

THE VICTORIAN ERA (1839-1901)



The Victorian era corresponds with the reign of Queen Victoria in England from 1839 to 1901. The word "Victorian" is now used to describe old-fashioned or narrow-minded behaviour

Victoria, was born in 1819. She inherited the throne of Great Britain at the age of eighteen. She married her mother's nephew, Prince Albert in 1840, and until his death he remained the focal point of her life (she bore him nine children.) Albert was moralistic, conscientious and progressive, if rather sanctimonious and intellectually shallow. With Victoria he made various reforms which were responsible for a great deal of the popularity later enjoyed by the British monarchy. (However, the government over which Victoria and Albert presided had, in the midst of the potato famine of 1845, continued to permit the export of grain and cattle from Ireland to England while over a million Irish peasants starved to death).

After Albert's death in 1861 a desolate Victoria remained in seclusion for ten years. Her genuine but obsessive mourning, which would occupy her for the rest of her life, played an important role in the evolution of the Victorian mentality. She travelled abroad once a year, but made few public appearances in Britain itself. She tended to dislike British politicians who criticized the conservative regimes of Europe, many of which were run by her relatives. By 1870 her popularity was at its lowest (at the time the monarchy cost the nation £400,000 per year, but it increased from then until her death. She died in 1901, having reigned for sixty-four years.

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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 the 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. There was a powerful reaction against the "Victorian parent" in the twentieth century.

Tennyson and Victorianism

What made Tennyson so Victorian was his ready acceptance of the thinking of his day, his willingness to conform to popular taste, to write a poetry that was easily understood and enjoyed (something that Robert Browning never could, or would, do, although he often said he wanted to).

<http://www.victorianweb.org/index.html>

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