

Chapter 12

A New Century



COSTUMES OF THE PERIOD

Edward VII (1901–1910)



Edward VII and Queen Alexandra

Queen Victoria was succeeded by her son Edward VII who was already sixty years old. His mother had worked hard for her people but Edward VII cared only for sport and women, and his life was taken up with pleasure. He was totally unsuitable to be a figurehead for the nation. Since he took less interest in his duties than his mother had done, and had not her wise advice to offer, the influence of the crown declined during his reign.

Since the days of William and Mary all monarchs had, without making any objection, taken an oath that they did not hold any Roman Catholic doctrines such as transubstantiation.¹ A monarch holding such doctrines would be unsuitable as head of the Church of England since the Church of England specifically denied these doctrines in the Thirty-nine articles. Edward, however, did not want his son (the future George V) to have to take the oath. He considered it inappropriate because of Ireland, and also for other reasons. The Australian Prime Minister, for instance, was actually a Roman Catholic and in Canada the population of Quebec was mostly Roman Catholic.² During Edward's reign however, Parliaments were unable to change the coronation oath in accordance with his wishes because of the strength of public feeling. Protest meetings were held which packed the Royal Albert Hall in London and petitions were signed throughout the land.³

The State Of The Church

The out-workings of the departure from belief in the Bible that began in the Victorian era now began to be felt. At the beginning of this period, the churches were still growing. In Parliament Nonconformists had great influence, usually for good. There was a great deal of evangelistic activity but no resistance to the higher critics.⁴ All the major denominations were apostatising from the top and a desire for denominational unity held back opposition to the modernist ideas. During this period the older Nonconformist denominations became more centralised. This fostered the spread of error as modernists strengthened their control over the denominations. In the USA there were strong conservative scholars who pointed out the errors of modernism and called people back to the old paths. In Britain no such movement grew up. In Wales there was a revival in 1904 but it was of a slightly different character from those of the previous century. There was an emphasis on personal religion, but theology was by-passed and little resistance was offered to those at the top of the denominations affected by the revival who were denying the very fundamentals of the faith. The emphasis was on conversions and on holiness and emotional means were often used to promote these ends.

A significant event for the future took place in 1910 in Edinburgh. This was a conference of Protestant missionary societies and it marked the beginning of the ecumenical movement. From this eventually there came the World Council of Churches which aims to move towards unity of all

1 See Chapter 6, "The Bill Of Rights", p. 71.

2 Countries of the empire over which the king reigned.

3 The strength of feeling in the country was not mere prejudice. The Roman Catholic church did not recognise the British royal family as rightful monarchs of Britain since they were descendants not of the Stuarts but the house of Hanover. (See Chapter 7, "George I", p. 84.) In the early years of the century, a princess of Bavaria was actually crowned Mary III Queen of England by fanatical Roman Catholics who regarded her as the lawful claimant to the throne rather than Edward VII. There was widespread recognition of the dangers of Roman Catholicism even among those who were not Evangelicals.

4 See Chapter 11, "Higher Criticism", p. 168.

churches – a sort of super-church. It appeared harmless enough at the beginning. It became a real threat to true Christianity as time went on.⁵

A dramatic change in church attendance took place around about 1911. Numbers began to fall off. Concern began to be expressed about this by the Nonconformists but they seem to have had no concept of why it was happening. In the main they seem never to have seen the direct connection between the defence of the Word of God and God's blessing on the church. By 1913 numbers had begun to drop dramatically as theological liberalism reached a form that was really atheism in a Christian disguise, denying all the essential evangelical doctrines. "The decline in church attendance was not surprising, because liberalism is simply the philosophies of men dressed up in religious garb, and if the churches are going to teach exactly what the world is already thinking, then why should people bother to go to church at all?"⁶ A number of inter-denominational movements were started but the real issue remained: Evangelical Christians were in churches whose leaders no longer believed in the literal truth of the Bible. During this period there were a few non-denominational churches and a number of Evangelicals did separate from denominations but in general there was no defence of the gospel such as that which was mounted in the USA. To this important fact we can trace not only the decline in the church in the later twentieth century but also a decline in the moral, and even the material prosperity of the nation.⁷

The Labour Party

We have already seen how the provision of evolutionary ideas throughout society had led to a new view of man.⁸ It was now possible to believe that God did not exist, that human beings were basically good, not sinful, and that society was capable of progressing towards a better future, and to justify those beliefs from what was regarded as science. The writings of Karl Marx, the members of the Fabian Society and the Socialist League continued to spread the idea that land and property should be taken away from those who owned it and given to the State which would then use the resources for the public good. Both those who believed that this should be done by force (communists) and those who believed that it could be achieved gradually (socialists) believed that the eradication of poverty was not only possible, but more desirable than retaining the freedom to own property and ultimately, the freedom to disagree with the government. The arrival in Parliament of M.P.s who held these ideas lent a new complexion to political life and began to change the balance between the political parties at Westminster.⁹

A. J. Balfour (1902–5)

There were two important Acts of Parliament during the Conservative premiership of Balfour. The Education Act of 1902 and the Irish Land Purchase Act 1903.

The Education Act abolished the School Boards and transferred control of the schools to the local authorities. By this act money from rates was used to support Church Schools, both Anglican and Roman Catholic, a policy which Nonconformists found alarming especially in rural areas where there was sometimes no alternative to the Anglican school. In Wales, where the number of Nonconformists was high, many rate payers withheld their rates in protest for a time.

5 See Chapter 13, "The War And The Churches", p. 208.

6 Simpson, P., *The Churches Lamentable Role in Britain's National Decline* (n.d., Leamington).

7 See Chapter 13, "The State Of The Church And The Rise Of The FIEC", p. 203, "Sir Harold Wilson 1964 (Labour) And The Decline Of Biblical Christian Influence On Society", p. 213 and "Corrupt Government And Freedom Lost", p. 219.

8 See Chapter 11, "Karl Marx (1818–1883), Socialism and Communism", p. 174.

9 See Chapter 11, "The Spread Of Socialism And The Rise Of The Labour Party", p. 179.

The Irish Land Purchase Act was designed to solve the problems of Irish peasant farmers and so remove a cause of agitation for home rule. Gladstone had attempted a similar but less far reaching scheme during the previous century.¹⁰ The act aimed to give the peasants ownership of the land they farmed. Under its terms landlords and tenants were able to agree on a purchase price for the land and the government then added 12 percent to the price. The tenants were able to borrow the money from the government at a very low rate of interest, spreading the repayment over sixty-eight and a half years.

Joseph Chamberlain And Tariff Reform

During the previous century, the reforms of Pitt, Huskisson, and Peel had led to the removal of duties on imports, especially foodstuffs, which had stimulated exports and lowered food prices. In the latter part of the century the effects of this had begun to be felt on British agriculture, which could not compete with cheap imported food. This had three very undesirable consequences: a general decline in the countryside, urbanisation and a dependence on imported food.¹¹

Joseph Chamberlain, a Birmingham M.P., began his parliamentary career as a Liberal under Gladstone. He became a Conservative on disagreeing with Gladstone's Irish Home Rule policy.¹² While serving in the Conservative government of Salisbury which had preceded that of Balfour, he began to consider changes in the country's tariffs. Although he did not set out to attack the principles of free trade, he ended up advocating a policy of protectionism.¹³ As Colonial Secretary under Salisbury, he had to consider ways of binding the British Empire together more closely and promoting a sense of unity. He proposed to do this by encouraging trade between Britain and the colonies by means of a system of colonial preference. This simply meant two different tariffs on imports, one for goods coming in from the colonies, and one for goods coming in from elsewhere. Huskisson had had similar ideas in the previous century.¹⁴ However, most imports from the colonies were of foodstuffs and since the days of the repeal of the Corn Laws, these had had no duties placed on them. The only way Chamberlain's ideas could be adopted was for duties on imported food to be resumed with lower duties on colonial imports. This in turn would result in a rise in the price of food – a development which would not be welcomed by wage-earning men (the majority of voters) or by manufacturers, who would face demands for higher wages if food prices rose. If imported foods were to be subject to duties, agriculture might benefit, but manufacturers would then argue that they too should benefit from similar protection and that duties should also be placed on imported manufactured goods.

Liberal Government (1906)

Opinion on the Tariff Reform idea was divided. The Liberals opposed it. The Conservatives were undecided. Chamberlain gave up his office in 1903 and devoted himself to a campaign to promote Tariff Reform. Balfour decided to adopt Chamberlain's Tariff Reform Policy and this resulted in defeat for the Conservatives in the election. Tariff reform, with its threat of higher food prices, was definitely not popular with voters. Despite this defeat the Conservatives continued to advocate Tariff Reform and so continued to do badly in elections.

10 See Chapter 11, "Gladstone And Ireland", p. 174.

11 See Chapter 11, "The Repeal Of The Corn Laws", p. 162 and "The Decline Of Victorian Greatness Begins", p. 173.

12 See Chapter 11, "Phoenix Park Murders", p. 177.

13 That is, protecting the country's own producers by means of customs duties as had been generally considered appropriate before the ideas of Adam Smith in his "Wealth of Nations". See Chapter 8, "The Wealth Of Nations", p. 108.

14 See Chapter 10, "Huskisson And Free Trade", p. 142.

Labour M.P.s

The newly elected House of Commons contained 53 Labour members. They assisted the Liberals to pass many sweeping reforms. These included the Labour Disputes Act and The Workmen's Compensation Act (1906); an act empowering local authorities to give school children medical examinations and to provide food for poor children (1907);¹⁵ the Old Age Pensions Act and the Children's Act (1908); the introduction of Labour Exchanges (1909); an act for the payment of M.P.s (1911); the Insurance Act (1911) which was for compulsory medical insurance; and the Unemployment Insurance Act for building workers (1911). Also significant, in view of what lay ahead,¹⁶ were army reforms (1907), made by the war minister Robert Haldane which brought the army up-to-date and drew on the experiences of the Boer War.

The House Of Lords (1910)

The House of Lords had a Conservative majority. It tended to pass the legislation of Conservative governments and block that of Liberal governments. The programme of reforms outlined above obviously required a large amount of money. The Government (now led by H.H. Asquith and his Chancellor of the Exchequer Lloyd George) proposed to raise this money by raising taxes, especially taxes on rich people and landowners. The House of Lords considered the budget prepared by Lloyd George was "... not so much a Money Bill as a means of organising a social revolution ..."¹⁷ They regarded with grave misgivings the idea of what is now called "redistribution of wealth" by means of the tax system, seeing in it an attempt at a socialist move towards removing money from the rich and giving it to the poor.¹⁸ They accordingly took an extreme step. For hundreds of years it had been recognised that the Lords should not interfere with the Commons in money matters but should pass all Money Bills. In this case, however, the Lords rejected the Budget. This caused a crisis since the elected government could not then carry out its programme. Asquith called an election which resulted in a House of Commons in which the Liberals had one more seat than the Conservatives. However, the House also contained 40 Labour members and 82 Irish Nationalists all of whom would support the Liberals over the budget. In view of this, the Lords backed down and passed the bill.

Parliament Act (1911)

The government took the view that this situation must not be allowed to occur again. The House of Commons had been elected by the voters and it should not, they thought, be prevented from carrying out the measures the electors had been promised. The unelected House of Lords should not be able to stand in the way of the Commons. A bill was therefore introduced which provided three main reforms: the Lords' power to reject or amend Money Bills was removed; if a bill was presented by the Commons and rejected by the Lords in three successive sessions, and two years had passed between its first introduction and its final rejection, it could be presented for royal assent without being passed by the Lords; the maximum length of a Parliament was also reduced from seven to five years.

15 This marks the beginnings of a change in attitude to children. They are now regarded as primarily the state's responsibility, not the parents'. This attitude led to more and more intervention in family life by the state as the century progressed.

16 The First World War.

17 Brett, R. S., *op. cit.*, p. 308.

18 See above, "The Labour Party", p. 191.

George V (1910–1936) The Sailor King¹⁹



The difficulty which then arose was how to get this bill passed by the Lords. During the wrangling and attempts at compromise which followed things were further complicated by the death of King Edward VII and succession of George V.²⁰ The new king could have created enough new Liberal peers to get the bill through the Lords. He thought this undesirable and wanted elections held first. Elections were held and the results again gave a small majority to the Liberals who could expect the support of the Labour and Irish Nationalist M.P.s. The Tory Peers therefore stood aside taking no further part in the passing of the Parliament Act. They realised that if they did not do so they might lose all their power rather than maintaining it in a modified form. During the controversy proposals were put forward to “... substitute for the House of Lords as it at present exists a second chamber constituted on a popular instead of hereditary basis.”²¹ In fact, of several bills rejected by the Lords subsequently before the First World War, only two were passed using the powers of the Parliament Act. These were the Welsh Disestablishment Act (1914) and the Irish Home Rule Bill (1914).

Welsh Disestablishment Act

The majority of Welsh people were Dissenters. That the Church of England should require them to pay tithes and be their established Church was recognised as unfair. The act disestablishing the Anglican Church in Wales was passed in 1912, becoming law in 1914.

Irish Home Rule Bill

The Liberals only had a majority in the House of Commons when supported by the eighty Irish members who voted with them.²² This gave the Irish M.P.s control and they used it to demand Home Rule for Ireland. The Liberals were prepared to grant this and a bill was introduced which passed the Commons. This bill provided for an Irish Parliament at Dublin to deal with purely Irish matters. The Lords threw out the bill. It was re-introduced in the Commons where it passed again and was again thrown out by the Lords. Under the terms of the Parliament Act, the Lords could not reject it a third time if it again passed the Commons. This happened in 1914. However, the Protestant Irish of Ulster refused to accept the act because they would have been put under the domination of a Roman Catholic Parliament in Dublin. They declared that they would rebel rather than accept the act declaring “Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right.” The Conservative Party in England supported the Ulster people and a crisis was reached when most of the army officers of the garrison at Curragh camp in Ireland made it clear that they would rather be dismissed from the army than fight against Ulstermen. It was only the advent of the First World War that stalled the Ulster rebellion.

The Role Of Women And The Suffragettes

In British society, women continued to play a traditional role as keepers at home wherever possible. Those women who were forced to work because of widowhood, neglect by their husbands or poverty were pitied and regarded as in need of help and protection.²³ Most women enjoyed the

19 So called because he had served in the Royal Navy in his youth.

20 George V was an improvement on Edward VII. His wife, Queen Mary, was the daughter of the Duchess of Teck, a godly woman who had been a great supporter of C. H. Spurgeon. There were, therefore, perhaps some evangelical influences on the new king.

21 See Chapter 13, “Corrupt Government And Freedom Lost”, p. 219.

22 The Liberal Leader Asquith, although brought to power largely by the votes of Protestant Nonconformists, was kept in power by the Roman Catholic Irish parliamentary party.

23 See for instance Chapter 11, “Mines Act”, p. 163.

privilege of bringing up their children and caring for the home. Women who played an active role in public life were the exception rather than the rule and although unmarried women were often teachers, governesses or maidservants, they did not usually pursue these callings after marriage. Modesty, motherliness and quiet virtue were regarded as ideal characteristics for women and men regarded it as their duty to protect women and provide for them. Such standards were the direct result of the biblical view of the relationship of men and women. They had come from the permeation of the Bible throughout British society during previous centuries and especially during the revivals and their aftermath in the Victorian period. Now that the Bible was under attack,²⁴ there was the beginning of the crumbling of this order of things. At this time, women did not have the vote and it was considered that a married man voted on behalf of his family. The first stirring of discontent with the whole situation came from women who wanted to be allowed to vote themselves. Known as suffragettes, they launched a campaign of violence (often deliberately self-destructive) which included breaking shop windows, attacking government members with whips, chaining themselves to railings and (when convicted and imprisoned) refusing to eat. Suffragettes were usually well-to-do women, the majority of ordinary poor women were probably not interested in voting. However, as it happened the most dramatic change in the position of women occurred because of the outbreak of war.²⁵

Causes Of The First World War

The fact that there had been no large-scale war for nearly 100 years had lulled people into thinking that the twentieth century would be a golden age when the “... spread of education and the growth of commerce had made war impossible, that all civilised nations had too much common-sense to settle their quarrels in so barbarous and primitive a way.”²⁶

The root causes of the First World War are complex and outside the scope of an English History.²⁷ The immediate cause was the assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne who was in Sarajevo during a tour of Bosnia. The Austrians accused Serbia of having instigated the deed and demanded compensation on impossible terms. The Serbians refused the demands and Austria declared war on Serbia. Serbia appealed to Russia for help and the Russians began to mobilise troops. Germany had a treaty which bound her to help Austria. France was bound by treaty to help Russia. France and Russia therefore prepared for war with Austria and Germany.

Britain was not bound by treaty to help any of these nations but the actions of the Germans brought Britain into the War. Britain was one of the nations that guaranteed the neutrality of Belgium when it became an independent kingdom in 1839.²⁸ The Germans planned to invade France by sweeping through Belgium. Not only did Britain have an obligation to defend Belgium but should the Germans invade Belgium, the armed forces of a great power (Germany) would occupy the sea-coast opposite British shores. This was a danger that Britain would not tolerate. Britain therefore called on the Germans to withdraw from Belgium. When they refused, war was declared between Britain and Germany. The Prime Minister Asquith said “If I am asked what we are fighting for, I reply in two sentences. First to fulfil a solemn international obligation ... second to vindicate the principle that small nationalities are not to be crushed in defiance of international good faith by the arbitrary will of a strong and overmastering great Power.”

For some time before the outbreak of war, the Germans had been steadily building up arms, training soldiers and, since 1900, building up a strong navy far in excess of their peacetime needs. Since

24 See Chapter 11, “Darwin And Evolution”, p. 166.

25 See below, “The Scale Of The First World War”, p. 196.

26 Horne, C. S., op. cit., p. 445.

27 See Moes. G. J., *Streams of Civilization*, vol. 2 (n.p., 1955), pp. 247–249.

28 The other nations involved in this treaty, The Treaty of London, were Germany and France.

Britain had allowed herself to become dependent on imported food she was dependent on shipping.²⁹ The German navy reached a point where British supremacy at sea was threatened. Britain reacted to this threat by strengthening her own defences and building up her own navy but the action taken in this area was not strong enough and the Germans were therefore not deterred.

The Scale Of The First World War³⁰

The First World War was fought on a scale unknown before. As well as many more soldiers, there were more weapons than ever before and they were more effective and operated on a much greater scale. War had previously been confined to the land or the surface of the sea. Now aeroplanes and submarines made war in the air and under the water a reality. As the war went on hand-grenades, gas, artificial fog, liquid fire and tanks came into use for the first time. All this meant greater suffering for the soldiers, both physically and mentally. Many of those who survived suffered permanent damage to their minds.

At the start of the war, there was an enormous response to the call for men to enlist in the army. Thousands and thousands of gallant young men, many of them giving false ages because they were really too young, enlisted to fight for their country and a total of 908,371 men from Britain and the Empire as well as 116,516 from the USA³¹ lost their lives. The fearful losses of men caused the government to introduce conscription in 1916³² and the huge loss of men into the army caused a change in the status of women. They were now needed to work in factories to produce munitions. As the men were away fighting they also drove trams, acted as postmen, worked on the land and generally took over men's work.

When the war ended women were given the vote³³ but although many went thankfully back to their normal role, the war had had a degrading effect and the gradual eroding of women's respect and place had begun.

Lloyd George, a Welshman from a Nonconformist background, took over from Asquith as Prime Minister in the middle of the war to head a three party coalition government. In the end, thanks in a great measure to the Americans,³⁴ the Germans did not succeed in starving Britain and were themselves starving. In a last desperate effort to beat the British before the American troops arrived, the Germans beat the British back and inflicted terrible casualties. They were forced to surrender on 11th November 1918.

Great rejoicing greeted the end of the war and everyone hoped for a period of peace and prosperity. However as we have seen before, prosperity does not usually follow after war and so it was in this case.³⁵ There were dark days ahead for England and during the war most of our most courageous men, the best of a whole generation, had been lost.

29 See Chapter 11, "The Decline Of Victorian Greatness Begins", p. 173.

30 The course of the war can be studied in books such as Warner, G. T., Marten, C. H. K., and Muir, D. E., *The New Groundwork of British History*, vol 4. (London, 1943), pp. 941–951 and will not be covered here.

31 The USA joined the war in 1917.

32 Conscription is the compulsory call up of men to the army.

33 See Chapter 13, "Elections And Political Life", p. 202 and "The General Strike", p. 204.

34 Britain and America have much in common culturally and politically as well as sharing the English language. Throughout the twentieth century they are often described as having a "Special Relationship". This relationship was closest during times of war. See Chapter 13, "The Battle Of The Atlantic", p. 207 and "Margaret Thatcher (1979, Re-elected 1983 and 1987) (Conservative)", p. 215.

35 See Chapter 10, "England After The Napoleonic War", p. 137.

Things To Do:

The Boer War overlaps with Chapter 11. Ensure that you have done your own work on the causes, course and conclusion of the war.

Read an account of the progress of the First World War. Why did people call it the “War to End All Wars”? Why should they have realised that this was wishful thinking?

Look into the wider causes of the First World War. Read about the Russian Revolution. (See Moes. G. J., *Streams of Civilization*, vol. 2 (n.p. 1955).)

The Foreign Secretary Grey is said to have remarked on the eve of war in 1914, “The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime.” What do you think he meant? Was he right?

Find out about Edith Cavell.

Discuss with your parents:

What does the Bible have to say about poverty? Is it possible to eradicate poverty completely in this world? Why do communist systems end up as tyrannies where people are not free to disagree with the government or form an opposition to the government? Why do communist governments persecute Christians?

Does the Bible give us any cause to think that the “... spread of education and the growth of commerce ...” can ever lead to the end of war?

Read F. A. Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* for an excellent description of the working of the socialist system and an explanation of why it is always incompatible with freedom.

Sources for this chapter include:

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What began to change the balance between the political parties at Westminster?

What two important acts were passed during Balfour's premiership?

In what part of Britain did one of these acts cause a great protest?

What was Tariff Reform?

Who championed Tariff Reform?

What were the three consequences of the removal of duties on foodstuff?

Why did the Conservatives do badly from 1906 onwards?

Robert Haldane made

- (a) reforms in the Army. []
- (b) reforms in the Airforce. []
- (c) reforms in pensions and benefits. []

Why did the House of Lords reject the Budget in 1910?

What were the provisions of the Parliament Act 1911?

What happened to the Irish Home Rule Bill 1912?

Who were Suffragettes?

Britain entered the First World War because

- (a) Germany invaded Poland. []
- (b) Germany invaded Belgium. []
- (c) the Germans had built up a strong navy. []

What was introduced in 1916 because although many brave men joined the army the losses were very great?

War is not usually followed by

- (a) peace. []
- (b) victory. []
- (c) prosperity. []