

## 6 nov 2020 - The Victorian Age

### Social Background

The Victorian Age was a very complex age, marked by religious, social and political unrest and confusion.

The country underwent a gradual but continuous process of democratisation, and greater freedom was given to Catholics, and the Catholic cause led a group of reformers known as the **Oxford Movement** to advocate reforms inside the Anglican Church, in favour of the Church of Rome.

The class that benefited most from the changes of the time was the middle class, which was made up of manufacturers, merchants and bankers.

This class increased in power, and took the control of the Government. This class was also favoured by progress in industrial and technological fields.

This situation led to widespread optimism, due to colonial expansion, scientific and technical results, and improvement in transports.

Middle class people believe that happiness could be reached **through technical progress**.

The Victorians were proud of their **welfare**, of their good manners, of their middle class values, and tended to ignore the social problems that still afflicted most of the population. The working class lived in misery and distress. The new urban conditions, and the growth of slums have created a lot of health problems.

Whole families were often crowded in a single room, where lack of hygiene, occasionally led to cholera.

The government created the **work houses**, in order to solve these problems.

They were institutions built by government and run by parishes, where families who couldn't support themselves were confined. Here sexes were segregated and people were barely fed. People were always hungry and dirty and miserable.

The reason why the work houses were built was the poverty, whether it was the result of bad behaviour or bad luck, was virtually regarded as a crime, and it was penalised as such. This was the mentality for which workhouses were created.

Also debtors were held in work houses, or at least in jail.

Also education had its problems, because teachers were often incompetent, but they

controlled the students through corporal punishment.

This particular situation which saw prosperity and progress on the one hand, and poverty, ugliness and injustice on the other, which opposed conformism to corruption, moralism and philanthropy to money and capitalistic greediness, and which separated private life from public behaviour, was called **Victorian Compromise**.

The situation nevertheless aroused the concern of many and many reformers and theorists, who, for social or humanitarian reasons, tried to improve living conditions of the poor, at all levels, including hospitals, schools and prisons.

It is thanks to their care and actions that parliament passed so many acts regulating work, sanitation, the condition of children, the exploitation of teenagers.