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England in the Nineteenth Century

CIVILISATION

FOURTH YEAR

FACULTY OF ARTS,

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Contents

Contents

The First Phase 1815 – 1850

Chapter 1 : Britain in 1815

The Social Scene

What was Great Britain like when she won the battle of Waterloo? She was a country of some 13 million people. His number was fast increasing, and by 1871 it had doubled, The chief reason for this quick growth were simple enough. They were that more babies survived and that Englishmen were living longer. Even in the slums of the new industrial towns expectation of life was better than ever before. People were already, on the whole, better fed, better clothed, less likely to contract disease and better cared for when they did, than during the eighteenth century. A further reason for the growth of population was that Irish immigrants were pouring into western England and Scotland, though soon Irish, Scots, and English were to reverse this direction of emigration and flock westwards towards North America.

Most Englishmen in 1815 still worked on the land or in trades connected with agriculture, though within the next generation most Englishmen became townsmen engaged in industry: sixteen years after Waterloo probably half the population already lived under urban conditions. Large urban populations were gathering in the north-west of England, in South Wales.

These urban populations were still mostly country-bred, with the traditional outlook, and character of country folk. Their children, too often reared in the slum-conditions which resulted from the shoddy houses rushed up to accommodate the newcomers, were a new social phenomenon in the northern towns. In the eighteenth century a few big towns – mostly ports like London, Bristol, and Liverpool _ had their town-bred and even slum-bred populations, brutalized by ignorance, squalor, and the habits of gin-drinking. The city mob had been a fearsome terror to governments during the second half of the century. Now this old evil assumed vaster proportions, and with the increasing employment of women and children in the coal-mines of Wales or the unhealthy cotton-mills of Lancashire, great new social problems were created.

At the time of Waterloo, therefore, Britain was midway through the most far-reaching social transformation in her whole history. Her industrial heart was beginning to throb, first in the great cotton-mills of Lancashire and soon in her coal-mines and blast-furnaces. From America came raw cotton to be spun and woven, mainly by steam-driven machinery in mills or factories which were privately owned and which employed hundreds of men, women, and children.

The wool industry, her traditional staple industry for export, was undergoing more slowly a similar transformation. Power spinning was driving out hand

spinning, but weaving factories were not established on a big scale until a generation later. Next in importance to these textile industries were the heavy industries of iron, coal, and engineering. The wars just ended had brought a boom to them, and the great age of railways which began in the 1830s turned them into one of the chief sources of national wealth. Already, the new inventions had laid the basis of big engineering firms; and in a few years the making of machine-tools – machines which made machines – introduced a new phase of the industrial revolution. In transport, the network of canals was nearly complete before Waterloo.

So the survivors of the 30,000 who the battle of Waterloo returned to a country that was fast changing its very appearance, and whose wealth was rapidly increasing by reason of new methods of manufacture and transport. But still the factory areas were a small part of the whole, and most English towns were picturesque country towns, sit in a countryside of unspoilt beauty. The villages, to which most of them came home, were still the main focus of life for most Englishmen, and had almost completed their eighteenth-century transformation. The countryside was now drained, ditched, hedged, and enclosed to an extent that would have amazed their grandfathers. Nearly all the old open fields had been enclosed; and the commons and waste lands had been enclosed nearly as much as they were ever to be. This meant that agriculture had become more efficient. Improved methods of tilling, of rotation of crops,

and of stock-breeding had become well known, even if they were not yet universally adopted by farmers. It also meant that more of the land was now owned by wealthy men, who let it to tenant farmers; more of the land was owned by wealthy men, who let it to tenant farmers; many of the old smallholders had become landless agricultural laborers or else had drifted into the new towns. Cottagers had in most cases lost their old common rights, and the fuel they used to gather from the waste lands, and their die was more often than not bread and cheese for six days in the week. The luckier ones had small gardens in which they grew vegetables, or kept a pig and a few fowls. Six years after Waterloo that sturdy, blustering countryman deplored the rise of a new, more irresponsible, and purely profit-making class of landed gentry which had drawn its wealth from trade and finance.

The rise of a new, more irresponsible, and purely profit-making class of landed gentry which had drawn its wealth from trade and finance had been deplored by many spokesmen of the old 'agricultural interest'. They were never tired of pointing out the difference between a resident native gentry, attached to the soil, known to every farmer and labourer from their childhood, frequently mixing with them in those pursuits where all artificial distinctions are lost, practicing hospitality without ceremony, from habit and not on calculation; and a gentry having no relish for country delights, foreign in their manners, distant and haughty in their behavior, looking to the soil only for its

rents, unacquainted with its cultivators, despising them and their pursuits.

The outcry against the "Nabobs" of the East India Company and the stock-holders of the national debt was a very old one. Here was a new wealthy class which was gathering up great riches and power into its hands, and which betokened great social changes yet to come. Both old and new landed gentry were certainly wealthy, happy, and engrossed in the life of their pleasant and beautiful country houses. The war had scarcely upset the delightful routine of their lives. Even the seven campaigns of the Peninsula War against Napoleon, the period of Britain's greatest expeditionary forces to the continent, cost less than 40,000 British lives. Both rents and tithes had risen with the price of corn, and the income tax was more tiresome than burdensome to the landed gentry. The labouring and manufacturing classes suffered from the dearness of corn and the periodic crises. The growing habits, which came to be known as the "Speenhamland system", of paying poor relief to supplement wages, helped them to evade starvation, at least in the southern counties. This practice, which in the short run benefited the working classes but in the long run pauperized and demoralized them, certainly benefited the large employing farmer. It relieved him from the need to pay his workingmen a living wage, and forced the small independent parish ratepayer to contribute, via the poor rate, to the wages bill of the big farmer and the big manufacturer.

These were perhaps, the most striking features of the English social scene in 1815. As usual, the new forces tended to attract attention and got exaggerated. The small yeomen farmer had been worked for wages had been declining in number and became more and more of a rarity after 1830. In 1830 the starving field laborers of the southern countries rioted in support of their demand for a wage of half-a-crown a day, they were suppressed with savage and offending laws and penalty to which the working classes were subjected.

London, by reason of being the capital and of its particular concentration of population, produced immediately after Waterloo a very special problem of crime. Contemporaries believed that the peace, demobilization and post-war distress produced a great increase in crime. They claimed that crimes, then, were less atrocious than formerly. In fact, what changed was people's attitudes to crime and public order, comparable with the changed attitude to the penal code. The nature and purpose of crime was changing, but not for the worse. London escaped both the torrent of pauperization which deluged the greater part of agricultural England, and the catastrophic fall in wages which occurred in many places.

The transition from war to peace undoubtedly brought much misery and unemployment, it was a shrinkage from a period of commercial and industrial expansion under the war conditions. It had been noted that hardships begin to

be talked about only when they are no longer taken for granted: and it is the increased attention paid to them that is perhaps the main feature of the period. Sweated labour and cellar dwellings were not invented by the men who made the industrial revolution: they were discovered by them, discussed by them, and in the end partially remedied by them.

London, of course, had its other side. In the days of the Regency it became, even more conspicuously than usual, the centre of fashion. It was the age of the dandies and their feminine counterparts the dandizette, with their exaggeratedly foppish costumes and habits of horse races and prize fights. When the date and place of a prize-fight had been announced, hordes set out, driving, riding, and walking to the spot from all parts of the island. Sometimes, twenty thousand spectators assembled. In one aspect, these vast outdoor assemblies were festivals of the common people. But the priests of the national cult were fashionable members of the aristocracy, who presided over the ceremonies and held the rough and turbulent multitude in awe. However widely divided by rank and wealth Englishmen might be, at least they were apt to meet round the ring-side.

The Political Scene

Such was the England of Waterloo. How was she governed? Her king was the aged George III, who had begun his reign with ambitious plans in 1760, only to run into the most serious opposition that any government of England had met with since the days of the great Revolution of 1688. This opposition had come at first from the great Whig landowning families which had ruled England in the days of the first two Georges. By attacking their oligarchic power and resuming into his own hands many of the royal powers which his predecessors had allowed to slip from them George had aroused the bitter enmity of the aristocracy. He had driven some of them to form an alliance – however uncomfortable and unusual they might feel in it – with more plebian elements in the English population. Men of the middle classes had been found to phrased the great protest of the Whigs against royal domination of Parliament. The agitation of the discontented lower-middle classes and the town-mobs which had devised methods of popular protest. The King himself, suffering from recurrent fits lf madness, in 1811 had to give way to the permanent Regency of his son, the disreputable and somewhat ludicrous George IV. So apart from popular sympathy roused by the spectacle of the old and ailing monarch, the kingship of Britain was at a very low ebb.

Power and prestige which the monarchy had lost, Parliament, and the Prim Minister whose power rested on

parliamentary support, had gained. The young William Pitt, national hero of the French wars, had died in 1806. His successors as Prime Ministers were less heroic figures. In 1815 the holder of the office was the liberal-minded and unspectacular Lord Liverpool. He for the next twelve years presided over a mixed cabinet of men harassed by post-war problems, frightened of the spread of French 'Jacobitism' the discontented classes of England, and varying in policy between savage repression in time of scares, and mild, piecemeal reforms in the face of severe discontent. Political parties were still led by the aristocracy and gentry of England, with a gentle admixture of spokesmen of the rising business, commercial, and manufacturing interests. They were acquiring better organization inside Parliament. The country gentry, as squires and Justices of the Peace as, were still the real governors of the countryside.

The antiquated electoral system on which Parliament rested was made more than ever out of dated by the growth of and shift of population and the rise of large northern towns. The franchise in the counties – freeholders of land worth forty shillings a year _ gave the vote to most of the well-to-farmers and most of the smaller landowners The franchise in the boroughs varied enormously, but in few save the larger towns of London and Westminster, and Bristol was it in any way representative of the population. Such voters as there were treated the vote as a property-right, to be sold at elections to the highest bidder, or given up autocracy for the traditional landowner who regarded the

boroughs on his land as 'in his pocket'. Although very uncommon for many seats to be contested, even at times of general elections, there was already a tendency for more and more to be contested; which was a sign that public opinion was taking shape about certain political and social issues, and that people felt strongly enough about politics to vote more according to conscience than to customs.

Yet it is a little anachronistic to speak of the commons of 1815 as 'unreformed'. The prevailing nineteenth-century theory still held the ground _ that it is property and not people which ought to be represented in Parliament. Only the growing movements of Radicals hold that men should have votes as men and as citizens, and not as the owners of specified quantities of landed property. And Radicals, for the moment, were associated with Jacobins – the revolutionaries of France who had brought war to England and so much misery to Europe.

As for the House of Lords – the other half of Britain's Parliament – that had recently undergone considerable change, which was not necessarily reform. One sign of the change wrought by the reign of George III was that the traditional stronghold.

From being a small and select family party of oligarchic leaders, the House had become more broadly comparable in size with the Commons. The political parties, thrown into some confusion of principles and sentiments by their various reaction to the Revolution and the Napoleonic wars.

The Tory was little more than the union of all men and groups who regarded Jacobinism as something to be resisted and destroyed. The Tory party had become identified with total opposition to movements of popular radicalism and political reform. It remained the party of the Church of England, of public order and administrative efficiency, of continuity and traditionalism in methods of government. It clung to a hierarchical and aristocratic notion of society, later to be embodied in the mid-Victorian doctrine of 'the rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate'. The Whigs, shared in much of this outlook; but in so far as they were supported by the Protestant dissenters, the moneyed men of the City, the fund-holders of the Bank, and many of the rising merchant and manufacturing interests, they sought gradual reform of the system of government, of financial and commercial policy, and of the social and legal system. They wanted to lessen the old power and privileges of the landed interest.

It was the Radical movements which set the pace in effective political organizations, and which were soon to dominate the whole growth of British Parliamentarianism. It would be misleading to draw over-sharp lines of distinction between the three main bodies of opinion which can too glibly be labeled 'Tory', 'Whig', and 'Radical'.

The International Scene

Britain, as one of the victorious Powers which had defeated the great Napoleon, held a high place in international councils after Waterloo. The most persistent and invulnerable of his enemies, she had defeated him at sea and joined with Russia and Prussia in defeating him on land. Her population was less than half that of France, barely half of Austria's, and only a little more than Prussia's. By her combination of commercial and naval power she had defeated equally his attempt to blockade her and his preparations to invade her: and unlike most Europeans countries she ended the war unravaged and unoccupied by the troops of the Grande Armee.

Her power rested less on the amount of available man-power, and more on her superiority in industrial and commercial technique, and on her degree of national unity at a time when Germany was splintered into a couple of dozen small States and Italy into half a dozen, when eastern Europe was still almost entirely agricultural and ruled by reactionary dynastic monarchs, and when Russia, Britain's most serious rival in the Near East, was excluded from far-reaching influence in Europe by the barrier of the Prussian State and the Habsburg and Turkish Empire. After the defeat of France, Britain remained the greatest Power in Western Europe and the Mediterranean, and despite the loss of America, supreme in the colonial world of North America, the West Indies, and India. The markets of the

world lay wide open to her manufactured goods, and the undeveloped areas of the globe to her capital investments. Soon the city of London became the economic capital of the world.

This was the greatest opportunity in Britain's history. Her enormous economic advantages, skillfully and opportunately used, could bring her a prosperity and a kind of world-leadership hitherto unknown. To her merchants, bankers, and manufacturers, eager to avail themselves of these golden opportunities, only two great obstacles seemed likely to hamper their activities. One was the set of restrictions imposed upon their free and plentiful import of raw materials by the Corn Laws of the Navigation Acts. The other was the feudal and monarchial reaction in Europe, led by Austria and Russia. This was calculated to drag Europe – and with it the overseas possessions of Spain and Portugal – back to the old order of feudal and clerical privileges and dynastic imperialism which represented all that was most hostile to the free-trading, competitive, highly capitalistic spirit of Britain's merchants and manufacturers. The open door for migration, capital investment, and markets was the essential demand of British shippers, factory-owners, and financiers in the nineteenth century. It was the creed natural to any people which has great natural advantages and a long lead in methods of production. Free competition is of most value to those who need not fear any competition.

Already, too, the general spirit of the country backed this policy. As a constitutional parliamentary Monarchy, however great its defects judged by modern democratic standards, Britain of 1815 enjoyed a system of government more enlightened, tolerant, and capable of peaceful reform than any other major power in Europe. Even her Tory ministries soon found the Holy Alliance of European Emperors, the Congress set up by the Congress of Vienna which made the peace-settlement with France and the policies of repression shaped by the Austrian Chancellor far too restrictive and oppressive for her purposes. First among the important victorious Powers, she broke with the System and thereby made it crumble. Her foreign policy henceforth was concerned with the defense of her colonial territories, systemic resistance to Russian expansion towards the Balkans and the Mediterranean, and the restoration of good relationships with France. A succession of great foreign ministers developed a characteristically free-handed British foreign policy which rested on these basic aims.

It was not only the goods, gold, and men that Britain sent out into the would that made her a great Power after Waterloo. It was also the ideas and ideals which she absorbed into herself that made her a leader of would opinion. England enjoyed stirring of intellect and conscience which came with tide of democratic ideals derived from the American and French Revolutions. These ideas _ of the natural right of all men to liberty, equality, and the pursuit of happiness _ could be slowly absorbed into her national

traditions and all the more beneficially, because she did not suffer the impact of these great upheavals within her own body as did America and France. Because her political institutions were spared this shock, they could assimilate the nourishing and stimulating ideas of democracy in an almost pre-digested form, and could avoid most of the excesses and violent disturbances which racked her neighbors. Her parliamentary system being more flexible and adjustable than the monarchial regimes of the continent, could be gradually adapted to meet the needs of the more refined and assimilatable version of democracy which became conceivable after the experience of France. It could broaden down from precedent to precedent', making England in the process the most ingeniously inventive nation in the nineteenth century in the art of politics. Thus it was that the devices of representative parliamentary government, the party and cabinet systems ministerial political responsibility, and the permanent civil service were all – in the familiar modern forms at last – the inventions of nineteenth century England. All were devised in the effort to reconcile institutions resting on the theory of the Parliament with movements demanding the 'sovereignty of the people'. In a similar way, Britain so successfully applied the lessons learnt from the loss of America the she devised, through the conception of responsible colonial government, the notion and reality of 'Dominion status', which have created a structure of Empire unique in the history of the world. Foreign ideas, like her foreign cotton, she contrived to

import, transform into articles more valuable and finished, and to export at a profit after satisfying her own needs at home.

This political inventiveness, no less than her mechanical inventiveness, brought her great prestige abroad. Suppressed nationalities in eastern Europe, learned to look to England for leadership, protection, or in the last resort refuge. Other countries, envious of her success in combining democracy with stability, and self-government with responsibility, tended to imitate her parliamentary form of government just as they borrowed her industrial techniques and skills. But machinery and factory-plant proved often to be more transplantable than political institutions. If the first period of our study, between 1850 and 1850, saw the growth of liberal and democratic movements in Europe partly under stimulus of Britain's example, the second period, between 1851 and 1874, saw the defeat of most of these movements and the reversion to more dictatorial and anti-democratic regimes. Meanwhile the more successful imitation of British industrial methods brought increased resources of power and wealth to these new regimes, with the result that in the last quarter of the century Britain found herself threatened by severe economic competitors and by powerful political rivals in the continent of Europe. Above all Germany, unified politically by the undemocratic methods of Bismarck and industrialized by the inventive exploitation of the coal and iron resources, confronted her as a rival which she had twice to defeat, in

world wars of the present century, before even her national security could be assured.

There had been movements of reform, Philosophical Radicalism, or 'Benthamism' as it is more usually called after its founder, Jeremy Bentham (1784 – 1832), was the most characteristic intellectual product of England at this period. Bentham and his followers dominated English Radical thought throughout the century. Starting from the belief that men are prompted in their behavior by the belief that men are prompted in their behavior by the desire to seek pleasure and to avoid pain, and that the purpose of all legislation should be to promote 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'. Although identified at first with opposition to all State interference in economic and social life and a distrust of all positive efforts of governments to do good to their subjects, it was transformed by the force of circumstances and by the inherent implication of its central social doctrine _'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' _ into a philosophy of legislative reform, social-service organization, and even a variety of socialism.

Hitherto the three chief functions of the State had been simply the securing of national defence, the maintaining of public order, and the protection of property. From Tudor times and even from the seventeenth century had come down a legacy of attempts at paternalist interference in such matters as poor relief, foreign trade, and the protection of agriculture. Most of these were by now out of date or

imperative. The less law the more liberty, and if only the State would leave people alone they would, by the pursuit of their own interest, automatically promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number. He was not entirely consistent, for he admitted the need of good laws to prevent people from harming one another in political and social life. While he denied the need for similar State-action in economic life. He posed a social question – 'what is the common good? He gave a social answer – 'The greatest happiness of the greatest number! But he thought that this good would be attained if the State would confine itself to its minimum traditional functions and leave all the rest to the 'invisible hand of providence which ensured that each man, seeking his general good and the general profit.

Men learned to look to Britain for world leadership not only because she held the secrets of economic prosperity and the key to political stability, but also because she seemed to have discovered the philosophy of happiness. Some of her leading statesmen were inspired with the passion to spread these threefold blessings to all mankind: and they identified free trade and parliamentary government with universal happiness and peace.

The Victorian adventure

For all theses reasons, England in 1815 was on the brink of an era of prosperity and greatness unrivalled in her whole history. The use she made of these great advantage is one theme of her history which call for study. At the same time, she entering upon a period of remarkable social distress and unrest, of economic crisis and political change. Her new wealth and her world supremacy rested of foundations of harsh sweated labour, appalling slum conditions in her new towns, and immense human misery. Progress and enlightenment coincide with conditions of cut-throat competition and inhuman exploitation: and much of her subsequent history has been the story of successive but not always successful efforts to reconcile her ideals of political democracy and universal happiness with the realities of economic distress and oppression. To bridge this enormous gulf she gradually devised the complex apparatus of the modern social-service State, with its ideals of full employment, social security, and freedom from fear and from want. To succeed in this task was the greatest challenge of all to her political and social inventiveness.

To sum up, the generation of Englishmen between 1815 and 1850 suffered from the combine aftermath of two great social and political revolutions, the American and the French; of two great social and economic upheavals, the agrarian and the industrial revolutions, of two great foreign wars, the French Revolutionary and the Napoleonic Wars

(1793-1815). The American and French Revolutions set in motion a whole tide of new forces and ideas in politics, and these seeped gradually into her national life after 1815. The agrarian and industrial revolutions, already well advanced before 1815, transformed the face and life of the nation and brought immense prosperity and misery combined. The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars cut right across the effects of both these other events, speeding industrialization but retarding social and political reforms, crushing England's chief continental rival while they liberalized her own politics, and establishing Britain as the peer of great imperial dynasties. It is not surprising that the period of our study is one of strenuous activity and dynamic change, of ferment of ideas and recurrent social unrest, of great inventiveness and expansion. The whole meaning of Victorian England is lost if it is thought of as a country stuffy complacency and black top-hatted moral priggery. Its daring experiment of fitting industrial man into a democratic society. Their failures, faults, and ludicrous shortcomings are all to apparent. At least the Victorians found greatness, stability, and peace: and the whole would, marveling, envied them for it.

Commentators tend to separate the Victorian age into early, mid and late periods. Victoria's reign (1837 – 1901) began shortly after the establishment in 1829 of Robert Peel's Metropolitan Police force and the passage of the first great Reform Act of 1832. The police heralded the new

Victorian age of greater state discipline and a clampdown on crime, while the Reform Act,

In the last decades of the eighteenth century, and in the first half of the nineteenth century, a number of words, which are now of capital importance, came for the first time into common English use, or, where they had already been generally used in the language acquired new and important meanings. There is in fact a general pattern of change in these words, and this can be used as a special kind of map by which it is possible to look again at those wider changes in life and thought to which the changes in language evidently refer.

Five words are the key points from which this map can be drawn. They are *industry*, *democracy*, *class*, *art*, and *culture*. Clear thinking was preferred to impulse or prejudice and the battle of ideas to the dictatorship of slogans; hard work was considered the foundation of all material advancement; and both clear thinking and hard work were deemed essential to continued national progress.

The stress on thought, work, and progress, carried with it smugness, dullness and 'cant'. But it was accompanied by heightened national pride. Prosperity and security together encouraged a belief in the superiority of English representative institutions. Also, there was also belief in a common moral code, based on duty and self restraint, was shared by most groups in the society, including scientists, creative artists, and intellectuals. Institutions like the

school, the voluntary organization, the trade union, and above all the family emphasized the maintainance of those values which held society together. The theme of the decline of aristocratic power has often been treated in the political history of the nineteenth century, and is always inescapable. Almost as often, the influence of the landed interests has been prematurely dismissed, in eagerness to write nineteenth century history in terms of the growing of the middle-class power, the democratization of the institutions, and the increasing importance of radical and laboring movements.

Victorian and Victorianism

The term Victorian, which literally describes things and events in the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), conveyed connotations of "prudish," "repressed," and "old fashioned." Although such associations have some basis in fact, they do not adequately indicate the nature of this complex, paradoxical age that was a second English Renaissance. Like Elizabethan England, Victorian England saw great expansion of wealth, power, and culture. (What Victorian literary form do you think parallels Elizabethan drama in terms of both popularity and literary achievement?)In science and technology, the Victorians invented the modern idea of invention -- the notion that one can create solutions to problems, that man can create new

means of bettering himself and his environment. In religion, the Victorians experienced a great age of doubt, the first that called into question institutional Christianity on such a large scale. In literature and the other arts, the Victorians attempted to combine Romantic emphases upon self, emotion, and imagination with Neoclassical ones upon the public role of art and a corollary responsibility of the artist. In ideology, politics, and society, the Victorians created astonishing innovation and change: democracy, feminism, unionization of workers, socialism, Marxism, and other modern movements took form. In fact, this age of Darwin, Marx, and Freud appears to be not only the first that experienced modern problems but also the first that

attempted modern solutions. Victorian, in other words, can be taken to mean parent of the modern -- and like most powerful parents, it provoked a powerful reaction against itself. The Victorian age was not one, not single, simple, or unified, only in part because Victoria's reign lasted so long that it comprised several periods. Above all, it was an age of paradox and power. The Catholicism of the Oxford Movement,

the Evangelical movement, the spread of the Broad Church, and the rise of Utilitarianism, socialism, Darwinism, and scientific Agnosticism, were all in their own ways characteristically Victorian; as were the prophetic writings of Carlyle and Ruskin, the criticism of Arnold, and the empirical prose of Darwin and Huxley; as were the fantasy of George MacDonald and the realism of George Eliot and George Bernard Shaw. More than anything else what makes Victorians Victorian is their sense of social responsibility, a basic attitude that obviously differentiates them from their immediate predecessors, the Romantics. Tennyson might go to Spain to help the insurgents, as Byron had gone to Greece and Wordsworth to France; but Tennyson also urged the necessity of educating "the poor man before making him our master." Matthew Arnold might say at mid-century that the world, which seems to lie before us like a land of dreams, so various, so beautiful, so new, Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain. but he refused to reprint his poem "Empedocles on Etna," in which the Greek philosopher

throws himself into the volcano, because it set a bad example; and he criticized an Anglican bishop who pointed out mathematical inconsistencies in the Bible not on the grounds that he was wrong, but that for a bishop to point these things out to the general public was irresponsible.

Age of Victoria

Writers and thinkers of the twentieth century have found far more points of interests in Victorian England than their iconoclastic predecessors. The period from 1851 to 1867 was the period of high-Victorian England; from its social balance it produced a distinctive civilization of its own. The key words of the times were 'thought', 'work', and 'progress'. Clear thinking was preferred to impulse of prejudice and the battle of ideas to the dictatorship of slogans; hard word was considered the foundation of all material advancement; and both clear thinking and hard work were deemed essential to continued national progress.

The Economic and Social Background to Victorian Print Culture

The cluster of revolutionary changes - including the growth of population, improvements in transport, and the introduction of powered machinery into large-scale manufacturing - that we collectively call the 'Industrial Revolution' had begun in 18th century Britain. However, it was the 19th century that saw the climax of these revolutions, and witnessed the economic, social, political and cultural transformation of the country. The printing and publishing industry was caught up in this transformation, benefiting from the application of power to the various stages of the manufacturing process, but also able to exploit developments in other technologies, most notably the railways and telegraphy.

Population

The population of the country had been growing since the mid-18th Century, and the 19th Century continued this trend. The Census of 1851 revealed that more people were living in towns and cities than in the countryside. As literacy and incomes tended to be higher in urban areas than rural ones, this rapidly growing population meant a hugely expanding market for books and newspapers.

Darwin's publications initially met great resistance in Victorian England because they were widely regarded as an immediate threat to many traditional doctrines of Christianity. Even many scientists refused to accept Darwin's conclusions in his book "Origin of the Species," but within a couple of decades much of that resistance had melted away as people accepted the logic and evidence supporting evolutionary theory. Of course, the fact that evolution as an apparent model of biological "progress" fit in with Victorian prejudices in favor of "progress" overall did help quite a bit.

Although there were parts of Victorian England which continued to object to Darwin's ideas about evolution, there was even more resistance in America. One of the problems which inhibited more widespread acceptance was the recent Civil War - it had caused such death, destruction, and devastation that it had shaken people's belief that society (and in particular American society) was steadily advancing towards a state of greater perfection. In such crises, there

are two common responses: to turn back and rely upon ancient traditions which are believed will strengthen society, and to seek outside enemies who are responsible for the weakening of the social group. Both occurred in the American South, the region most negatively affected by the Civil War.

On the one hand, people in the South began to rely more heavily upon religious traditions, eschewing modern perspectives on the Bible and Christianity in favor of literalist, orthodox interpretations. Genesis provided them with an understanding of where they belonged in the universe; Exodus provided a model for where they were going; Leviticus provided a structured system of morals and values which they could apply to their lives in an effort to become more righteous and more worthy in God's eyes.

On the other hand, people in the South were also encouraged to reject the influence of outside philosophies which might undermine tradition or social bonds - and that included the new scientific idea about evolution and natural selection, not to mention developing social theories about labor, the place of women, etc.

Resistance towards evolutionary theory increased further after the turn of the century due to increasing contact with it. During this time period, more and more children started to attend public schools - especially in the rural South, where such schools were at one time very rare and attendance was even more rarely enforced. These were

also the areas where acceptance of evolution was weakest, thus setting the stage for numerous state and local battles over the teaching of evolution in science classes.

Interest in opposing evolution was a key ingredient in the development of American fundamentalism. Generally, a movement opposed to "modernism" (the intellectual aspect of modernity), fundamentalists sought to eliminate theological, philosophical, and scientific ideas which challenged or undermined what they regarded as orthodox and traditional Christian beliefs. They fought for what they believed to be the "fundamentals" of their faith, and the influence of evolution played an important role in their view of a degenerating society that had abandoned true Christianity.

This perspective only intensified with America's involvement in World War I. On the one hand. there was a sense that America was doing the right thing because both evolution and theological liberalism seemed to stem from German scientists and German theologians; reports of German barbarity in the war confirmed people's fears that Germany had become corrupted and godless by modernism and needed to be stopped by a righteous America. On the other hand, there was an even stronger feeling among fundamentalists that the war in general was simply a product of modern depravity, with enough barbarism to go around to all parties involved. Many even believed that it was a sign that the next millennium would soon arrive.

Once the war ended, the resulting rise of labor strife and communism reinforced fundamentalists' fears about the threats to Christianity posed by modern ideas.

Early in the nineteenth century the labels "working classes" and "middle classes " were already coming into common usage. The old hereditary aristocracy, reinforced by the new gentry who owed their success to commerce, industry, and the professions, evolved into an "upper class" (its consciousness formed in large part by the Public Schools and Universities) which tenaciously maintained control over the political system, depriving not only the working classes but the middle classes of a voice in the political process. The increasingly powerful (and class conscious) middle classes, however, undertook organized agitation to remedy this situation: the passage of the Reform Act of 1832 and the abolition of the Corn Laws in 1846 were intimations of the extent to which they would ultimately be successful.

The working classes, however, remained shut out from the political process, and became increasingly hostile not only to the aristocracy but to the middle classes as well. As the Industrial Revolution progressed there was further social stratification. Capitalists, for example, employed industrial workers who were one component of the working classes (each class included a wide range of occupations of varying status and income; there was a large gap, for example, between skilled and unskilled labor), but beneath

the industrial workers was a submerged "under class"--contemporaries referred to them as the "sunken people"--which lived in poverty. In mid-century skilled workers had acquired enough power to enable them to establish Trade Unions (Socialism became an increasingly important political force) which they used to further improve their status, while unskilled workers and the underclass beneath them remained much more susceptible to exploitation, and were therefore exploited.

This basic hierarchical structure (presented here in highly oversimplified form), comprising the "upper classes," the "middle classes," the "Working Classes" (with skilled laborers at one extreme and unskilled at the other), and the impoverished "Under Class," remained relatively stable despite periodic (and frequently violent) upheavals, and despite the Marxist view of the inevitability of class conflict, at least until the outbreak of World War I. A modified class structure clearly remains in existence today.

In the simplest terms, capitalism can be defined as the condition of possessing capital -- the original funds or principal of an individual, company, or corporation, which provide the basis for financial and economic operations. The term capitalism also describes an ideology which favors the existence of capitalists (individuals who accumulate capital which then becomes available for investment in financial or industrial enterprises). Robinson Crusoe is a bourgeois Puritan, but on his island his preoccupations -- labor, raw

materials, the processes of production, colonialism (and implicit Imperialism), shrewdness, self-discipline, and profit -- are (oddly enough, at first glance) those of the proto-capitalist. James Joyce would write that "The true symbol of the British conquest is Robinson Crusoe, who, cast away on a desert island, in his pocket a knife and a pipe, becomes an architect, a carpenter, a knife grinder, an astronomer, a baker, a shipwright, a potter, a saddler, a farmer, a tailor, an umbrella-maker, and a clergyman. He is the true prototype of the British colonist, as Friday (the trusty savage who arrives on an unlucky day) is the symbol of the subject races." Karl Marx, noting that "Robinson Crusoe's experiences are a favorite theme with political economists," took the opportunity, in his Capital, (q.v.) to critique Defoe's fantasy from his own very different perspective.

Chapter II : The Forces of Change

During the great wars agriculture in England had enjoyed a boom. The improving landlords of the period enjoyed a big increase in rents during the Napoleonic Wars. In large districts waste, open fields, and commons had been steadily enclosed during the eighteenth century, and inside the enclosures more scientific farming, better stock-breeding, and agricultural experiments could be carried out. The result was more corn grown; it was also the dispossession of the small-holder and the independent yeomen farmers, the destruction of communal rights and consequent poverty for the cottar who had lived on the margin of subsistence, the creation of a large landless labourer class uprooted from the soil and forced either to work for a wage or wander into the new towns. The farmers grew corn in a big way to feed England during the wars:

but they often cultivated chalk lands or moorlands that were normally uneconomic to use for corn, and after the wars when the price of corn fell they demanded protection.

Accordingly, in 1815, Parliament passed a corn Law which prohibited the import of corn until the price on the home market would keep up the price of corn sold by English farmers, ensure stability and profits to landlord, farmer, and labourer alike and tide over the period of transition from war to peace. It was something of a panic, easure, for the immediate results of the drop of prices after the war had been a drop in rents, frequent bankruptcies,

and unemployment in the countryside. Demobilized soldiers added to the supply of labour available just when less labour was called for on the farms. The Corm Law was the wrong answer to a real economic problem and until the middle of the century farmers were in almost constant distress. Because it made bread dear, poorer people could not afford to buy bacon, eggs, butter, cheese, milk, meat, and all other farm products. So even when corm fetched good prices, farming as a whole did not flourish. This instability caused hardships not only to the farmers themselves, but to the urban populations whose wages remained more steady and at a low level.

The use to which the landed interests put their predominance in Parliament to protect themselves in this way at the expense of the industrial populations of the towns and the manufacturing interests caused the first big open split between landed and manufacturing interests, employers and workers alike, wanted this to be a low level, so as to make wages go further, keep wage-bills low and therefore the cost of manufactured goods low, and enable them to reap maximum benefits in world markets. The cotton merchants likewise wanted the plentiful import of cheap corn to enable the corn-exporting countries to pay for the manufactured cotton goods that England exported. The land owners and farmers wanted corn-prices stabilized at a high level. Thus, two distinct groups of economic groups of economic interest grew up, bitterly hostile to one another: and this led to the long agitation for the repeal of the Corn

Laws, the Free Trade movement as a whole, and the demand for the lessening of the power enjoyed by the agricultural and landed interests in Parliament.

Another conflict of social economic interests was becoming manifest, which cut across this battle between landed and manufacturing interests. It was the split between the owners of the coal-mines and cotton mills whose sole concern was to produce as much as possible as cheaply as possible and as quickly as possible, and their employees whose interest lay in getting a share of the proceeds in their wage packets large enough to keep them alive and make their working and living conditions tolerable. In a time of unemployment, of no labour organization and no legal protection against exploitation and industrial inhumanity, the wage-earners were helplessly exposed to every kind of abuse. Workers under the old domestic system, such as the surviving handloom weavers, suffered new rigours because they couldn't compare with the new factories. Workers in the new factories were little better off. When women could be employed in coal-mines, small children in cotton mills, and all for twelve or fourteen hours a day, bargaining about wages was possible. Each had to take what work he could get, there was no hope of returning to the land when so many farms were being deserted and so many labourers unemployed, and employers were able, by ingenious methods of payment in kind and fining for trivial offences.

Lancashire, the home of the cotton industry, saw many such battles in the class-war between "two nations".

The period 1830-50 was the era of railways and steamships in Britain. The opening of the new Manchester and Liverpool roads was an event as important in its own way as the Battle of Waterloo which had been won fifteen years before. It symbolized the conquest of space and of parochialism. Parliamentary Reform must follow soon. During the two following years several bills and Acts were passed, and these were the boom years of railway construction. The demand for coal and iron which this vast construction caused stimulated the development of the heavy industries, encouraged the rise of big contractors, and offered employment to thousands ranging from the gangs of navies who laid the tracks to drivers, firemen, and other staffs which ran the lines. A great new industry was born in little more than twenty years.

The spread of social distress and economic upheaval, combined with the various conflicts of economic interest just described what soon came to be called 'the condition of England question'. To this 'question' various men and various movements gave very carried answers. Some of these answers are highly revealing as to how Englishmen thought and felt at the time, and are extremely important for subsequent developments in English politics and social thought. They fall into two categories: the highly personal and somewhat paternal answers of certain sensitive,

individuals: and early efforts at self-help on part of the depressed classes. The social history of this period can be understood largely through the lives and achievements of these men. But behind the reflections of the new social thinkers, the experiments of philanthropists, and the successes of the popular leaders, there was fermenting a new spirit of discontent. Life in the new industrial towns, the discipline of the factories and strenuous, incessant activity of the mines and mills in which men were harnessed to machine, all meant great problems of human adjustment. Country-bred men live by custom, and in the new environment custom was killed and habit shaken. I such an age, 'the inequalities of life are apt to look less like calamities from the hand of heaven and more like injustices from the hand of man'. Unrest bred in such surroundings would seek social expression, political means of improvement and would be turned against the most visible symbols of oppression. It seems likely to be true, as many historians have contented, that the English working classes of the industrial revolution were relatively better off than their ancestors: that degree of material improvement served only to increase and broaden their discontent. The essence of the 'the England question' was that Englishmen were at last seeking, primitively, for the reason why their condition was not better still.

The Philanthropists

To this central question Robert Owen, who came of lower middle-class parentage, provided a simple and coherent answer: that the condition of Englishmen would improve only when they replaced competition by cooperation as the mainspring of their social life and their economic activities. It is in this sense that he is correctly called father of English socialism. He proclaimed that a social question demanded a social answer. If social conditions are bad – change them: in so far as they are bad because men are bad and behave inhumanly to their fellow-men, let men undergo a change of heart. He was, in every sense, a self-made man. Born and brought up a s shopkeeper, he was a man whose career most strongly appealed to a nation of shopkeepers. Taking into a concern which had lived on child labour drafted from Edinburgh and Glasgow and was staffed largely by thieves and drunkards, he turned it within a few years into a model business, which many men of power and wealth went on pilgrimage to visit. Every aspect of modern welfare-work was undertaken, ranging from public health, temperance, and education to provision of social security. If even philanthropy could make profits, then the men of Manchester were interested in philanthropy. The Welshman who brought enlightenment to Scotland left a profound impression on Englishmen. His super-abundant writings penetrated to people who were less likely to be won over by his record of practical success. He founded a tradition and almost a school of socialistic thought. The bases of nearly

all his thoughts were the belief in a sort material determinism: out characters are made for un by environment and heredity alike, and therefore we are not at all responsible for what we are. This being so, education is the panacea for ills. Men can all recognize truth when it is placed before then, and by moulding men's minds to the truth, society and even human nature can be revolutionized.

Very different in origins and in character, though also something of a saint, as Anthony Ashley Cooper, eldest son of the sixth Earl of Shaftsbury. His life also was given, with single-minded religious zeal, to the cause of social philanthropy, and he is the father of all nineteenth-century legislation. His answer to the 'condition of England question' was more political than Owen's; it was that the State, through legislation and systematic regulation, should control conditions in factories, the length of the working day, and similar sources of inhumanity and distress. Even more paternal and patriarchal in outlook that Owen, he taught the governing classes in England to assume some responsibility for the welfare of the people. He issued several Acts reforming the condition of child labour. No person under eighteen was to be employed for more than forty-eight hours a week, or more than nine in one day. No person under eighteenth was to be employed more than sixty-nine hours a week, or more than twelve hours in one day.

His work on behalf of agricultural labourers, starting with those on his father's scandalously run estates which her inherited in 1851, his support for reform of lunacy laws, and his efforts to better the lot of boy chimney-sweeps. So stiff was his character that aristocratic benevolence was never replaced in his make-up by a spirit of comradeship or a readiness to cooperate in movements for working-class.

If the career of Owen illustrates a middle-class response, and that of Shaftsbury an aristocratic response, to the challenge of their time, the life and thought of John Stuart Mill exemplify the intellectual and theoretical adjustment which had to be made in prevailing creed of Radicalism by honest men who sought a new creed of more appropriate to the changing social scene. He was that peculiar product of the nineteenth century, a professional reformer; prepared to make reform an almost full-time occupation, a career, even a crusade. He learnt that happiness is a state of mind and being, a condition of spirit, and not the total result of merely seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. He perceived the fallacy in Benthamism: its debased conception of human happiness as a mere arithmetical sum of physical pleasures. He revolutionized Benthamism, for the distinction between higher and lower pleasures undermined the whole basis of the materialist philosophy of utilitarianism. He believed that human liberty means more that just leaving the individual alone to pursue his own selfish pleasures, and is a social pursuit of 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' by deliberate and

possibly coercive measures. It followed, too, that legislation must have a more positive function in society than Bentham had allowed: it must seek to enable men to exercise their natural capacities, use their talents, and develop their personalities, untrammeled by artificial legal impediments and evil economic conditions. The good society, for Mill, is one of the richest diversity derived from the free interplay of human character and personality, he saw that to attain anything like that society in nineteenth-century Britain a long series of far-reaching reforms would be necessary. These reforms would mean a breach with the crude doctrines of *laissez-faire*, a profound modification of the notion of a 'natural harmony of interests' whereby each pursuing his own good (i.e. his own profit in business and his own pleasure in social life) would automatically promote the general good.

He championed the cause of popular education, of trade-union organization, of the cooperative movement of the emancipation of women. He could rejoice that 'the poor have now come out of their leading strings, and cannot any longer be governed or treated like children'. He broke sharply, in his teachings, with the paternalism of Owen and Shaftsbury and even Bentham. Self-government was better than good government imposed by authority, because it allowed men and women to be educated by experience and by responsibility. Progress, he believed, came from mental energy and spiritual enterprise and truth emerged from the free interplay of educated and well-developed minds. He had

faith in the governing influence of ideas and ideals:' one person with a belief is a social power equal to ninety-nine who have only interests.

The Artisan Reformer

Meanwhile, the artisan and labouring classes were gaining both the legal right and the social experience of free association and self-help. Vast tasks of popular education and enlightenment were called for. The 'mob' of the early industrial revolution as an anti-Jacobean, anti-Papal, anti-Dissenter force. It laughed at the French and Bonaparte, it rioted against Popery,

Chapter III : Constitutional and Political Reforms

The great political and constitutional settlement of 1688 had survived in substance all through the eighteenth century because it represented a remarkably solid and comprehensive compromise between various sections of the population. The landed gentry had votes as 40s. freeholders in the counties and often held great power as the local magistrates: a goodly proportion of their number sat in the House of Commons, and their sons had access to trade, politics, or the professions as they chose. The big landowners enjoyed great wealth from their extensive estates, the agricultural prosperity of the national economy. They dominated the House of Lords and the councils of the King, controlled foreign policy, served as lords-lieutenant, nominated large retinues of relations a place in the Commons, the Church, the Army, and indeed al public services. The merchant and business class, the nabobs of the East India Company down to traders, manufacturers, and shopkeepers, enjoyed great freedom of enterprise and plentiful opportunities for that enterprise within the colonial empire bequeathed to England. The professional classes – literary giants like Edward Gibbon, painters like Sir Joshua Reynolds and Gainsborough, master craftsmen like Chippendale and Wedgwood – throve on the patronage of the wealthy aristocrats and merchants. They also enjoyed a ready and appreciative middle-class public of gentry and

townsfolk. The 'masses' counted for little in politics and as yet felt little conflict of interest with the 'classes'. Eighteenth-century England was a close-knit, organic social unity. The stable political and constitutional system of that period reflected this deep and sold social equilibrium.

Into this community came the disturbing and disruptive forces of industrialism and radicalism. The great wars of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic era for a time altered the flow of these forces. Industrialization, temporarily diverted into war-industries, proceeded apace after the wars. Radicalism, with its demand for a complete overhaul of the parliamentary system, was a pent-up during the wars and then subjected to the period of repression after the wars which has already been described. The new social balance and the new political doctrines in combination made some overhaul of the political system inevitable. It was all a question of how much and how far it should be readjusted to fit the new shape of English life and ideas.

The essence of the movements for parliamentary reform in the first generation of the nineteenth century was the claim of new forms of wealth – manufacturing and commercial – to assert their place alongside landed property as the bases of social prestige and political power. The Whig spokesmen of these mercantile and industrial interests were in most cases content that property and not people should still be regarded as what parliament ought to represent: but they wanted such changes as would admit the industrialists

and merchant to representation in parliament. The Radicals, heirs of the French and Americans Revolutionaries, wanted person and not property to be the subject of representation. One man one vote, universal suffrage, was their first demand. The movements for political reforms were split between these two main schools of thought. Before even the first Reform Bill could be passed, the privileges of the eighteenth-century landed gentry in ecclesiastical matters were attacked, and after it their powers in local government were likewise weakened. In this sense, the whole series of political and constitutional reforms in the decade between 1828 and 1838 was one composite attack on the legal privileges of the landed interest which the shift of wealth, power, and population to the towns and factories and ports had already rendered out of date. It is important for understanding Victorian England that these piecemeal reforms should be seen as one whole process, making in one direction; and also, these political constitutional reforms should be seen in their close relationship to the economic reforms which accompanied and succeeded them.

The Fight for Religious Equality

For Roman Catholics and most kinds of Protestant dissenters the legacy of the eighteenth century was a set of legal disabilities. T Toleration Act of 1689 had given the latter some protection for freedom of religious worship, but the former none. The tolerant temper of the eighteenth century combined with the proven worth of Protestant dissenters as reliable British citizens, had won them considerable toleration in practice, and had even opened the doors of civil military office to all whose consciences would stretch a little. In the main they were still formally excluded from ministerial or administrative office, from commissions in the armed services, and from the universities: and Roman Catholics, in addition to all these disabilities, were subject to occasional persecution even for practicing their religion.

Agitation for removal of these old discriminations against British citizens on religious grounds grew during the war. It was that the battle of Waterloo came to let the Papists into Parliament. Roman Catholics were placed on the same civic footing as Protestant dissenters, and in England and Scotland all public official posts were thrown open to any citizen of the United Kingdom whose capacity fitted him for them, regardless of his religious beliefs. To a large measure public life was separated from private religion, and citizenship from churchmanship. On this liberal basis a new social order and a new kind of state could be built.

The Overhaul of Town Government

The new industrialism with the consequent growth of sprawling towns, combined with the aftermath of the wars, produced the twin evils of crime and poverty in much more acute forms. There put a great new strain upon the machine-cry of local government. In this period, it was still as true as it had been in earlier centuries that most government was local government. The tasks of the central government were, primarily, the framing of national policy in foreign, commercial affairs, and the general maintenance and supervision of government internally. The day-to-day administration of the country was still conducted mainly on the periphery – in the localities themselves. It was in the hands of the corporations in the boroughs and the magistrates in the counties, where it had been for centuries.

The rapid growth of population and the equally rapid redistribution of population over the face of Britain, the changing type of population produced by town life, the importunate evils of crime and poverty, made this old machinery out of date and hopelessly inadequate, most acutely in the towns.

The years between 1828 and 1835 saw a remarkable change of outlook and method in grappling with these problems. First in priority was the fundamental problem of public order. The period opens with riots. The normal

reaction of Parliament to disorder was to increase the already excessively large number of offences for which the death penalty could be inflicted. A completely different attitude intended to reform the Criminal Code by diminishing the number of capital offences. This notion caused immediate alarm, but further bills had been proposed by parliamentary reformers to remove further offences of theft from the list of capital crimes. The main arguments even these mild changes in the savage penal code were that national character and manners were moulded by the criminal law, that the removal of even one cog of the machine of punishment might bring disaster, and that the fear of death was essential to restrain the evil-doer. Typical to the whole chorus was the plea that 'the peace of the countryside would be cheaply purchased by the forfeiture of a few lives in order to deter further outrages on the property of 'individuals'. Plainly enough the policy of mere terror did not deter: for so long as detection and capture were so uncertain, and juries were reluctant to convict where conviction meant disproportionate penalties, these offences continued in abundance. Improved police methods were essential and were logical part of any coherent programme of penal reform.

The new campaign which advocated for improving public law and order successfully led to the establishment of the new Metropolitan Police Office at Scotland Yard, and the sound establishment of Britain's first effective civilian police.

The new force was at first greeted with derision and hostility. But gradually the police came to be accepted and respected. The security of the ordinary citizen was greatly increased and crime was checked. By establishing very early contact with disorder rather than waiting until it had grown too great to be quelled without bloodshed; by preventing mobs from forming rather than trying to disperse then after they had formed; by creating a spirit of civilian cooperation with the public in the common cause of good order; above all, by making the detection and punishment of offenders more inevitable and certain. As London became too hot for the elements of crime and disorder they dispersed to other towns, and when these in turn adopted police methods the offenders moved on to the county districts. When the counties too adopted police forces, crime came to be increasingly held down. Certainty of punishment rather than savagery of punishment became the ideal of public authorities: and both morals and manners, as well as civilisation improved.

The local authorities who in this way strengthened their hands against crime and disorder were also driven to tackle the problem of poverty. As already mentioned, the Speenhamland method of paying outdoor relief in aid of wages had developed and spread throughout large areas of the country after 1795. By 1830 its evil effects on both the habits of the poor and the pockets of the ratepayers, were notorious. The difficulty was to find a way of cutting down the wasteful and demoralizing expenditure of public money

without also causing excessive hardship to the deserving poor. The existing poor laws, some dating from the time of Queen Elizabeth, were a fearsome tangle of inconsistent and ineffective devices and regulations.

As regards relief of the poor, a basic principle, then, was national uniformity in the treatment of each separate class of paupers, but diversity of treatment for each class: so that the able-bodied should no longer be confused with the old and frail, or orphan children with lunatics, and the lot of the able-bodied should not vary merely according to the place in which they happened to live. This remained the official theory of the new law, but in practice the Commissioners did not fully enforce these principles. On the one hand the same workhouse was often used indiscriminately as poorhouse, orphanage, and asylum, and on the other some unions imposed harsher tests on the able-bodied than did others.

The new Act intended to be applied to all poor persons indiscriminately, and the workhouse-test was used more harshly than was intended. Nevertheless, at the price of considerable human hardship in the short run, the reforms did succeed in checking the demoralization and pauperization of the working classes. The grouping of parishes into unions was greatly extended, so that by 1840 sex-seventh of the population lived in areas covered by poor-law unions. The system of poor relief had certainly been improved. The old chaos had given place to a new pattern of

public administration involving important new principles which could later be extended and adapted.

The workhouses created by this system loomed large in the life of the poor in mid nineteenth-century England, and life in them has been immortalized by the novels of Charles Dickens.

Reform of Parliament

In all these ways – the organization of the new police, the new Poor Law, and the new municipal councils – the pattern of government in England was changed fundamentally within a single decade. In conjunction with the removal of religious disabilities, these reforms laid the structural foundations for a new kind of State in Britain: a State in which the electoral rights and civil rights of citizens were extended and given greater legal protection, but in which the ordinary citizen was subjected a much greater degree of administrative interference, direction, and control from the centre, The most spectacular element in this whole process the Reform Bill of 1832 – ensured that the new State should also be partially democratized at the centre, The full significance of 1832 in the history of the country is appreciated only if it is seen as the central change in this many-sided transformation of an agricultural nation ruled by squires, parsons, and wealthy landowners into an industrial nation dominated by the classes produced by industrial expansion and commercial enterprise.

The manner in which the Bill passed through Parliament was important. Under the leadership of the Whigs, backed by intense popular pressure in the country which was mobilized for reform.

Chapter IV : Economic And Social Reforms

Free Trade

To the forces of business enterprise, commercial and industrial, it seemed that the fiscal policy of England was burdened by inefficient and out-of-date restrictions and regulations as were the legal and political systems of the country. They had a common interest in sweeping away the most irksome of these relics. In 1820 the London merchants presented to Parliament a petition which embodied principles that were to win ascendancy in economic policy during the next forty years. Two of the most important of these were that freedom from restraint is calculated to give the utmost extension to foreign trade, and the best direction to the capital and industry of the country. That the maxim of buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest, which regulates every merchant in his individual dealings, is strictly applicable as the best rule for the trade of the whole nation. These principles were to reform British commercial and fiscal policy: their results, in combination, are usually called 'the free trade movement'. In the period between 1815 and 1848 it began as a purely utilitarian and piecemeal movement, thriving on the mild modifications of import duties: it ended as a doctrinaire force making for complete freedom of trade, backed by a whole philosophy of commercial liberalism and a new popular faith in the virtues of free competitive enterprise.

Commercial policy at this time was closely linked with two political considerations: the need to raise taxation in conditions where the land tax was the chief alternative source of revenue and income tax was a war-time novelty; and the urge to protect British shipping interests so that in case of war the British Navy should be strong. The countless and clumsy import duties and excises were imposed as much to raise revenues as to protect British industries, and the Navigation Laws, dating from 1651 and 1660, were intended to serve the double purpose of protecting British shipping and restricting the expansion of Britain's chief naval rivals. The trend of reform between 1820 and 1848 was to separate economic policy from political considerations, to mould it entirely in terms of promoting national wealth by untrammeled private enterprise and to leave considerations of national defence and of taxation to the direct action of government through naval building and the imposition of income tax and other direct taxes. Some of the details of these trends are of special interest.

The first moves to simplify and diminish import duties came to reduce or eliminate some of the more irksome duties, The bulk of Customs and Excise revenue came from duties on sugar, tea, coffee, beer, and spirits, wine, and tobacco; some of it came from duties on the import of corn and timber and from excise duties on paper, glass, and leather. In so far as bounties were still given – quite

unnecessarily – on certain commodities exported or re-exported, these actually imposed a burden on revenue rather than contributing to it. Bounties came under first and heaviest fire from the free traders. The basic problem, in an age when, despite the *laissez-faire* doctrines of Benthamism, the State was beginning to do more and cost more, was how to find a better alternative source of revenue. The main alternative found was income tax, as part of a Property Tax.

With this alternative source of revenue at the disposal of Government, was able to repeal many of the old restrictive and wasteful duties. Duties on raw materials were mostly abolished, and those on manufactured articles were consolidated. In these ways the burden of revenue was moved from trade to ordinary citizen, and the motive of protection was virtually abandoned. In one major respect protection survived – in the Corn Laws.

Because the Corn Laws purported to protect the agricultural interest, and because they had proved themselves inefficient even for this purpose, they became the main target for free-trade polemics. The background to the Anti-Corn-Law agitation was a series of bad harvests before 1842 and a severe trade depression which entitled to the label of 'the hungry forties'. Free trade became a gospel, a cure for all social ills, and the path to international peace. The Laissez-faire philosophy had been combined with the

humanitarian philosophy of the philanthropists into one coherent and plausible set of doctrines, which were presented with remarkable vigour and lucidity to the mass of the people.

The Position of Britain in 1848

In foreign relationships the period 1815-48 was a period of peace. Britain, then, enjoyed the benefits of that absence of major European wars. She gradually dissociated herself from the anti-liberal and anti-nationalist policies of the System, backed as it was by the Holy Alliance of the eastern dynasties. She championed the freedom of the Greeks, of the Latin-American colonies, and of the Belgians. But she avoided any major hostilities herself. Subject to the same tides of economic forces and social movements as the rest of western Europe, her counterpart to the European revolutions of 1848 which rocked Europe was the peering out of Chartism and the new tide of emigration in the same year. She seemed to have found, in her supple parliamentary institutions and her monarchical traditions, a strange immunity from violent revolution. As explained above, the threat of violence, and at times even violence itself, was often there. Yet her governing classes showed greater tact, skill, and statecraft in evading revolution than those of most European countries, her middle classes found satisfaction in such adjustments of the traditional order as gave them freedom to seek wealth through the new medium of factory and machinery, railway and steamship, and her labouring classes inherited a respect and affection for the methods of self-help and constitutional agitation, as well as a spirit of patience and tolerance. Emigration had served as an outlet for the intense pressure of population on the economic resources of the country, and it was noted that

workmen were wearing, perhaps for the first time in British history, very much the same sort of clothes as the gentleman. Such a country might well be envied by her European neighbours. But such a country was unlikely to find repose, or be able to prevent further great overhauls of her system of government and further immense changes in her way of life. A host of new forces had been launched upon the country. Far from having yet spent their force or revealed all their demands, they were just at the very height of the most restless and dynamic stage of their history.

Throughout the century one constant factor in Britain's relation with her neighbours and in her own sense of national security operated so effectively and so silently that few gave it much thought: the British Navy. Her naval power grew steadily during the Napoleonic Wars. During the wars she had captured from the French ships and most of these had gone to swell the size of her own Navy. It has remained something of a mystery to historians that with ill-disciplined officers and mutinous crews, British naval power stood so high even in Nelson.

In the fifties and sixties, despite her great technological lead in industry and her vast merchant navy, Britain did not originate any of the great naval developments. She imitated changes introduced by France and America; and imitated so clumsily that naval shipbuilding passed through a *baroque* phase. But Britain through the heyday of mid-Victorian prosperity kept up a large and costly fleet – the biggest in

the would: and thereon she implicitly pinned her faith for complete national defence. The fleet in being was a permanent factor in her whole position, both in Europe and as a maritime Empire. It was even the framework for her policy of free trade, for it and nothing else ensured for all the freedom of the seas.

The Second Phase: 1851 – 1874

Chapter V : Mid-Victorianism

The background of mid-Victorianism is growing material prosperity, and a level of industrial production and foreign trade which set England ahead of all other countries. The elemental facts speak for themselves. The enclosure of common land, stimulated by the General Enclosure Act of 1845, proceeded apace. It was checked only in the late sixties by the resistance of the urban population, to their exclusion from the nearby countryside. The cultivated land of Britain grew three-quarters of the corn that she needed.

The building of railways was continued. She was reaping the rich advantages of the lead she had gained by reason both of her political stability and of her industrial revolution and inventiveness. Material Progress seemed, as by some new law of nature, to have been showered without stint on a people who rated industriousness, business efficiency, and private enterprise among the major virtues.

This situation induced in large sections of the upper and middle classes a mood of comfortable complacency which later generations have found the most unattractive of Victorian characteristics. But it induced also a mood of

revolt and reaction against such complacency. If Lord Palmerston, Lord Macaulay, and Samuel Smile are typical of the mid-Victorian outlook, so also are Charles Dickens, Mathew Arnold, and Thomas Carlyle. The self-satisfaction usually found expression in a robust, if some-what swaggering, attitude which found reflex ion in both domestic and foreign policy. The cocksure pugnacity of Palmerston had at least a solid basis in material wealth, impregnable financial strength, and a strong fleet.

Samuel's Smile's *Self-Help* was rapidly succeeded by works with similar pious titles _ *Thrift, Character, Duty* _ which form a veritable catalogue of the 'Victorian virtues'. This long series of smug lay sermons on the virtues of industry and honesty, connecting always the practice of such virtue with the reward of material prosperity, is the shoddiest side of the mentality of the time, It was the instinctive creed of the prosperous industrialists and business men whose ethics now dominated English manners as they dominated English economic life, It found its enemy in Matthew Arnold's bitter attacks on barbarians and philistines. It is worth recalling that the finest expositon of Victorian Liberalism, with its breadth of humanity and sensitive honest of spirit, Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* so did Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

The buoyant, optimistic, and somewhat arrogant mood which seems almost to have been born in 1851, lasted for the next twenty years. It premeated much of the literature, history, art and philosophy of these years: and if it also bred its own antidote and antithesis, the impact of the reaction against it was not felt very acutely until after 1870. It remains to examine a few of the more significant manifestations of this spirit in the thought and achievements of the time.

It was natural, and perhaps inevitable, that Victorian England should demand and find a historian of suitable temper and caliber to re-interpret English history in the light of her new prosperity. She found him in Lord Macaulay, just as she found her representative Poet Laureate in Lord Tennyson. A man of wide practical political and administrative experience, he brought his peculiarly masculine and self-confident mind to the writing of English history in a manner most compelling to his contemporaries. His collective essays, mostly elaborate book-reviews, had been published some years earlier and established his reputation as an historian of shrewd, forceful, and pugnacious qualities. He never did his strong prejudices. He detested Roman Catholicism as much as Jacobinism, and distrusted kings as much as mobs. As a fair spokesman of

the middle classes, parliaments are his real heroes, though he was strongly attracted by the daring of men like Hastings. The Whig Revolution of 1688 and the Whig Reform Bill of 1832 are the events which most rouse his whole-hearted enthusiasm. Although he is more critical of the great Whigs of history, and more sympathetic to the Tories, than many of the opponents of the 'Whig interpretation of history' would believe, he nevertheless founded the popular 'Whig legend' of English history which during the rest of the nineteenth century sank deep into Englishmen's view of their own development.

Moral Conscience

No interpretation of mid-Victorianism would be sound which did not place religious faith and observance in the very centre of the picture. The most generally accepted and practiced form of Christianity at the time was that which may be broadly called evangelicalism, with its emphasis upon moral conduct as the test of the good Christian. In this sense it transcended all barriers of religious sect. Its basis was biblical. Bible reading in the homes was as popular as sermonizing in church. Its highest virtue was self-improvement. Its emphasis lay not on sacraments or ritual, but on organized prayer and preaching, and on strict observance of Sunday. Until 1870s this form of religion and of religious worship remained the normal form for the great mass of Englishmen, although they remained divided formally into Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Quakers, and the many other nonconformist sects.

The chief characteristics, indeed, of the Church of England in the mid nineteenth century was its remarkable variety and comprehensiveness in belief. It comprised almost as wide a range of beliefs as did English society itself, and was in that sense at least a truly national Church. In 1846 the Evangelicals formed the "Evangelical Alliance' which united all English Protestants, Anglicans, and Nonconformists alike, in a common resistance to Roman Catholicism and all its influence.

Not least of Britain's achievements during the fifty years after Waterloo was to assert her role as the exemplar and pattern of free constitutional government; a role which she had enjoyed for fifty years after 1715, partially lost during the thirty years before the French Revolution, and now recovered in fuller measure under Victoria. During the last decades of the eighteenth-century men learned to look to America and to France for intellectual and moral leadership in the practice of liberal ideas: after 1815 they again learned to look to Britain as the model of stable and constitutional government, a safe refuge for exiles and defeated rebels and a stout champion of suppressed nationalities in Europe. If Britain plunged unprepared into ill-considered hostilities as in the Crimean War, even this kind of self-assertiveness had a strong appeal to Englishmen at the time. At home, Liberalism meant increasing assumption by the State of responsibility for the social welfare and security of the citizen, and abandonment of the amoral doctrines of *Laissez-faire* – 'devil take the hindmost'

Above all, mid-Victorian England was great enough to breed and nourish its own cities. Self-criticism could never be quite dormant so long as a Mathew Arnold or a Charles Dickens held so much of the public attention. Arnold was perhaps the finest critic of his day. Thoroughly Liberal in upbringing and temperament, he had a profound sense of religion. His *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) remain the most biting indictment of the materialism and bad taste of his times. Arnold was a liberal critic of Liberalism. He attacked

the social, moral, and aesthetic evils which were the consequences of the materialistic, economic, and political Liberalism of the mid nineteenth century. It was the force he called Philistinism, as distinct from the attitude of the aristocracy ('The Barbarians') and from that of the 'vast residuum' ('The Populace'). There is no more erosive criticism of mid-Victorianism than Arnold's famous description of the characteristics of these three social classes.

Charles Dickens (1812 – 1870) through his long series of immensely popular novels touched people's hearts and imagination where Arnold touched only their intellects. His satires on poor law institutions, Chancery, and judicial procedure in general, profiteering private schools, and many other social ills of his times are well known. Having been a poor boy himself he had an instinctive and burning sympathy with the poor. He gloried in the broad humanity, the patience, good-nature, and good humour of the poor, even while laughing at their foibles, conceits, and oddities. His significance is not that he propounded any programme of social reforms or political improvements, but simply that he painted for all to appreciate and enjoy, a vivid picture of working-class folk whose poverty could be seen not as a penalty from heaven or the punishment of sin, bur as the product of bad social conditions and the consequence of man's inhumanity. He helped to dissolve the older and more wooden class-divisions of Victorian England, to awaken a broader and more humane interest in fellow-men, and to

blow away in gust of laughter many of the stuffy absurdities of outdated modes of thought. His remedy was Christian charity and good-natured benevolence, and he has been well described as "'nearer to Father Christmas than to Karl Marx"

Thomas Carlyle (1795 – 1881) was a more violent and virulent critic than either Arnold or Dickens. He was above all a moralist, and a Puritan moralist that, and thus he embodies more of the spirit of his times than he would have cared to admit. He was evangelical to the core. Carlyle wrote of the division into 'Dandies and Drudges', by which he meant also rich and poor. This fundamental social cleavage was a problem which haunted all the critics of Victorianism, from Dickens to Karl Marx. It drove Carlyle to sympathy with the Chartists so far as they wanted to destroy the poverty of the poor. As the Victorians groped their way towards more efficient and flexible methods of administration, they proved ready enough to assume collective responsibility for tackling the worst social evils of their time. The true Carlyle was as radical as Dickens, filled with a burning hatred of poverty, cruelty, and man's inhumanity to man.

It is, indeed, part of the eternal greatness of the Victorian era that Englishmen showed themselves so energetically persistent and so ingeniously inventive in discovering better ways of improving social conditions. Evils felt to be humanly remediable were tackled as promptly as

possible. There could be no efficient drainage system or water supply until they had invented the cheap pipes. Modern plumbing was characteristically a mid-Victorian invention. Where the Victorians became laughable was in their over-enthusiastic adoption of new devices. The once beautiful furniture of the eighteenth century was padded, sprung, and upholstered until it lost all recognizable shape or beauty. Houses and cottages formerly made by necessity out of local materials which naturally harmonized with the soil and the landscape, were now made of red bricks. Old and well-tried local craftsmanship broke down, established traditions and methods gave way to mass-produced work assembled by semi-skilled labour. Public taste, dominated by the upstart classes of the new rich, was as bad as Mathew Arnold described it. Beauty was killed in village, town after town, house after house, by this powerful combination of new amenities and low public taste. This is one of the biggest crimes of the mid-Victorians, even if they can scarcely be blamed for it. In material construction, as in public administration, they had to experiment with untried methods and made hideous mistakes than that they made such speedy progress in refining and adapting the techniques.

Victorian art and architecture suffered from similar afflictions. The Crystal Palace was one of the very few attempts at functional architecture. Albert Memorial is a fair enough sample of Victorian notions of decoration and monumental architecture. Sculpture and painting were

traditionally tied to the art of representation: their basis was the need to create a recognizable likeness of someone or something. The invention of photography in the Victorian era introduced a technique of accurate representation with which sculpture and painting could not compete, and they were therefore free to abandon the effort to produce mere likeness and to concentrate on artistic creation. But both remained haunted by the old tradition, and the new school of impressionists. Yet art criticism enjoyed a remarkable vogue, as evidence the enormous influence of John Ruskin, and in the Pre-Raphaelite movement. And in music the era was more creative. The long series of comic operas is a characteristically middle-class product of the period.

The industrial and commercial classes which, by reason of their wealth and control of economic life, came to dominate English society and culture after the middle decades of the century, stamped upon English development an impress peculiarly their own. At once materialistic and moral, aggressive and religious, self-satisfied and self-critical, the middle generation of Victorians enjoyed a special moment in English history. Their final achievement is that they were liberal enough in mind to extend the amenities and advantages of their creation to classes poorer and less organized than themselves, and to do this without bloodshed. Like the Whig aristocracy of the eighteenth century of these business folk, they themselves in turn yielded so relatively painlessly to the upsurge of the working classes. It would be excessively innocent and naïve to be

scandalized by the comparatively few examples of violent attempts to crush the extension of democracy in the mid nineteenth century. What is remarkable is the relative smoothness with which democratic ideas and institutions spread and grew within the hot-house atmosphere of the generation which built and admired the Crystal Palace.

Chapter VI : The Age of Palmerston

Politics from Peel to Gladstone

Sir Robert Peel's great ministry lasted from 1841 to 1846. The ministry of Peel was in many respects the climax of the long period of Liberal-Tory administrations after 1815; in other respects, it was necessary adjustment of Toryism to the new middle-class ascendancy marked by the great Reform Bill and the reorganization of British administration and local government. It introduced a new element of confusion into party politics. Peel was accused of betraying his party over the repeal of the Corn Laws and his other free-trade measures, just as in 1829 he had 'betrayed it over Catholic emancipation. In fact, after Peel's ministry, both parties accepted the broad principles of the Liberal creed and differed over the speed and method of its application. It thus became possible to have a real system of party government with parties alternating in power without each repealing the measures recently passed by its rival. Without this common ground the working of party-government would have been impossible. Socially it rested on the domination of both parties by the 'middle class'. Economically it rested on the fact that, although there were great extremes of wealth and poverty, the gap between them was filled by the strength of the middle classes.

The classical model of solid two-party government did not appear until the great duel between Gladstone and Disraeli after 1867. Between Peel's resignation in 1846 and

the second Reform Bill in 1867 there were nine administrations, several of which had no stable majority in Parliament. Politics were dominated for most of that time by the most characteristically mid-Victorian statesmen of all Lord Palmerston (1784 – 1865); and by his policy of conservatism at home jingoistic liberalism abroad he perpetuated great confusion among parties. The truth was that he not only represented intuitively, but almost personally embodied the character and outlook of the commercial industrial middle classes. So long as party discipline and organization were so loose, and party loyalties so confused, a figure like Palmerston was almost indispensable. There were only five years during this whole generation when Palmerston was not in power in an important office. It is, indeed, the age of Palmerston; and of Palmerston as the supreme personal spokesman of the hegemony of Liberalism. In the early ambiguity of his outlook and his position he perfectly represented the balance of social forces of the mid-Victorian era. His political outlook and habits had been shaped in the years before the Reform Bill, and he carried over into the generation between the two Reform Bills the spirit of the pre-Reform Parliament. His death in 1865 is an important landmark in English political history. It released the more liberal forces in Liberalism from the restraints he had imposed and was a necessary preliminary to the passing of a second Reform Bill in 1867. Only then could a sharper line of division appear between Conservatism and

Liberalism – and only his foreign policy was continued by the new Conservative leader Disraeli. His death marks the end of an epoch.

Broadly, the substance of Liberalism in home policy was still *Laissez-faire* in economic life, involving low taxation, the piecemeal improvement of social conditions without radical overhaul, and the encouragement of private charity and voluntary association as the best remedies for surviving evils. Free trade was its main plank in commercial policy, peaceful international relations through expanding trade.

Throughout the Palmerstonian era foreign affairs dominated English politics much more than any single issue of domestic politics. He hoped to lower the income tax by installments and abolish it. He regarded it as 'an engine of gigantic power for great national purposes', and less a normal source of national revenue than an emergency expedient, as in time of war. He abolished most duties on partially manufactured goods, so he had to find other sources of revenue.

Chapter VII : The Age of Machinery

Changes in Economic Organizations

The population of England and Wales increased by some five million between 1851 and 1871. This increase was due to all three causes which can increase population: immigration, higher birth-rate, and lower death-rate.

How did the 22 million inhabitants of the United Kingdom mainly find their living? Agriculture was still Britain's largest national industry. Next to it came textiles. The growth and wealth of the middle classes are reflected in the fact that over a million people were engaged as domestic servants. The heavy industries were growing fast. The mileage of railroads doubled between these dates, and the big railway companies arose from amalgamations of smaller ones. This was the period when Britain enjoyed to the full the economic benefits of having become the 'workshop of the world'. The gap between imports and exports was more than bridged by her 'invisible exports' in the form of shipping, banking, and insurance services. The Post Office Savings Bank was established in 1861. The total wealth of the country was growing fast, and it was more widely distributed throughout the community than before. Better wages, improvements in conditions in the mines, factories, and towns, and regulation of hours of work, as well as the growth of free social services such as public health and education, meant that the poor were much better off at the end of period than they had been twenty years before. The

greatest abuses in the employment of women and children had been removed. Though the worker's lot was still harsh by modern standards, it was very much better than a generation earlier. Pressure from labour organizations and the electorate ensured that it should continue to do so.

The years of Gladstone' First Ministry were marked by a big boom in trade. It is significant of the whole history of Victorian England that the climax of its material prosperity meant also the strengthening of labour organizations which were to play so large a part in the criticism and transformation of its principles of free enterprise and competitive capitalism.

Meanwhile, the structure of capitalism was changing. Old family firms tended to be replaced by limited liability companies run by salaried managers. The 'share holder' as such had no knowledge of the lives, thoughts, or needs of the workmen employed by the Company in which he held shares, and his influence on the relations of capital and labour was not good. The paid manager acting for the company was in more direct relation with the men and their demands, but even he had seldom that familiar personal knowledge of the workmen which the employer had often had under the patriarchal system of the old family business now passing away.

The units of production being larger, workshops and factories were tending to get larger. The accumulated new wealth of Britain was poured by these men into capitalist

enterprise, both at home and overseas. The centre of control of both national and international financial systems lay in the City of London. The corollary of an international commodity market was an international discount market, an international market for shipping freights, an international insurance market, and finally, an international capital market. Backed by the stability of the London money markets and the silent but constant security provided by the Navy, Britain's overseas, traffic multiplied more than four times in bulk between 1847 and 1880.

The rapid development of industry, dependent upon imports for much of its raw materials other than coal and iron, combined with the growth of population and of overseas trade, meant that the country was becoming increasingly dependent on imports for its food supplies as well. Although the full extent of this development belongs to the twentieth century, already by 1880 nearly three-quarters of the corn Britain consumed came from overseas. In all ways Britain was ceasing to be an island.

Nor was it shipping and trade alone that linked the British Isles to the rest of the world. In the sixties the technical problems of laying deep-sea cables were solved, after twenty years of experiments and disappointments.

The immense changes in the structure of economic social life called for great adjustments in both the habits of thought and the forms of labour organization of the new generation of the English people. The basic fact was

improvement in the standard of living. By 1870 most working-class families were absolutely better off by about ten per cent than they had been in 1850. It was on the firm basis of such prosperity that trade unionism, the cooperative movement, and other labour organizations grew and thrived. The result was a variety of 'Liberal Socialism'.

The Birth of Liberal Socialism

Most of the reforms were put through Parliaments by Liberals and Radicals, with some pressure from outside Parliament generated by radical and labour agitation in the country. Some – such as the Reform Bill of 1876 itself – were directly the result of the competitive party-system, wherein Liberals and Conservatives rivaled each other in winning votes by making concessions to the more progressive sections of public opinion. But they were only in the most indirect and imperfect way the achievements of organized workmen. Chartism had been quelled in 1848, and in the fifties working men sank into a decade of comparative apathy and inertia in politics. Chartism had been basically the product of hunger and distress and it died when the growth of British trade improved wages and the standard of living, governmental repressiveness slackened, and unemployment became less prevalent. Although much real distress continued among less skilled workers, the more skilled were enjoying better times and this destroyed the chance of a mass-movement based on

economic distress. The more skilled were turning, however, to new methods of organization such as trade unionism and the cooperative movement, and these great changes brought a vital revolution in the whole character of labour organization in England. When Gladstone formed his First Ministry Trade unionism was an accepted and well-established feature of English industrial life. They could, then, grow in step with the development of industrialization, and as part of it and of the industrial life.

It is characteristic of the traditions and spirit of this new unionism that its first impulse was to get representatives into Parliament. It was radical and democratic in character, not Marxist, and it remains one of the remarkable facts of English history that although Marx and Engels lived and worked in England throughout the formative decades of the labour movement, they exercised virtually no influence at all, on its development.

The enormous increase in the population, wealth, and power of mid-Victorian England carried with it important changes in methods of economic organization and in forms of labour organization. The age of machinery was also the age of organization: and industrial relations became more impersonal, less a matter of human relationships between man and man than social relationships between one large organization and another. This new impersonality of economic relations brought with it new social tensions. On one hand men and women had to get used to being more

'organised' than they had ever been before, and this called for often painful adjustments of old ways of life and thought. Their habits, conditions of work, and even their wages were determined more for them y the interaction of big associations or by government regulation. On the other, a new stratum of middlemen had come between the mass of the workers and the owners of factory, mine, or mill: a class of managers and foremen, or of trade union organizers and government inspectors. What mattered now was the relationship to his employer. Although in the long run these changes meant greater security, improved conditions, and higher wages, in the short run they brought problems of human adjustment which were seldom solved without distress. The distress was, however, alleviated by the growing prosperity and by the Liberal spirit which prevailed during this middle generation. The worst phase of sweating and of severe hardship was over before 1850.

Chapter VIII : The Age of Prestige and Expansion

The Policy of Prestige

Mention has already been made of the almost symbolic role of Lord Palmerston in British foreign policy, the immense resources of economic power which Britain discovered during the period naturally exalted her position and importance in international affairs. The mood of self-assertiveness which this exaltation induced was perfectly expressed by Palmerston. Disraeli (1804 – 1881), in his handling of the 'Eastern Question' and of imperial affairs, continued Palmerstonian traditions in foreign policy.the years 1850 – 78 were years of great wars in Europe, but in only one of these – the costly and inconclusive Crimean War _ was Britain directly concerned. Apart from various remote colonial and far eastern skirmishes, she contrived to retain her power without getting engaged in any of the other European Wars. With this exception the chief problems of her foreign policy were therefore the adjustments made necessary by such events as the revolution of 1848, the American Civil War (181- 65), the three wars waged by Bismarck in his campaign to unite Germany by 'blood and iron', and the hostilities involved in the corresponding unification of Italy. The nature of Britain's international prestige can best be discovered by examining her attitude towards these turbulent events.

Perhaps the chief characteristic of Palmerston's attitude was a sturdy independence of judgment which took little

account of sentiment or formality in diplomacy. Believing that it was for other Powers to seek and preserve British friendship and sympathy if they valued it, and that Britain herself need not court the favour of any power in particular, he pursued what seemed at times an impulsive, temperamental, and inconsistent policy in Europe.

During the fifties and sixties, the three great forces at work in the world were liberalism, nationalism, and socialism. The first two struck sympathetic cords in Palmerston, as they did in the heart of the prosperous British middle-class. The third. As already described, left British politics almost unaffected until the seventies and eighties, despite the European activities of the first International and the part played by socialism in 1848.

It was the fear of Russian expansion, especially in the direction of the Mediterranean, and anxiety to uphold the declining Turkish Empire as a barrier to this expansion, which led Britain to take part in the Crimean War. The Crimean War is an important landmark in the history of modern warfare. It was the last time that a British ambassador, unimpeded by telegraphic orders from home, could conduct a foreign policy of his own. It was the last big war to be fought without the resources of modern science. It was the first time in Victorian England that the new forces of middle-class politics, expressed through the press and public meetings, changed the foreign policy of the government.

Similar internal division of public opinion appeared in Britain over the American Civil War which broke out in 1861. The ruling classes, especially the millowners and cotton merchants, regarded the secession of the southern States as another movement of national self-determination, and cherished strong sympathies for the southern aristocratic communities. They were comforted by the belief that slavery had nothing to do with this issue. The working classes in general saw that slavery was an issue involved in the Civil War, and that the future of constitutional government and national unity lay with the forces of the North. Britain's basic diplomatic problem, once war had broken out, was whether she should recognize the Southern Confederacy.

At the same time the United States, after a period of reconstruction and recovery following her Civil War, emerged as a great industrial Power and, in time, as a competitor to Britain in the markets of the world. In the seventies her chief on English economic life was exerted through her exports of corn. Already by 1875 nearly half the wheat consumed in Britain was imported from abroad, and the bad harvests of the late seventies increased the proportion to nearly 70 per cent. The price of British wheat dropped greatly, contributing to depression of British agriculture in these years. Britain was beginning to pay the penalty of industrial leadership, which was dependence for her food supplies on overseas producers. Her industrial output was, moreover, expanding less rapidly than before.

In these ways the picture of Britain's position internationally in the late 1870s is, therefore, one the of diminished prestige, loss of initiative in foreign diplomacy, and increasing economic dependence on foreign supplies of food, though all these changes were at first masked by the continuing aura of prestige which lasted over from the middle of the century, and the continued pre-eminence of Britain financially and commercially in the world. She remained an immense exporter of money, men, and goods.

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