

THE WORLD WARS

The twentieth century was a period of construction and destruction. New ideas and inventions broke old boundaries. New inventions altered the lives of the people. But the two global wars threw the world out of gear. In England, the industrial revolution went on without any break. But men of letters felt there was a moral decline. This was wonderfully drawn in the literary works of this era.

British socialism grew in the native soil. It was felt that private ownership led to inequality. A society called Fabian Society was formed. The purpose was to spread socialism. After all, the British were against violent revolution. Trade Unionism was the offshoot of industrialism. The workers had a chance to meet and discuss their problems. This paved the way for trade unionism. But initially many Acts were passed declaring Trade Unions Illegal. But soon they were legalised. The Unions functioned on the subscriptions from the members. After the big strike in 1911 the Railway Trade Unions were recognized. In the Trade Union Congress many Unions combined together. In course of time, Unions became a way of life.

The reform spree of the Victorian age continued. Many reforms were undertaken by the Government. The Compensation Act 1906 was passed to protect workers. Pension for old people over seventy was introduced. The working hours in the mines was reduced to eight hours. The Health Insurance covered workers earning less than 160 pounds per year. To raise the necessary revenue, the rich were taxed heavily.

In spite of the measures, there was internal unrest. But the First World War united all the factions. England followed a policy of isolation in international politics. But it had to enter the First World War to protect Belgium. England lost thousands of young men in the war. After the war, British economy was ruins. But America helped her recover.

The Second World War was imminent. Britain was forced to declare war on Germany. The war ended with the bombing of Japan. The colonial power of Britain declined after the war. One by one, the colonies won their independence. Again, Britain recovered with the American Marshall Aid. From then on, Britain concentrated on internal growth. The 'Welfare State' came into existence. Old age pension was increased. Medical service was made free to all. The handicapped were taken care of. The number of State schools increased.

The children were given free milk. Each ministry introduced new schemes of social welfare. This infused faith in the Government. Scientific research too gathered support. There was all round progress and achievement. From 1950 onwards, new industries earned profit.

Ireland remained a problem to England. The Irish Catholics and Protestants were opposed to each other. A militant movement called the Sinn Fein Movement was formed by the Irish rebels. The movement raised a rebellion in 1916. The Easter Rising 1916 had to be suppressed with an iron hand. An Irish Free State was formed. But a part of Ireland continued to be British. Ireland began her self-government.

When the British colonized South Africa, there were 25,000 Dutch colonists. They were known as Boers. The abolition of slavery affected the Boers. They had employed slaves in their farms. Around 10,000 Boers founded a separate state. This was recognized by the British. The Boers denied political rights to the local British. This resulted in the Boer War. The British defeated the Boers. The Union of South Africa was formed in 1910.

For centuries, male supremacy was accepted in England. The Feminist Movement showed women in a new light. Feminists demanded social, political and human rights equal to men. The earliest English feminist was Mary Woolstoncraft. She challenged the belief that women existed only for men. She proposed that moral standards must be applied to both women and men. The struggle was a violent one. In 1928 all women over 21 were granted political franchise. Today, women have entered all the fields including the defense service. Basically, modern Britain is a peace - loving nation.

