade still had nine brigades in the late 1870s, but only two remained by 1904, one of which had changed to help adults with disabilities. The Departmental Committee of the Employment of Children stated that there were only 12 shoeblacks still working in urban centers outside the London County Council. It did not bother to continue listing shoeblack as a

143 Charles Reed, “Ragged Schools,” Times (London), December 28, 1875, The Times Digital Archives.
contemporary child street trade. Shoe-shining remained a street trade in London for some time but completely disappeared in the 1960s.\footnote{Higginbotham, \textit{Children’s Homes}, 19; Rose, \textit{The Erosion of Childhood}, 70-1.}

Since Forster’s Education Act diminished the need for ragged schools to provide elementary education to destitute children, they focused more on offering other services. On May 10, 1875, the Ragged School Union held an annual meeting at London’s Exeter Hall. At this meeting, it was stated that they would not try to compete with the London School Boards but instead focus on providing religious education and evening classes. The Ragged School Union reported in 1875 that ragged day schools had declined, with only 57 ragged day schools with 6,959 students remaining. However, their ragged Sunday and night schools were still doing well. The Ragged School Union reported that they had an average attendance of 25,709 students in their Sunday schools and 5,176 in attendance at their youth religious services and 5,399 in their ragged churches. They also had 3,865 who attended their Mothers’ Meetings. At these meetings poor mothers would fix and make clothes while someone read scripture aloud. It was hoped that these meetings would help these mothers better run their homes and better train their children. In 1875, around 40,000 people visited one of their institutes for religious teachings each week.

From 1870 to 1885 ragged day schools’ attendance fell by 86 percent, and the number of schools had shrunken from 134 to 24. On the other hand, in 1876 there were 131 ragged night schools, which grew to 176 by 1879. However, these numbers were still low compared to the number of night schools in existence before 1870, and they too began to decline in the 1880s and 1890s due to increased pressure from the School Boards and the Education Act of 1891.\footnote{Anonymous, “The Ragged School Union,” \textit{Times} (London), May 13, 1875, The Times Digital Archives. Great Britain, \textit{Report of The Committee of Council on Education (England and Wales); with Appendix. 1872-73} (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1873), 169, \url{https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015076567539;view=1up;seq=13}; Seymour, Ragged Schools, 8.}
Some ragged schools and offshoot organizations started finding new ways to help their communities after 1870. The charities they offered changed with the times, and some of these organizations can still be found in the United Kingdom today. For instance, The National Refuge for Destitute and Homeless Children is now known as Shaftesbury Young People. The procuring of the *Chichester* in 1866 and the *Arethusa* in 1874 led to 100 years of training young men for the Royal and Merchant Navy. By 1900 the organization was providing residential care for more than 1,000 children, and in 1904 it changed its name to Shaftesbury Home and Arethusa. In the 1970s, the government raised the school-leaving age, which caused a smaller gap between the time boys left school until joining the military, so *Arethusa II* could no longer serve its purpose. They sold *Arethusa II* to the South Street Seaport Museum in New York, where it was referred to by its former name, the *Peking*. Today, the organization has a land-based *Arethusa* training center instead, now known as the *Arethusa Venture Center*, to provide outside education to children. In the 1970s and 1980s, the organization focused on providing homes and hostels for children and young people who were disadvantaged, susceptible, and excluded. More recently, the organization has formed two partnerships with local authorities and still strives to house and assist disadvantaged children. It changed its name to Shaftesbury Young People in 2006.  

The Field-Lane Ragged School merged with the London School Board after 1870, and for a while was managed by both the School Board and four members from its own Field-Lane Committee. Field-Lane stayed relatively the same until more School Boards formed and many of its pupils transferred to different schools, thus ending Field-Lane’s day schools. After this, the Committee opened a ragged Bible school that operated on Friday and Sunday evenings. In 1871,

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the school opened two certified industrial schools for orphaned, destitute, and deserted children, one for girls and the other for boys. At these certified industrial schools, students resided there until they turned 16, and Field-Lane helped them find honest work. Each year, the Home Office paid Field-Lane £15 per child staying at these schools. Around the same time, Field-Lane was also providing other charities to help relieve the poor of all ages. One way it did this was by offering “broken” food, or the excess food left over from restaurants and warehouses that they gathered and gave to those in need.  

In 1872, the construction of a road led to the demolition of one of Field-Lane’s buildings. After that, the Home Office decided that certified industrial schools could no longer be in central London. Field-Lane found a new location in Vine Hill to replace the building they lost and moved their certified industrial schools to Hampstead. At these new locations, Field-Lane would provide numerous services to assist anyone in need. Close to 1,000 children attended Field-Lane’s numerous services, most being fed and clothed. The Mothers’ Meetings had an average attendance of 300 women, and about 20 men and women took shelter at the refuges every night and Field-Lane attempted to help many of these refugees find work. Their industrial schools were very successful, being considered “the best of the industrial schools with which the Board has agreements,” by the Industrial Schools Committee.

In 1901, Field-Lane struggled to keep their Girls’ Industrial School open. Standards regulated by the Home Office, which distributed certifications to industrial schools, determined the school unsuitable to house 88 girls. Reducing the number of girls attending was discussed, but the school would receive less income with fewer girls, and the Field-Lane was not able to

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handle that financial burden. Unfortunately, they did not have the money to move the girls anywhere else and, after a discussion with the Home Office, they sadly decided to close the school. The Boys’ Industrial School’s admissions dropped substantially because of the Probation Act of 1907. This Act allowed magistrates to dismiss charges facing juvenile offenders, resulting in fewer children sent to their industrial schools. In 1913, the Female Refuge closed because women could find better accommodations elsewhere. This closing allowed Field-Lane to enlarge their male refuge and day nursery. 149

Between 1914 and 1918, Field-Lane assisted those who were poor, hungry, and stressed because of the war. After 1918, the institution remained busy due to the widespread unemployment of the time. In 1923, the Boys’ Industrial School started to get phased out. By 1930, it only contained 53 boys in a building that could house 140. Due to this trend, the Home Office closed many certified industrial schools, including Field-Lanes Boys’ Industrial School in Hampstead. Field-Lane sold the building, and the money was used to buy more land at Vine Hill where they built a playground. The plan originally was that the newly bought land would be used to enlarge the premises, but the start of World War Two halted this plan. Eventually, Field-Lane began focusing more on the elderly and those with disabilities. 150

In 1942, the isolation, failing health, and the poor living conditions of the elderly caught the attention of Field-Lane. The organization offered them housing, medical care, daycare, and became experts regarding dementia. Field-Lane became the Field-Lane Foundation in 1972, and worked to provide for the needs of the elderly until the early 2000s. In 1995, it began offering supported housing and other such services for homeless families after seeing the poor accommodations offered to homeless families. In 1993, it opened a nursing home to help adults

149 Ibid., 20-22.
150 Ibid.
with learning disabilities. This endeavor was so successful that it led to many homes opening after 2005. To this day Field-Lane continue to develop new projects to help those in need.  

The Ragged School Union has also evolved over the years. After 1898, it was called the Ragged School Union and the Shaftesbury Society, and then renamed the Shaftesbury Society in 1944. Over the years, the Shaftesbury Society continued helping poor children, the disabled, and other disadvantaged people, becoming one of the leading Christian social welfare charities in London. In 2007, the Shaftesbury Society merged with another Christian charity provider known as John Grooms to offer support for the disabled. This merger formed what is now known as Livability, the largest Christian charity for the disabled in the United Kingdom.

The last ragged school to close in London, Thomas Barnardo’s Copperfield Free School, became the Ragged School Museum. In 1866, Barnardo moved from his home in Dublin to London to go to medical school, intending to go to China to be a missionary. Once in London, however, he saw a populace that was congested and poor, sick, and had few educational opportunities. This situation troubled Barnardo, and he decided to leave medical school and opened a ragged school in 1867. Ten years later he opened Barnardo’s Copperfield Road Free School in 1877, where he offered children a free elementary education for the next 39 years. In 1908, the government had succeeded in supplying the community with enough school buildings and declared Barnardo’s school inadequate, and it was forced to close. The school had been a warehouse before Barnardo took it over, but after the school closed, the buildings served

numerous industrial purposes. In the 1980s, these buildings were facing demolition until a group of people came together to save it and created the Ragged School Trust. The Ragged School Museum opened in 1990. Today the museum educates its visitors about ragged schools and education in the 19th century.  

Though the Education Act of 1870 ended the Ragged School Movement, it did achieve what ragged schools had been striving to achieve for 30 years. More children had access to an education, and juvenile crime decreased. On December 2, 1897, the social investigator Charles Booth interviewed Louis Vedy of the Y Police Department in Kentish Town. In this interview, Vedy told Booth that crime was declining, especially violent crime. He credited this to better educational opportunities. All children having access to an education and avoiding a life of crime was everything ragged schools had hoped to achieve. Ragged schools were a product of their time. Philanthropists witnessed a problem in society and opened ragged schools to help fix it. Once their help was no longer needed, many of these same philanthropists moved on to help people in other ways. 

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The government establishing Forster’s Education Act of 1870 was a pivotal moment in the United Kingdom’s history. It allowed every child, no matter their social class, to have access to elementary education. It was everything that the Ragged School Movement had aimed for since the 1840s. Unfortunately, it meant the end for ragged schools. Most ragged schools were forced to close or find other ways to help those in need. Though their full impact on society is not clear, for 30 years they were an essential part in the education of destitute children and prepared them for the real world. Ragged schools are credited for leading society to mandatory education for all, but it is also important to know why ragged schools became necessary in the first place. Without ragged schools, these children would not have had the knowledge or skills to survive in the newly industrialized society.

Industrialization had caused many people to move away from their rural homes to the cities in hopes of finding work at a factory. While some were able to find stable work, many could not. Some working-class people could afford to put their children in school during the day, but not all children were so lucky. The most destitute of children were prevented from attending private or Dame schools because of the way they dressed, behaved, and their inability to pay the weekly fees. Instead, these children roamed the streets during the day, doing whatever necessary to avoid starvation. Their lives revolved around begging and stealing, and they lacked access to anything that would allow them to end this vicious cycle. Juvenile delinquency had become a concern for contemporaries. The impoverished children these philanthropists saw did not have the know-how to live an honest life in this newly industrialized society. To correct this,
philanthropist like John Pounds, Thomas Guthrie, Lord Shaftesbury, and the Ragged School Union voluntarily provided ragged schools for the most impoverished children to give them the proper knowledge needed to support themselves without having to rely on crime or charity.

First, they made sure they provided them with an education in Christianity. Ragged schools were nondenominational and taught their students lessons strictly from the Bible. These teachings caused tensions between many ragged schools and the Roman Catholic population. Though many advocates for ragged schools did not claim to favor one religion over another, this was not true for all ragged schools. Despite this, religion was a crucial part of improving the moral character of ragged school children.

They also needed an elementary education. There was more need for people to be able to read, write, and know some basic math to be able to function in society due to the Industrial Revolution. Therefore, ragged schools, many still using the Bible to do so, taught their students the three R’s. Mary Carpenter also taught her students other subjects that helped them better understand the world around them. Ragged schools understood that for any of their teachings to rub off on their students, they needed to provide for their students’ physical needs as well. Many ragged school students were homeless and starving and did not want to attend school if it meant missing out on a meal. Ragged schools fed, clothed, and sheltered many of their students to give them an incentive to attend their classes. Also, it made it easier for students to learn.

Finally, and most importantly, ragged schools sought to make their students more hirable for employers and by teaching them the importance of a good work ethic. School plays an important part in preparing children for the workforce, because it makes them accustomed to the discipline and structure the work will require of them. Before industrialization, many of these children would have grown to work on a farm and been in charge of their own product. After
industrialization, people had to get used to being told when they would work and how much needed to be done. This was why it was so important for ragged schools to motivate their students to make it a habit of attending school regularly and behaving appropriately.

Ragged schools also taught their students industrial skills and helped find them employment, even if that meant shipping them off to another continent. Ragged schools taught their male students skills such as carpentry, tailoring, and cobbling, while they taught their female students skills related to domestic service. Plans were also made that allowed boys to become shoeblacks or even train on a ship to eventually work at sea. While there were some schools that taught their students agriculture, most of the skills taught were those that focused on industry and the trades. A problem for many of these children living in destitution was they lacked an industrial skill. Therefore, this was the most important part of the curriculum because it gave them the edge they needed to find honest work.

The history of ragged schools demonstrates just how important education is in an industrialized world. Since their disappearance, the education required for children in the United Kingdom and elsewhere has expanded. Children are now required to go to primary school for 12 years and many go on to college or vocational school afterwards. Those who do not finish school usually struggle to find work that pays them enough to live comfortably. Society has advanced a great deal since the Industrial Revolution and that has caused educational standards to increase as well. Citizens must earn an education in hopes that it will allow them to live securely. Philanthropists who opened ragged schools saw how important education was after industrialization, and that still holds true 150 years later.
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