

3 *The Victorian age*

DOMINATION

INFLUENCE

OPPOSITION

RÉVOLTE



Omnibus Life in London (1859), by William Maw Egley

1. Queen Victoria (1819-1901)



When Victoria came to the throne in 1837, the British monarchy was held in very low esteem. When she died in 1901, her sense of vocation had turned it into a revered institution.

During her reign, the British Empire developed into the greatest in history and the Industrial Revolution made Britain the world's predominant producer of manufactured goods. Queen Victoria also presided over reforms that

made the country a constitutional government. Despite her popularity, Britain's power was being challenged abroad and there was poverty at home.

1. Why is the 19th century referred to as "the Victorian age" in Britain?
2. What made Victoria's reign so exceptional?
3. In 1900, Britain's empire covered one fifth of the landmass of the globe. Name ten countries which were under British rule.

2. From country to city



London: A Pilgrimage (1872), by Gustave Doré

The Industrial Revolution accelerated the migration of the population from country to city. The result of this movement was the development of overcrowded cities. By 1900, 80% of the population lived in cities. These cities were "organized" into geographical zones based on social class – the poor in the inner city, with the more fortunate living further away from the city core. This was made possible by the development of suburban rail transit.

The Victorian city of London was a city of startling contrasts. New building and affluent development went hand in hand with cramped row housing¹ and horrifying slums where people lived in the worst conditions imaginable. The population surged during the 19th century, from about 1 million in 1800 to over 6 million a century later. This growth far exceeded London's ability to look after the basic needs of its citizens.

A combination of coal-fired stoves and poor sanitation made the air heavy and foul-smelling. Immense amounts of raw sewage² were dumped straight into the Thames River. 2100 km of tunnels and pipes were then built to divert sewage outside the city. This made a drastic impact on the death rate, and outbreaks of cholera dropped dramatically.

David ROSS and Britain Express, 2001

1. *maisons contiguës* – 2. *eaux d'égout non traitées*

1. Before reading the text, observe the engraving and describe it.
2. Read the text and find the English equivalents of (in the right order): *surpeuplé* – *centre ville* (two expressions) – *saisissant* – *cossu* – *étroit* – *taudis* – *augmenter* – *croissance* – *poêle* – *nauséabond* – *déverser* – *tuyau* – *taux* – *épidémie*.
3. Which words and phrases from the text are illustrated by Doré's engraving?
4. What were the causes and consequences of the fantastic growth of London's population during the 19th century?

3. What makes Victorians Victorian

For much of this century the term Victorian, which literally describes things and events in the reign of Queen Victoria, conveyed connotations of “prudish, repressed and old fashioned”.

5 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.

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 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.

George P. LANDOW, *The Victorian Web*

**syndicalisation*

1. Describe the picture briefly and give your impressions. Then read the text and find the passage it illustrates. Justify.
2. What is commonly thought of the Victorians? (Quote the text.) Does George P. Landow agree? Justify.

4. Child labour in Victorian Britain

At the beginning of Victoria’s reign, most poor children as young as 5 had to earn a living. They would work in coal mines, cotton mills, as chimney sweeps... In the country they picked up stones before the crops were sown or scared birds away. Orphans and homeless children were often sold to employers. An 1842 report revealed that half of all children died before their 5th birthday.

Throughout Victoria’s reign, new laws were passed to improve children’s living conditions and make it illegal to employ the very young:

1842 – The Mines Act banned children under 10 from working in mines.

1868 – Under the Agricultural Gangs Act, no child under 8 was to be employed in farm work.

1870 – School became compulsory for all children (Education Act).

1890 – Education was made free for all children.



1. Read the text and find the English equivalents of: *filature* – *ramoneur* – *récolte* – *semer* – *effrayer* – *améliorer* – *interdire* – *obligatoire*.
2. In 1870 all children had to learn the three Rs: Reading, aRithmetic and... What is the third R?
3. What do you know about child labour in the world nowadays?

5. "I want some more..."

1. Look at the picture before reading the text and guess the situation. What can you read on the master's and boys' faces?
2. Why did Oliver Twist have to ask for more food?
3. What were the reactions to Oliver's demand and the consequences for him?



Charles DICKENS
(1812-1870)

After his father was imprisoned for debt, 12-year-old Charles had to work in a factory. His deprived childhood inspired his works about

child labour, orphanages and the need for prison reform. He was a reporter and made his name with *The Pickwick Papers* (1836). Main novels: *Oliver Twist* (1837), *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *David Copperfield* (1850), *Hard Times* (1854), *Great Expectations* (1861).

*Oliver Twist, a 9-year-old poor orphan,
has been sent to a workhouse¹.*

Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months: at last they got so voracious and wild with hunger, that lots were cast² who should walk up to the master after supper that evening, and ask for more; and it fell to Oliver Twist.

The evening arrived; the boys took their places. The master, in his cook's uniform, stationed himself at the copper³; his assistants ranged themselves behind him; the gruel⁴ was served out; and a long grace was said over the short commons⁵. The gruel disappeared; the boys whispered to each other, and winked at Oliver, while his next neighbours nudged him.

Child as he was, he was desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery. He rose from the table, and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said, somewhat alarmed at his own temerity:

"Please, sir, I want some more."

The master was a fat, healthy man; but he turned very pale. He gazed in stupefied astonishment on the small rebel for some seconds, and then clung for support to the copper. The assistants were paralysed with wonder; the boys with fear.

"What!" said the master at length, in a faint voice.

"Please, sir," replied Oliver, "I want some more." [...]

The board⁶ were sitting in solemn conclave, when Mr. Bumble rushed into the room in great excitement, and addressing the gentleman in the high chair, said, "Mr. Limbkins, I beg your pardon, sir! Oliver Twist has asked for more!"

There was a general start. Horror was depicted on every countenance.

"For more!" said Mr. Limbkins. "Compose yourself, Bumble, and answer me distinctly. Do I understand that he asked for more, after he had eaten the supper allotted by the dietary⁷?"

"He did, sir," replied Bumble.

"That boy will be hung," said the gentleman in the white waistcoat. "I know that boy will be hung."

Oliver was ordered into instant confinement⁸; and a bill was next morning pasted on the outside of the gate, offering a reward of five pounds to anybody who would take Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish⁹. In other words, five pounds and Oliver Twist were offered to any man or woman who wanted an apprentice to any trade, business, or calling.

Charles DICKENS, *Oliver Twist* (1837) (abridged)

1. hospice - 2. on tira au sort - 3. chaudron en cuivre - 4. gruau (= purée d'avoine) - 5. maigre pitance - 6. membres du conseil d'administration - 7. ici, établi par les règles alimentaires - 8. détention - 9. paroisse