

Summary of the Victorian Age- The year 1830 is generally placed at the beginning of this period, but its limits are very indefinite. In general we may think of it as covering the reign of Victoria (1837-1901). Historically the age is remarkable for the growth of democracy following the Reform Bill of 1832; for the spread of education among all classes; for the rapid development of the arts and sciences; for important mechanical inventions; and for the enormous extension of the bounds of human knowledge by the discoveries of science.

At the accession of Victoria the Romantic Movement had spent its force; Wordsworth had written his best work; the other romantic poets, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and Byron, had passed away; and for a time no new development was apparent in English poetry. Though the Victorian Age produced two great poets, Tennyson and Browning, the age, as a whole, is remarkable for the variety and excellence of its prose. A study of all the great writers of the period reveals four general characteristics: **(1)** Literature in this Age has come very close to daily life, reflecting its practical problems and interests, and is a powerful instrument of human progress. **(2)** The tendency of literature is strongly ethical; all the great poets, novelists, and essayists of the age are moral teachers. **(3)** Science in this age exercises an incalculable influence. On the one hand it emphasizes truth as the sole object of human endeavor; it has established the principle of law throughout the universe; and it has given us an entirely new view of life, as summed up in the word "evolution," that is, the principle of growth or development from simple to complex forms. On the other hand, its first effect seems to be to discourage works of the imagination. Though the age produced an incredible number of books, very few of them belong among the great creative works of literature. **(4)** Though the age is generally characterized as practical and materialistic, it is significant that nearly all the writers whom the nation delights to honor vigorously attack materialism, and exalt a purely ideal conception of life. On the whole, we are inclined to call this an idealistic age fundamentally, since love, truth, justice, brotherhood--all great ideals--are emphasized as the chief ends of life, not only by its poets but also by its novelists and essayists.

(1) The Poets; the life and works of Tennyson and Browning; and the chief characteristics of the minor poets, Elizabeth Barrett (Mrs. Browning), Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne. **(2)** The Novelists; the life and works of Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot; and the chief works of Charles Reade, Anthony Trollope, Charlotte Brontë, Bulwer-Lytton, Kingsley, Mrs. Gaskell, Blackmore, George Meredith, Hardy, and Stevenson. **(3)** The Essayists; the life and works of Macaulay, Matthew Arnold, Carlyle, Newman, and Ruskin. These were selected, from among many essayists and miscellaneous writers, as most typical of the Victorian Age. The great scientists, like Lyell, Darwin, Huxley, Wallace, Tyndall, and Spencer, hardly belong to our study of literature, though their works are of vast importance; and we omit the works of living writers who belong to the present rather than to the past century.