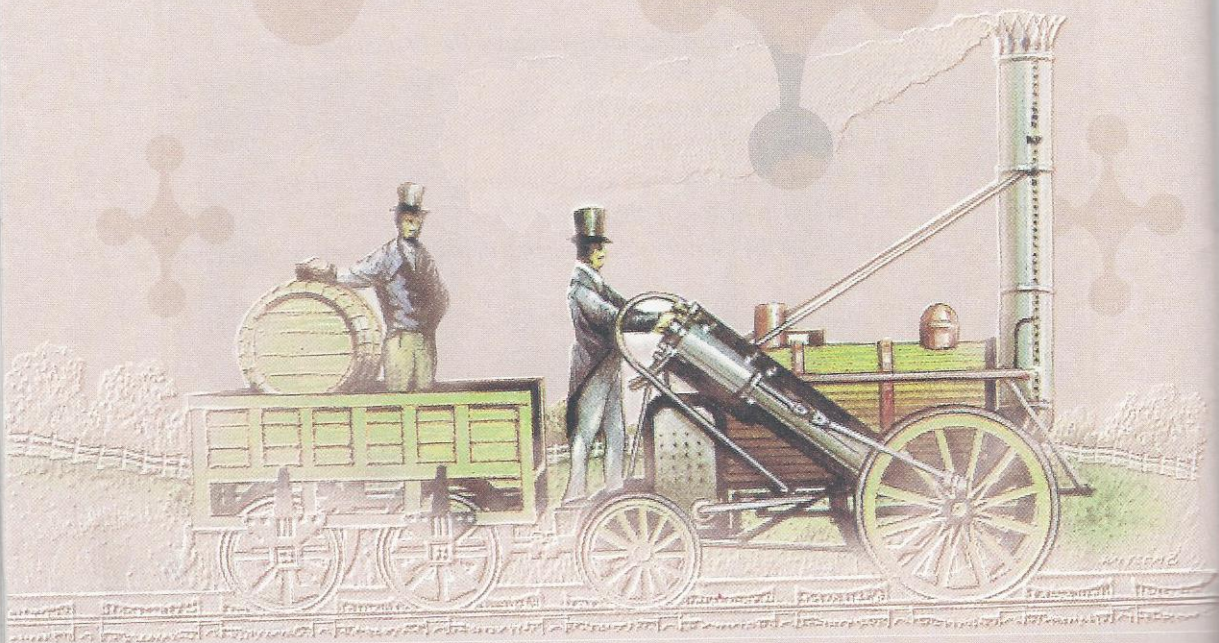


UNIT VI

THE 19TH CENTURY — THE VICTORIAN AGE OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE AND... THE NEW RIVALS

Key words, terms and concepts:

1. R. Peel, "Peelers or Bobbies"
2. Stephenson's "Rocket"
3. The electoral franchise reform (1832) and other Acts of Parliament
4. The Earl of Shaftesbury, friend of the oppressed
5. Queen Victoria (1837–1901)
6. Great English novelists
7. People's Charters (1838–1839, 1842, 1848). Chartism
8. Potato famine in Ireland, 1846
9. The Crimean War (1854–1856), Victorian politicians and their policies
10. The Education Act, 1870
11. Home Rule for Ireland
12. Britain and Ireland



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In the 19th century the post-Napoleonic wars period of reaction was being gradually reformed and more liberal ministers were included in the Government, more progressive policies and laws were adopted. Under ultra-conservative Wellington, who became Prime Minister in 1828, some reforms were introduced: R. Peel, the Home Secretary, created an efficient police force, and the policeman were called peelers or bobbies.



A Policeman (A Bobby)

The Catholic Emancipation Act was a forced decision that split the Tory party and brought the Whigs to power in 1830. The Whigs were determined to reform the Parliament and the parliamentary franchise, which had not changed since the reign of Elizabeth I. The electoral franchise and distribution of seats in Parliament were in a mess. Different parts of the country were represented in an uneven and unjust way. The county of Cornwall where the population was less

than the population of Manchester or Birmingham elected 44 men to the House of Commons, but neither of these big industrial cities elected a single MP. The voting was not secret, the whole system was corrupt and unrepresentative.

The confusion at Westminster reflected the situation in the country. There were outbreaks of machinebreaking and riots: people exploited at the factories by factory owners and left unemployed by machines replacing them, were outraged; they smashed machines blaming Ned Ludd for it and bearing his name — Lud-dites, wearing masks and damaging the factories.

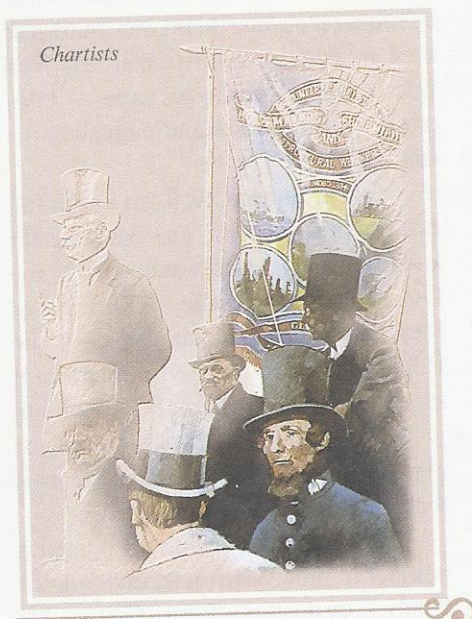
The Parliament Reform came together with railways. The Manchester and Liverpool Railway was opened by the Duke of Wellington in 1830. George Stephenson built a locomotive — “the Rocket”, which reached a maximum speed of forty eight kilometres per hour.

The technological revolution was going on strengthened by social reforms that were obviously lagging behind.

The reformed Parliament passed a number of progressive acts, due to Lord Shaftesbury the first effective Factory Act was passed, limiting the hours worked by children in cotton factories to nine, prohibiting their employment under nine years of age, and appointing inspectors to see that the decisions were enforced.

The state assumed also some responsibility for the poor. According to the Poor Law all the able bodied poor were to go to the workhouses where the conditions were terrible. It was described by Ch. Dickens in his novel “Oliver Twist”. The working classes were infuriated by the injustice and inhumanity of the Poor Law and demanded more radical reforms.

In 1838 the first petition was drawn up by leaders of first association of workers, which was called the **People's Charter**. It included six main demands for changes: the vote for all males, parliamentary constituencies of equal size, voting by secret ballot, a salary for MPs, no property qualifications for MPs, annual Parliaments. All these reforms seemed revolutionary at that time.



The Chartist movement was supported by the working people, but it had its ups and downs. The first Charter was rejected by Parliament in 1839, which was followed by protests of the working people and repressions by the Government. The Chartist leaders were arrested; the Movement was defeated when the second Petition was also rejected by Parliament in 1842.

The revival of Chartism in 1848 coincided with the Revolution in Europe and with nationalist demands of the Irish, but the third petition having been rejected,

Chartism began to decline and grew into the cooperative and trade unionist movements.

The Parliamentary struggles of the Tories and the Whigs, the working classes struggle for social rights and a better life, were all developing against the background of a drastic change in the Monarchy. The only daughter of the Hanoverian Duke of Kent turned out to be the only heiress to the British throne, and after the death of her uncle William (William IV 1830–1837) 18 year old Victoria became Queen (1837–1901). Her first Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, taught the young Queen the duties of the constitutional monarch. The accession of Queen Victoria came at a difficult time: the Whigs lost their popularity and the majority in the House of Commons; the Hungry Thirties passed into the Hungry Forties, and the alternative to the Whigs polices was the new Conservative Party, created by R. Peel. Peel's financial reforms brought revival to the country (1844), and legislation to protect factory and mine workers improved their conditions, but the disaster came with the poor harvests in Britain and Ireland. Famine in Ireland (1845) convinced Peel that the Corn Laws should be repealed (in 1846). It was the greatest victory of the free traders. But it destroyed the Tory Party and R. Peel was forced to resign.

The reforms brought cheaper food and exports from "the workshop of the world". And the Whigs inherited the benefits of Peel's reforms.

Queen Victoria's Prime Ministers followed one another due to the Political developments in Parliament: Lord Melbourne (1835–1841), Sir R. Peel, Lord John Russel, Earl of Derby, Earl of Aberdeen, Viscount Palmerstone, Benjamin



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Queen Victoria

Disraeli, W. E. Gladstone, Earl of Rosebery, Marquess of Salisbury.

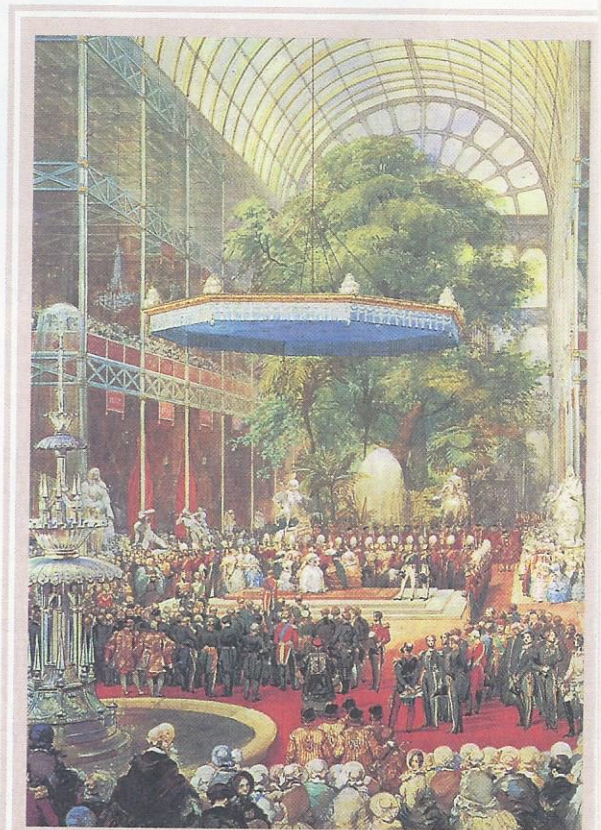
In 1840 Victoria married her cousin (see Table 6) of Saxe-Coburg of Gotha. The marriage was happy, and the Royal family became a model for moral standards in high society as well as for the middle classes.

Prince Albert became deeply interested in the British affairs, both foreign and home. He was the initiator of a great display of Victorian glory and progress in the country — the Great Exhibition of 1851. This international exhibition was quite a new idea, and Albert had to overcome a lot of opposition. The Exhibition building was an enormous glass-and-iron structure — the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, it had on display machinery and products from Britain, the Empire and other countries.

“The Crystal Palace” was the symbol of Technological progress. The new poet-laureate Tennyson wrote an ode to it. All the Victorian writers, poets, painters glorified English culture. Tennyson and

Browning dominated the poetry. Charles Dickens in his novels *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby* exposed the social evils of the time. Thackeray exposed the middle class hypocrisy in his “*Vanity Fair*”. It was a great age for novels. Women writers — the Bronte sisters, Mrs Gaskell — flourished as never before.

Thomas Hardy and Henry James were “Victorian” novelists too. The English drama was brilliantly represented by Irish talents: Oscar Wilde wrote his brilliantly entertaining comedies, Bernard Shaw’s plays were more serious but extremely witty.

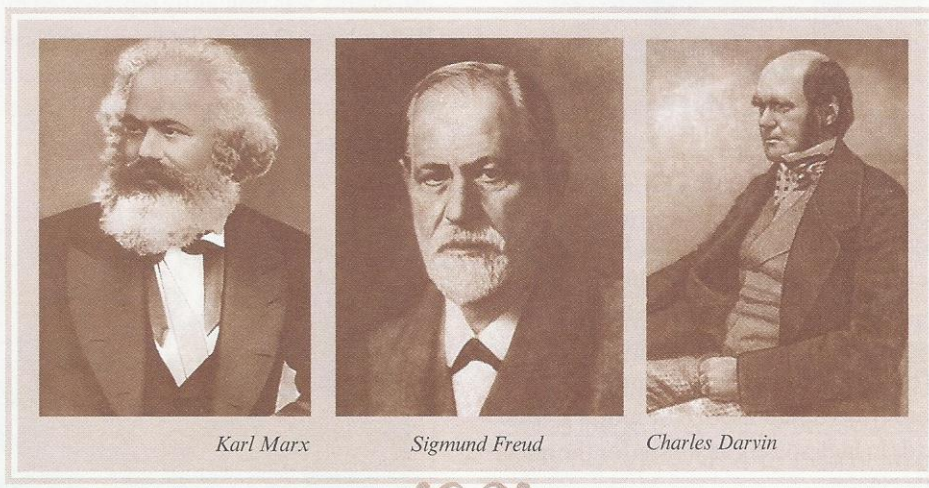


The Great Exhibition in “the Crystal Palace”

Painters of the group called the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood expressed the great Victorian nostalgia for the Middle Ages.

Victorian science was to become greatly influential on the developments in the Modern Time. These three men: K. Marx (1818–1883) — the founder of Communism, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) — the founder of psycho-analysis

The Crimean War revealed the courage of ordinary soldiers and the incompetence of the command. Newspapers reported the shocking conditions in the army hospitals, the terrible organization of supplies: a load of army boots sent out from Britain turned out to be for the left foot. The war solved nothing but it brought a glory to the remarkable work of **Florence Nightingale**, “the lady with



Karl Marx

Sigmund Freud

Charles Darwin

and Ch. Darwin — the founder of the modern theory of biological evolution — shocked the world.

Encouraged by Prince Albert, the Queen came into conflict with Palmerston. In 1854 the Crimean War broke out — when Britain and France declared war on Russia in support of Turkey. Prince Albert had supported the policy of preventing the war while Palmerston was given the Parliamentary support as the only Prime Minister capable of winning the War, and the Queen was compelled to accept him as Prime Minister in 1855. Palmerston became the symbol of British superiority in everything: in fights, in trade, in politics.

the lamp”, who organized hospitals and treatment of the wounded.

In India the British policies aroused a revolt in **1857**, it was known as the **Indian Mutiny**; and it developed into a national movement against foreign rule. There was much violence on both sides. The British brutally punished the defeated rebels, which caused a feeling of animosity that later grew into the Indian Independence movement of the twentieth century.

Queen Victoria suffered a great personal tragedy in 1861 — Prince Consort Albert died of typhoid — and the Queen went into deep mourning, withdrew from public duties and lived in isolation for a

decade. Her last years were a period of **Liberal Party** in the **Conservative** Palmerston by

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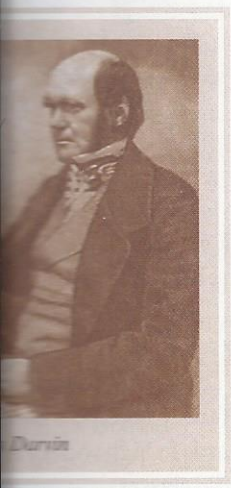
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The contest was in full swing when it had been

Jingoism of waving patriotism **B. Disraeli**, but rival, the **L. Gladstone**.

The Empire gained by the war was the result Britain possessed of trade, financial colonies were by trade, the administration was growing the British 19th century people sought

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decade. Her last thirty-five years of reign were a period of struggle between the new **Liberal Party** led by W. E. Gladstone and the **Conservatives** who were headed after Palmerston by Benjamin Disraeli.

On the great issues which dominated British politics in the last quarter of the 19th century — the extension of the Parliamentary franchise, the limitation of the Power of the House of Lords, social reform, Home Rule for Ireland and the new aggressive imperialist policy abroad — Queen Victoria strongly sympathized with Conservatives and disapproved of **Gladstone** and Liberals.

B. Disraeli became Prime Minister in 1868 and first held the office for only nine months, but he managed to establish a very close relationship with the Queen and further developed it during his second term of office (1874–1880). B. Disraeli pleased the Queen greatly by persuading Parliament to agree to grant her the title of Empress of India.

The contest of Disraeli and Gladstone was in full swing, and the two-party system had been already firmly established.

Jingoism (the word for extreme, flag waving patriotism) was encouraged by B. Disraeli, but it was condemned by his rival, the Liberal Leader, William Gladstone.

The Empire, that Great Britain had gained by the middle of the 19th century, was the result of the greatest power that Britain possessed through its command of trade, finance and manufacturing. The colonies were united by English law and by trade, the forms of governing administration varied. The whole population was growing due to the emigration from the British Isles: throughout the 18th, 19th centuries poor and disadvantaged people sought a new and a better life in



Disraeli, Victoria's favourite prime minister in her later years, had the inspiration to make her Empress of India by the Titles Bill of 1876. In this cartoon he offers her the imperial diadem in place of the British crown

the colonies. In 1850 New Zealand became the responsibility of the Crown. The population of Australia was expanding rapidly. There were four self-governing colonies: New South Wales, South of Australia, Victoria and Queensland. By the end of the century the Empire was spreading over the continents of Africa, Asia, North America, South America, Australia. The sun did not set on the Empire. The colonial office became a large and important ministry. Imperialism had become popular with the middle classes. The patriots of jingoism sounded more and more aggressive: Cecil Rhodes (the founder of Rhodesia) spoke about the British as a race superior to their colonials. The actions of the imperialists were no less dishonourable: a chain of "small colonial wars" was caused by the aggression of the British imperialism. But the Anglo-Boer War proved to be an unsuccessful surprise to

the British people and the proof of a certain weakness of the Empire (1880–1881, 1899–1902).

There was the Irish Problem: the Irish MP's in Parliament demanded Home Rule for Ireland, and Irish extremists committed terrorist actions. Gladstone supported the idea of Home Rule for Ireland — which meant the restoration of the Parliament, that they had lost by the Union with England in 1801 and the control of the Irish local internal affairs. Gladstone's own Liberal Party voted against the Home Rule Bill. The Liberal Party was split and broken. Its role as one of the two major parties in the country was over. The Liberals were to be replaced by the forthcoming **Labour Party** in the constant struggle against the conservatives.

Due to the Industrial Revolution and the strength of the Empire Great Britain was still the greatest power of the world in the last 30 years of the 19th century. Symbolic of its greatness and the expansion of the Empire were the jubilees of Queen Victoria (1887 and 1897), celebrated with great pageantry and enthusiasm of the crowds.

The nations of the New World and a strengthened Europe were becoming industrial rivals of Britain. The European

countries were partitioning the African continent, and Britain succeeded in adding great African possessions to her Empire: Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, New Zealand and Rhodesia; the Sudan was jointly administered by Britain and Egypt.

The United States since the end of the Civil War (1862–1865) had progressed greatly and rapidly, supplied the free-trade England with its food products and were developing into a great power.

The role of the United Kingdom at the end of the Victorian Era, at the end of the 19th century was highly important, jingoistic (shovinistic) imperialism and the financial strength spread over the world through the export of capital by the banks of the City, strongly influenced the internal development of the country: Anglo-Saxon shovinizism and superiority complex in the upper spheres and the trade unionism, emigration to the colonies and Dominions, political parties struggle for power were the consequences.

Meanwhile the conflicts and contradictions among the European countries were bringing the world to the brink of the World War, which was destined to bring about great changes in the British role in the world.

Questions:

1. *What reforms were introduced by the Whigs and how did they influence the situation in the country in the 30th of the 19th century?*
2. *What were the repeated attempts of the people to introduce more radical reforms? Describe the programme and the demands of the movement.*
3. *Who was the Monarch of Britain for the greater part of the 19th century? What were the political affiliations of the numerous Prime Ministers of the century?*

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4. *What can you say about the role of Prince Albert in British Affairs?*
5. *What were the greatest cultural achievements of the Victorian Age?*
6. *Why did the British start the Crimean War and who became the heroic figure of the War?*
7. *What was the policy of Britain in India?*
8. *What was the difference between the policies of B. Disraeli and Gladstone? How do you understand "jingoism"?*
9. *How did the overseas possessions of Britain expand? What was the situation in the British Empire?*
10. *What was the role and the status of Great Britain in the World at the end of the 19th century?*