

Victorian Age

The first four decades of Queen Victoria's reign was a time of great national prosperity. By the middle of 19th century England had become "the workshop of the world". Her industries, her railways, the vast increase in production witnessed by the International Exhibition of 1851, held in London, set a model for the industrialization of other countries. Nevertheless Victorian society was far from idyllic.

Social evils such as child labour had not disappeared, class differences were marked as ever.

These were years when general changes in attitude, and especially about colonialism, industrialization and scientific advancement, were beginning to come about.

In addition, Britain's economy supremacy had started to be challenged by the increasing competitiveness of the USA and the importation of refrigerate meat from Argentina.

The passing of the first Reform Bill, in 1832, had extended the right to vote to much of the male middle class. As the right to vote was based on property, many working class people were disappointed because they were excluded.

In 1836, a group of working class radicals formed the **London's working men's Association** to campaign for acceptance of the six points:

- Universal male suffrage;
- Secret ballot;
- Equal electoral district;
- Payment of MPs (member of Parliament); People's Charter -> The Chartist Movement.
- Abolition of property qualification for MPs;
- Annual parliamentary elections.

Another decisive step was a second Reform Bill in 1867, which granted the right to vote to all working men, but excluded miners and agricultural workers. A third Reform Bill in 1884 extended the right to all male workers.

Queen Victoria

When Queen Victoria at 18 came to the throne there was a certain amount of skepticism. Many were convinced that the monarchy would not last long, however she did not appear afraid of her duties. Initially she was helped by her Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne. In 1840 she married her cousin, Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. She was devoted to him and gave him the title of Prince Consort and did nothing without his approval. Albert's death was a shock for Victoria, and for 40 years she reigned as a widow.

Her reign was the longest in the history of England and it was a reign of prosperity. During her reign the industry flourished while a succession of Parliamentary Acts called Factory Acts, limiting working hours and restricting child labour, improved the conditions of the lower classes, and in 1870 Parliament passed the Education Acts which made elementary education compulsory. The defining technology of the age was rail way. Locomotives and the other industries machines required improvements in iron and steel production, advances in British steel technology soon made it possible to build iron bridges, while ships were increasingly built of steel and powered by coal and steam.

The highest point of Victorian prosperity was the inauguration in 1851 of the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park housed in the Crystal Palace.

During her reign, Britain's modern political parties were born: the conservatives grew out of the old Tories and the liberals out of Whigs.

In Victorian Britain, pragmatism and morality had combined to create a wealthy of considerable social and moral uncertainty and intellectual ferment. Because of the advances in politics, science and industry people began to question about the new and

the old, as happened with the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859. The religious uncertainty that followed was profound. The liberal truth of parts of the Bible had already been challenged by German scholars who had analyzed it as a text of tory.

The United States

During this age, America was growing in political and geographical size, in fact after a war against Mexico in 1846, the States added the territories of Texas, California and New Mexico.

About a hundred years after the Declaration of Independence, America dive into Civil War, the aggressive capitalistic culture of the North and the slave economy of the South had maintained an uneasy union.

In 1858 Abraham Lincoln, one of the leaders of the new Republican Party which had arisen in the North, opposed slavery in a series of debates with the leader of the new Democratic Party, and on this platform won the presidential elections in 1860. So the delegates of the southern states broke away from the Union snd formed the Confederated States of America with Jefferson Davis as a President. The war ended about four years after.

Around this period American writers began to emerge more distinctly from the shadow of English literature, producing works that dealt with distinctive American themes. During the 1830s, slavery became a burning issue in the United States. Abolitionists, who wanted to end slavery, published stirring essays, novels, pamphlets, and poems. The great American writers were also forging distinctive literature in terms of form and idiom. Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was the first theorist of the short story and the father of the modern detective story.