

THE VICTORIAN AGE.

Historical background.

England was moving steadily in the direction of becoming Europe's most stable and prosperous country. The industrial revolution, the railway age, steam engines were being used in mines, factories and ships. Small towns were beginning to swell into smoky centres of manufacturing industry. All this was taking place under a government and legislature that were still narrowly restricted to the privileged few, who were wealthy by birth or becoming wealthy in commerce.

Despite the industrial revolution, the factories, mills, mines and workshops, England was still an almost entirely agricultural country. The English countryside was a part of everyone's existence. The industrial revolution, however, was just beginning to bring dirt and squalor, ugliness and crime, into the lives of the poor whom circumstances forced to live and work in the mills and factories of the new towns. Labourers were being unfairly treated without redress, women workers were also ill-treated and underpaid, while children were often overworked in abominable conditions.

Society in the country was still effectively feudal. A small agricultural community was still more or less governed by the landlord or lord of the manor to whom rents were paid by tenants of farms or cottages. No one else in the rural community had much authority except for the local parson, or to a lesser extent an apothecary or surgeon.

Literary background.

In the first half of the 19C the English became a nation of avid novel-readers. Theatres were disreputable, possibly even immoral. Poetry, especially Byron's was popular but people wanted stories. Women had already triumphantly demonstrated their ability to compete successfully with their brother novelists. Mrs Radcliffe (1764-1823), Fanny Burney (1752-1840), Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849), Jane Austen (1775-1817).

Contributing to a rapid rise in the popularity of the novels were the growth of a moneyed, leisured and educated middle class reading public, and an increase in the number of circulating libraries.

Serialization was to some extent an artistic strain on the novelists, but many major works, particularly those by Dickens, Thackeray and Hardy were first published in this way.

Thackeray was born in 1811, Dickens in 1812, Trollope in 1815, Charlotte Bronte in 1816, Emily Bronte in 1818, George Eliot in 1819, Samuel Butler in 1835, George Meredith in 1828 and Thomas Hardy in 1840.

The novelists of the first half of the century identified themselves with their age and shared a special climate of ideas, feelings and assumptions. They accepted the idea of progress without much question. The age represented the triumph of protestantism. The taboo on the frank recognition and expression of sex had come into existence slowly. Fielding was banished.

Later novelists came to question and criticize and became hostile to the dominant assumptions of the age. The character of scientific discovery was seriously disturbing the 19C minds. Instead of providing evidence that the universe is both stable and transparent to the intellect, it showed the universe to be incessantly changing and probably governed by the laws of chance. After the publication of *The Principles of Geology* (1830-3) by Charles Lyell and later *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) by Charles Darwin, many intellectuals were forced into religious disbelief, or into some form of personal religions which, though it might contain elements of Christianity, was essentially untheological.

The Scottish philosopher, David Hume, in his *Treatise on Human Nature*, carried scepticism so far that it offered a challenge for reformulation by Immanuel Kant - a German philosopher of Scottish descent. Another Scot, Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) made German thought widely known in Britain, Goethe being the chief influence. Carlyle led a new spirit of reform, a desire for individual fulfilment and liberation, "the religion of hero worship" or cult of great men, a reaction against the principle of laissez-faire and the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham and James Stuart Mill. He inspired the stream of "social problem" novels between 1830 and 1860, notably some of the best by Elizabeth Gaskell, Disraeli, and Dickens.

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION.

The Industrial Revolution is a process that began in the middle of the 18C and covers a wide period of more than a century. Britain became for the first time the richest country in the world, but at the price of being the first to encounter the immense social problems that arise from the rapid development of urban industry.

Transport.

In the 16C the care of the roads was in charge of the country parishes, under the supervision of the magistrates, but the work was neglected.

In the second half of the 17C the turnpike system was introduced to transfer the cost of road repairs on to the road users. The turnpikes were barriers across the roads at suitable places, where travellers were compelled to pay tolls before they were allowed to proceed.

In the second half of the 18C roads were immensely improved by the great engineers Macadam, who invented the method of building road surfaces from broken stone, and Telford, who was also a great bridge builder. By the end of the century foreign observers acknowledged English roads to be the best in Europe.

For heavy transport, water was still more convenient than land and in the 16C and 17C rivers were deepened, locks were built and the first canals were dug. But again in the second half of the 18C the Duke of Bridgewater was responsible for the construction of a system of canals throughout England.

However, the great revolution came with the steam-railway, which was more economical and made extensive travel possible. The formerly enclosed, regional cultures lost their self-sufficiency, so that British civilization became more uniform. But perhaps the most important effect was that railways increased the movement of population from the countryside into the town.

Urban growth.

The Agricultural Revolution had important effects on society. The new methods of farming made it profitable as never before, but they required capital investment and large scale enclosure. Unable to adapt to the new circumstances the peasant farmer had to sell and he emigrated to the colonies or drifted to the industrial towns where there was a growing demand for labour.

This rapid urban growth was of course produced by the development of new factories operating with steam power (Watt), other discoveries such as the battery (Volta) and the textile mill (Cartwright), and to the spread of the railways in the 1830s and 1840s.

Growth of the economy.

Economy grew from 1846 because of Free Trade. Salaries were low and therefore, industries became more competitive in terms of exports. The basis for this growth were three: coal mining, iron foundry and the cotton industry.

Social and political changes through literature.

Britain had emerged from the long war with France (1793-1815) as a great power and as the world's predominant economy.

This new status as the world's first urban and industrialized society, was responsible for the extraordinary wealthy vitality and self-confidence of the period. The juxtaposition of this new industrial wealth with a new kind of urban poverty is only one of the paradoxes that characterize this long and diverse age.

The biggest social change in English history is the transfer, between 1750 and 1850 of large masses of the population from the countryside to the towns; the basic social classes were transformed from small farmers and rural craftsmen into an urban proletariat and a lower middle class of industrial employers.

It affected the north of England and parts of the midlands far more than the south. The north was pushing against the conservatism of the south.

The evidence of this contrast is frequent in mid 19C novels; it is the title of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North & South*, in George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, and in Dicken's *Bleak House*.

We find modern society and the old rural way of life contrasted in Hardy's novels, such as *Tess of the Urbervilles* or *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

The towns grew rapidly, without care for dignity or for human welfare. Women and children were exploited in factories. The industrial towns were no better than jungles where the law was the survival of the fittest. We can see all these problems in Mrs Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and in Dicken's *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*, *Hard Times*...

Change in women's social role.

In the middle of the 18C, there was a fashionable circle of women intellectuals known as the "Bluestockings" in London, led by Mrs. Montagu. At the end of the century, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) made her well-known appeal for women's education, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), a right not recognized until the State Education Acts of 1870 and 1902.

Men of letters often had a circle of close women friends with whom they corresponded (Swift, Pope, Richardson, Samuel Johnson...).

Boarding schools for girls, like Miss Pinkerton's Academy in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* were being opened in increasing numbers.

But the changing position of women in society was not altogether to their advantage, and this was particularly true of attitudes to the sexual relationship, especially those of Puritanism. The Puritan elevation of marriage and the family into something more sacred was incompatible with a frank acknowledgement of sensuality. The belief came into existence that a good woman does not have sexual desire. Since Puritanism was mainly a middle class set of codes, there tended to be a cleavage between middle and upper classes in this matter. It is evident in the difference between the upper class Fielding, whose women are "natural" and the idealized women in Richardson's novels. In the 19C, the predominance of the middle classes caused the Puritan, Richardsonian view to prevail.

Women of strong character began to open up professions hitherto closed to them. They became writers, journalists and nurses. In industrial areas they began to achieve economic independence at a low level as workers in factories.

The Married Women's Property Act of 1882 and 1892 removed the husband's control over his wife's money. Yet political changes did not take place until after the First World War when the 1918 Act allowed women over 30 to vote. Women over 21 had to wait until 1939.

Economic and political power of the middle class.

Thanks to the industrialization the increasingly powerful middle-class became a large and a very rich class. In spite of this, at the beginning of the 19C, politically speaking, they were an underprivileged class.

The system of electoral representation in Parliament was an ancient one and favoured landed society. The middle class fought hard and victoriously in the first half of the 19C to secure the political representation to which they were entitled.

They were the class portrayed in the novels and to whom the novels were written. Thus Victorian novelists were inclined to treat the predominance of money with angry satire. We have the arrogant "nouveau riche" merchant such as Thackeray's Mr Osborne in *Vanity Fair* (1848) and in Dickens's Podsnap in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865).

Between the rich middle classes and the workers, a very large lower middle class existed; its members populate the novels of Dickens and H.G. Wells more than the members of any other class. Its bulk was the large number of small traders brought into existence by the extensive "consumer society" which the Industrial Revolution created. At one extreme, the lower middle class met the new kind of skilled worker, the engineer and mechanic; at the other, it met the upper middle class in the retail business, in the teaching and medical professions and in banking. The lower middle classes tended therefore to be the most fluid of all the classes. It was the most unstable in political sympathies, and consequently often the decisive section of the society in elections. Better educated than the average working class man, its members helped to provide leadership in Labour movements.

Chartism.

In 1819, a crowd of unemployed weavers and their families -60.000 of them- gathered on St. Peter's Fields,

near Manchester, to listen to Leigh "Orator" Hunt declaim the cause of their misfortunes. The police ordered that the speaker be arrested, but as it was impossible to reach him, the Hussars were commanded to charge a way through the defenceless crowd. Eleven people were killed and more than 400 injured. The Government's reputation was destroyed and the horror of the Peterloo massacre lasted long after. During the next 30 years, the problems caused by industrial growth, and the grinding poverty of the working man only increased.

The center of the textile industry, Manchester was making a whole new class rich. Not all achieved their wealth at the expense of their fellow men. Some factory owners organized a shorter (11-hour) day; some run factory schools for the children working there. The town had trebled in size. Much of the new housing thrown up was appalling. At a time when an agricultural labourer had a life-expectancy of 38 years, that of a Manchester labourer was just 17. Well over half the children of Manchester labourers died before the age of five.

In some areas, like "little Ireland", there was no water supplies or sewerage at all, and refuse of all kinds was thrown into unpaved streets built narrow so as to crowd in the maximum number of back-to-back dwellings. Many families had no furniture at all, beds were of straw. Frequently they share corner of the same chamber.

The 1832 Reform Act extended the right to vote to most middle-class men. The labouring classes, however, were still without a voice in Parliament. A feeling was growing that the Government should be doing something.

In 1839 the London Working Men's Association drew up the Charter which gave them their name. It attracted support from Manchester, Birmingham and Wales. Presented by Thomas Attwood to the House of Commons, it demanded the right to vote for all men, and abolishing of property qualification to entitle persons to sit in the House of Commons. The Charter was greeted with howls of derision by MPs and the House refused to receive the petition. It was refused again three years later. Meanwhile, bad harvests had forced up the price of bread, a slump threw 10,000 weavers out of work in Manchester alone, and the disastrous Irish potato blight sent thousands of emigrants into the North-West of England.

1848 was a decisive year not only in England but all over Europe. A wave of revolts broke out from the Austro-Hungarian Empire to Paris. The Chartist, who had by now one Member of Parliament, Feargus O'Connor, elected in Nottingham, present the Charter for the third time. In his support, a vast crowd of unemployed, students strikers, and Chartist sympathizers, estimated at between 15,000 and 100,000 converged gathered at Kennington Common, London. Wild promises of nationalization and redistribution of land struck terror into the property-owners. London prepared itself for a revolution, with barricades and an army of special constables including Louis Philippe, the King of France, deposed by the Second Republic in Paris. London's defence was put in the hands of the Duke of Wellington.

At the last moment, Feargus O'Connor was warned by the Commissioner of Police of the plans to protect London. He faltered then and there. After a long and rambling speech to his supporters, he left the great crowd and went, with just a small delegation in three cabs, to the House of Commons, while the confused crowd got soaked in the down-pour of rain, and eventually drifted, cold and wet to a hundred of different refuges. The Charter was rejected for the third and last time.

In many cities of the North, rioting and strikes followed, but the action was unco-ordinated. Troop-trains were quickly dispatched to put down any unrest. The leadership of the Chartists collapsed. The great downfall of the Chartist lay in their isolation from the middle class.

Trade Unions were beginning to provide a more direct weapon of change. Also, a succession of better harvest brought down the price of bread, and the Manchester-based Anti-Corn Law League organized the import of cheaper corn from abroad in time of bad harvests in England.

But the English upheaval had an impact in Europe. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 and cited the examples of Manchester factories to encourage German working-class uprisings.

Political changes.

Though Parliament was the unquestioned victor in the long struggle with the 17C kings, England was by no means yet a democratic country. There was an archaic electoral system whereby some of the new industrial cities were unrepresented in Parliament while "rotten boroughs" (communities which had become depopulated) elected the nominees of the local squire.

In 1832, the passing of a Reform Bill had seemed to satisfy many of the demands of the middle classes who were gradually taking over control of England's economy. The bill extended the right to vote to all men owning property worth ten pounds or more in annual rent. In effect the voting public hereafter included the lower middle classes but not the working classes (they had to wait until 1867 when a second Reform Bill was passed).

All these issues can be seen in George Eliot's novels. She campaigned for secular education, trade unions, etc.

Free Trade & Political Rise of the working classes.

The Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 was a turning point for British society. The Corn Laws protected English agriculture by imposing taxes on imported corn. It deprived the market of cheap food and thus weakened the industrial labour force. By their reappealing, the government, in effect, acknowledged that Britain was no longer basically an agricultural country, but an industrial one; and by supplying the working class with its most urgent need - cheap food- it bowed to the alliance of the middle classes against the landed classes.

The mining and metal working classes which were virtually created by the Industrial Revolution led to a working class aristocracy, and provided a natural leadership in the second half of the 19C. It was from such resources that the trade union movement grew up, and achieved national unification by the establishment of the Trade Union Congress in 1868.

The Conservative and Liberal politicians saw the necessity of winning working-class support. Disraeli gave the urban workers the right to vote in elections and to sit in Parliament in 1867, and the Liberals gave it to the agricultural workers in 1884; in 1870, universal primary education was established (Forster's Act).

In the last twenty years of the 19C the unskilled workers also achieved trade union organization and by 1900 the working classes were sufficiently well consolidated to form their own Labour Party. All these issues are also discussed in Mrs. Gaskell's novels.

Discussion Topics

- The Victorian Age: its social and intellectual background.
- What are the connotations inherent to the word "Victorian" ?
- Point out the most important social and industrial transformations going on at the time.
- Did writers, and intellectuals in general, agree on a feeling of optimism in the face of the strong economic growth ?

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The Victorian Period by Steve Shaffer

Queen Victoria had a profound effect on the nineteenth century. Many events occurred during her reign in England and in the rest of the world. Many places in the British colonies were named after her. Even the nineteenth century has been referred to as the Victorian Era or Victorian England or the Victorian Age.

Victoria also changed the way the monarchy in Britain worked. During her reign Britain was the most prosperous nation in the world. England had gone from a rural society to an urban one. Britain did not lose a war during her reign. She also inspired authors to do writings on human rights and saving the poor. Victoria affected the rest of Europe because she was the "Grandmother of Europe". She put on the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Golden Jubilee, and the Diamond Jubilee, to show of how great the British Empire was. The British created a new renaissance.

One of these events was the 1839-1842 Opium War in China. The Chinese had been trading spices for British money for many years. The British wanted to balance the trade balance and decided to trade opium for spices. Opium is a very addictive drug and most of the Chinese population became hooked on it. The trade balance had tipped in favor of the British and the Chinese became mad. Advisors to the Chinese Monarchy told them that they needed to get rid of the opium. The Chinese and the British soon were at war. To the world's surprise the British won. The British were given Hong Kong in a treaty with the Chinese after the war.

Another event during Victoria's reign was the 1853-1856 Crimean War. The British were in an alliance with the Ottoman Empire and other European countries against the Russians. The war was called the Crimean War because it was fought mainly on the Crimean Peninsula in modern-day Ukraine. The Alliance won because the Russians could not supply their troops. The Russian railroads became broken and the Russians could not fix them.

The Boer War (1899-1902) was fought in South Africa between the British colonists and the Dutch colonists (called Boers) living in South Africa. This war is often called the first "total" war, because both sides fought endlessly. In the end the British won and all of South Africa was under British control.

Victoria was an important proponent in transferring control of India from the East India Company to the British government in 1858. Victoria was declared "Empress of India" in 1876.

The British gained control of Egypt (with the Suez Canal) and many other areas. The British Empire became the richest country in the world during the reign of Queen Victoria. There were many sayings like, "The sun never sets on the British Empire", and "The workshop of the world", that described Britain in the nineteenth century.

When Victoria was made queen in 1838, the British public's view of the British Monarchy was not a good one. Britain needed a "people's monarch". Queen Victoria had her first Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, educate her in politics and government. When her husband, Prince Albert died in 1861, Victoria mourned and was in self-imposed exile for ten years. The British nation mourned with her. Victoria started to wear black clothing and continued to for many years. She also had the longest reign of any British monarch, sixty-three years.

Victoria's ideals were the ones of most of the British public. Her ideals were very puritan. Being a puritan meant that she believed in strict Christianity and discipline. Many paintings show her with "her nosed turned up" in sternness. She heavily believed in discipline. Because she mourned the death of her husband for so long it went along with the Victorian mentality. The Great Exhibition of 1851 was a large show of Victorian ideals. The exhibition was held in the Crystal Palace, which was a palace made out of crystal and had a new architectural design. The Crystal Palace was built for the same reason that the later Eiffel Tower was built. The reason was to show off the building, the Crystal Palace for The Great Exhibition and the Eiffel Tower for the World's Fair. The Golden Jubilee of 1887 and the Diamond Jubilee of 1897 were also examples of Victoria putting on an exhibition.

Many advances in literature and art happened during her reign. It was like a new renaissance in

England. Many new places had been explored, like in Africa by the Scottish explorer Dr. Livingstone. The British made many advances in the academic field.

Victoria had a great impact on Europe as well. She had been called the "Grandmother of Europe". Two of her grandsons were Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany and Czar Nicholas II of Russia. Many of her children and grandchildren married into the other royal families of Europe.

Victoria was said not to be the real reason why the Victorian Age was so successful in England. Most of the real credit should go to her very able prime ministers. The two most famous prime ministers were Benjamin Disraeli and Lord Melbourne. They guided her, along with Prince Albert, in the ways of politics.

Many places around the world are named after Queen Victoria. Lake Victoria, in Africa and is the lake where the Nile River starts, was named for Victoria, along with Victoria falls by the Scottish explorer Dr. Livingstone. Victoria, a state in Australia, is also named for the queen. The city of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada is also named for the monarch. Other cities, states, and landforms are named for the famous monarch.

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ELIZABETH GASKELL (1810-1865)

Biographical notes.

1810 Elizabeth Gleghorn Stevenson, born in Chelsea. Sister to eight children, whom only herself and her brother John survived.

1811 Her mother dies. Her father, a Unitarian and the Keeper of the Treasury Records sent Elizabeth to live with her aunt in Cheshire. Until she was 14 she lived at her aunt's large red-brick farm. She learnt housekeeping, cooking and spent her spare time reading or sewing.

1823 She went as a boarder to Avonbank school in Stratford-upon-Avon, which was run by her stepmother's relatives (her father had remarried in 1814).

1827 Returned to Knotsford.

1827 Her brother John writes to her telling her he has become a mariner with the East India Company and is setting sail for a new life in India. Shortly afterwards he was reported missing, presumed drowned at sea.

1827-29 She goes to live with her devastated father until he died in 1829.

1829-31 Elizabeth live in Newcastle, at the home of a distant family connection, William Turner, a Unitarian minister and teacher.

1831 An outbreak of cholera in Newcastle sent Elizabeth to Edinburgh. She visited Turner's daughter in Manchester. She was married to a senior Unitarian minister. His junior minister was William Gaskell.

1832 W. Gaskell was a learned man who was to make his name as a German scholar, a Professor of English History and Literature, an authority on Lancastrian dialect and a writer of hymns. Elizabeth and William felt a swift mutual attraction and married. After a month's blissful honeymoon in Wales, they settled in Manchester.

1834 -37 She had a son, who died, and two daughters.

1837 Her beloved aunt died. She left a legacy of £80 a year to help the Gaskells.

1838 Corresponds with William Howitt, a famous contemporary author, who encourages her to write.

1842-44 She has two more children. One dies of scarlet fever. Elizabeth is overcome by grief and depression. She is strongly encouraged to write. The novel that evolved was *Mary Barton*. Although flawed in some respects, it owes much of its power to a bereft woman's urgent need to ease her own anguish, and to her compassionate insight into the conditions of the working class.

1846 Her fourth daughter is born

1848 *Mary Barton* published under the pen-name Cotton Mather Mills, esq., an attempt to avoid causing trouble to her husband, who preached to the wealthy mill-owners she criticised.

1850 The success of her first novel brought Mrs Gaskell to social prominence. Dickens was keen for her to contribute to his new journal, *Household Words*. And so, *Cranford*, was born. This same year she met Charlotte Bronte. They became good friends. When Charlotte died in 1855, Mr Bronte commissioned Mrs Gaskell to write his daughter's biography.

1853 *Cranford*.

1857 *Life of Charlotte Bronte*. While holidaying in Rome with two of her daughter she met Charles Eliot Norton, a young Unitarian intellectual from America, sixteen years her junior, and an admirer of her work. An intense friendship grew up between them. Norton returned to America and Gaskell to face the uproar caused by her book, but the two maintained a regular correspondence until her death.

1858-62 Invited by Florence Nightingale's (forged the modern concept of nursing in the field hospitals of Crimea) family to their house in Derbyshire to work on *North and South*. Travelled abroad frequently with her daughters.

1863 *Sylvia's Lovers*. Finishes *Wives and Daughters*. Purchased a large house in Hampshire, keep a secret from William Gaskell whom she hoped to persuade to retire there.

1864 *Cousin Phillis*

1865 While visiting her new house with her son-in-law and two daughters, Mrs Gaskell died suddenly but peacefully, while taking tea in the afternoon.

1866 *Wives and Daughters*

The Unitarian faith favoured girls' education and were not hostile to feminine achievement. It stood for freedom of thought and action. Neither dogmatic nor censorious. From a witty, talkative, gay and vivacious beauty, Elizabeth Gaskell matured into a woman of astounding energy and hard-won experience. Her husband never attempted to dominate her. The poverty and injustice she witnessed set her writing, but she never let literature outweigh the other aspects of her busy life. Her extensive charitable work among the poor gave her first novels both their impetus and their insight. *Mary Barton* was not intended as a political plea, but inevitably it had political implications. Manchester mill-owners and the Tory press were outraged. Thomas Carlyle praised the author.

Mrs Gaskell admired Dickens's work but she found him too demanding. The friction between contributor and editor became serious when *North and South* began to appear in *Household Words* and Mrs. Gaskell complained about deadlines. She declared she was "*sick of writing*". Her letters often give an impression of a frenzied activity which was no doubt to blame for the occasional breakdowns in her health.

North and South is sometimes seen as a retreat from the abrasive social criticism of *Mary Barton*. The chief characters are middle -rather than working- class, and the message of kindness and reconciliation between classes is made abundantly clear. This may also owe something to an increased prosperity in Manchester in 1850s which suggested grounds for optimism. Having written two "industrial" books, Mrs Gaskell turned to less contentious moral and psychological subjects.

Works: *Mary Barton* (1848), *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* (1857), *North and South* (1855), *Tales of Mystery and Horror* (1878), *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), *Cousin Phillis* (1864), *Wives and Daughters* (1866).

Cranford.

Cranford began as a series of self-contained sketches, which Mrs. Gaskell later worked together to make the novel and which account for its episodic structure. The book celebrates old-world innocence, with humorous descriptions of daily rituals. No one in Cranford has enough money to live in the style to which they aspire, and so all kinds of peculiar fictions are maintained to disguise the "shameful" face of poverty. Old worn caps and collars are kept for indoor wear, hastily changed when visitors knock. Candles are only lit seconds before visitors arrive, and everyone always pretends to be surprised at the cakes produced with tea, even the mistress of the house, "*though she knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew we knew, she had been busy all the morning making teabread and sponge cakes*".

Much as Cranford and its inhabitants may choose to ignore the vast economic and social changes taking place in England at that time, they cannot remain unaffected. Behind the Cranford facade of aristocratic dignity, hovers a collection of

ageing women, increasingly unable to continue in the way they have always done. The narrow, stultifying world of the town itself, with its snobbishness and petty moral sensibility must make way for the more vital, energetic forces of the new age.

Questions on Cranford.

Discuss characterization, plot, theme, point of view.

Discuss E. Gaskell's irony in its exposure of absurd pride and prejudices. Discuss Mary Smith's role in the novel. Explain how does Miss Matty's life story add a greater dimension to our appreciation and understanding of all these quaint characters and their comical, outmoded world. How does the story of Miss Matty's younger brother resembles that of E. Gaskell's brother? Explain the reasons behind bank collapse. Compare *Cranford* with Jane Austen's *Pride & Prejudice*.

Bank failure.

During the late 18C, bankers made loans of banknotes rather than actual gold. In fact they issued notes with a nominal value 10 times more than the gold they held. When Government gold reserves were swallowed up by the Napoleonic Wars, the Bank of England became unable to cash notes on demand. From 1797 to 1817 all cash payments were suspended. When the suspension was lifted, holders rushed to cash their notes, and many small, private country banks went bankrupt.