

## **Graduate Research Symposium Proposal**

**Title** – “Richard Oastler: Champion of Factory Children”

**Program of Study** – European History

**Presentation Type** – PowerPoint (Remote Oral Presentation)

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**Category** – Textual

**Abstract:** Charles Dickens writes in *Oliver Twist or the Parish Boy's Progress*,

For the next eight or ten months, Oliver was the victim of a systematic course of treachery and deception. He was brought up by hand. The hungry and destitute situation of the infant orphan was duly reported by the workhouse authorities to the parish authorities. The parish authorities inquired with dignity of the workhouse authorities, whether there was no female then domiciled in "the house" who was in a situation to impart to Oliver Twist the consolation and nourishment of which he stood in need.<sup>1</sup>

These words from the classic tale of *Oliver Twist* reflect the era of British workhouses and what some have argued was the criminalization of poverty because of Lord Althorp's 1834 British Poor Law Amendments. Richard Oastler is a name that is now often forgotten, but his work championing the cause of factory children set a precedent in child labor laws. The following paper will explore the work of Richard Oastler – his factory reform, his compassion for the poor, and his fearlessness when standing for the common people. It will explore the historiographical interpretations of Oastler's work, which typically champions his often socialist ideals of the enemy of free trade and plight of the working class. Professionals in the area of children's welfare point to the work of Richard Oastler as a predecessor of modern-day ideals of children's rights.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist or the Parish Boy's Progress* (Garden City, NY: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1837-1839), 18.

## Bibliography

Dickens, Charles. *Oliver Twist or the Parish Boy's Progress*. Garden City, New York: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1837-1839.