

10 nov 2020 - The Victorian Age

Evangelicalism

A religious movement that acted in this period was **Evangelicalism**; it was inspired by the teachings of John Wesley, the founder of **Methodism**.

The evangelicals were deeply concerned with *human problems* and *social reforms*. They contributed to the abolition of slavery and the First Reform Bill.

They had a puritanical view of life, so they advocate

- the abolition of certain public entertainments,
- a strict observance of Sunday
- very strict code of behavior.

Bentham's Utilitarianism

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According to Utilitarianism, an action is morally right if it has consequences that lead to happiness, and wrong if it brings about the reverse. Therefore all institutions should be tested in the light of reason and common sense to determine whether they are useful, measuring the extent to which they provide for the material happiness of the greatest number of people.

Utilitarianism suited the interests of the middle class and contributed to the Victorian conviction that any problem could be overcome through reason.

Fabian Society

It was in this particular atmosphere that the **Fabian Society** was founded in 1884, by Sidney and Beatrice Webbs. It was inspired by Marxist doctrines, and it consists in **socialists** who advocated gradual reforms instead of drastic revolutionary measures. Its name derived from *Quintus Fabius Maximus*, which was a general called "the delayer", because in his campaign against Annibale avoided direct engagement.

Respectability

Manners underwent a deep change in this period; under the influence of Queen Victoria herself the age became excessively **puritan**; sex became a taboo subject, and all the words with sexual connotation were replaced by synonyms.

The key word in this period was **respectability**

Victorian Family

The conventional morality of the time found its best expression within the family, where the father was the *authority* and the mother was to be *submissive* and *fruitful*. In fact Victorian Families were usually very large, also because Queen Victoria herself had 9 children.

Middle class women were expected to be *frail*, *innocent* and *pure*. They were confined within the family. They were devoted to *respectable jobs* like teaching.

But restrictions involved men too; they were forbidden to gamble, swear and drink hard.

Clothes were very formal because appearance was very important.

The Victorian House

Victorian people were busy with making money and social climbing, so they had little time for art, and this indifference led to bad taste in buildings and furnishings.

These needed to be a status symbols, and so houses became pretentious, but not beautiful. The interiors were overcrowded with *ornaments*, *decorations* and *furniture*.

Challenges from the scientific field

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In his work *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* Charles Darwin presented his theory of evolution and natural selection. He later developed it in his work *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*.

According to Darwin's theory:

- all living creatures in existence have developed their forms through a slow process of change and adaptation in a struggle for survival;
- favorable physical conditions determine the survival of a species, unfavorable ones its extinction ;
- man evolved, like any other animal, from a less highly organized form, namely a monkey.

On the one hand, Darwin's theory discarded the version of creation given by the Bible; on the other hand, it seemed to show that the universe was not static but perpetually developing, that the strongest survived and the weakest deserved to be defeated.

The Oxford Movement

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British Catholics replied to the challenges of science by returning to the ancient doctrines

and rituals. The religious revival found its expression in the movement headed by the English cardinal John Henry Newman, which went under the name of "Oxford Movement" because it began at Oxford University.

Victorian Poetry

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During Victoria's Reign poetry became more concerned with social reality.

This led on the one hand to the creation of majestic poetry linked to the myth and the belief of the greatness of England; on the other hand to the creation of poetry more inclined towards anti-myth and disbelief which had to solve the ethical problems raised by science and progress

Now the poet was seen as a "prophet" and a "philosopher". People expected that he could reconcile faith and progress, as well as sprinkle a little romance over the unromantic materialism of modern life.

The major poets of the age were **Alfred Tennyson** and **Robert Browning**.