

the Story of the World

HISTORY FOR THE CLASSICAL CHILD



Volume 4: The Modern Age

From the Victorian Empire to the Fall of the USSR

Susan Wise Bauer

The **Story** of the **World**
History for the Classical Child

Volume 4: The Modern Age
From Victoria's Empire to the End of the USSR

Susan Wise Bauer

illustrations by Sarah Park



Peace Hill Press
Charles City, VA

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Printed in the United States of America

Manufacturing by BookMasters, Inc., Ashand, OH (USA), #50011639,

June 2015

Cover design by Andrew J. Buffington

Cover painting by James L. Wise, Jr.

Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication

Bauer, S. Wise.

The story of the world. Volume 4, The modern age :
from Victoria's Empire to the end of the USSR / by
Susan Wise Bauer ; illustrated by Jay L. Wise and Sarah Park.

p. cm.

Includes index.

"History for the classical child."

SUMMARY: Chronological history of the modern age, from 1850 to 2000.

Audience: Ages 5–12.

LCCN 2004112538

ISBN 0-9728603-3-9 978-0-9728603-3-8 (paper)

ISBN 0-9728603-4-7 978-0-9728603-4-5 (cloth)

1. History, Modern — 19th century — Juvenile literature.

2. History, Modern — 20th century — Juvenile literature.

[1. History, Modern — 19th century. 2. History, Modern — 20th century.]

I. Wise, Jay L. II. Park, Sarah. III. Title. IV. Title: Modern age.

D299.B35 2005909.8

QBI04-200396

Print Year 2014

Printing Number 16

Peace Hill Press • 18021 The Glebe Lane • Charles City, VA 23030

www.peacehillpress.com

info@peacehillpress.com

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Sample

Chapter One Britain's Empire



Victoria's England

Summer had come to England. The sun poured down on the hot, soot-covered roofs and cluttered streets of London. The Thames River shone in the morning light. In an open green space at the center of the city, a huge glass box sat like a glittering toy on the grass.

Beneath the glass roof of the box, an army troop was marching in circles, beating a path on the grass. The youngest soldier looked up at the glass ceiling nervously.

"It's going to collapse any minute!" he whispered to the soldier in front of him.

"Quiet!" bellowed the sergeant at the troop's head. "Left! Right! Left, right, left! Stamp your feet! March until it falls down on your head!"

The young soldier hunched his shoulders and tramped harder. The ceiling shook—but the walls stood firm. Finally, the sergeant called his men to a halt. They had marched for an hour, and failed to shake the glass building down. Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert, would be delighted!

Victoria was queen of Great Britain, a country made up of four smaller countries (England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales) all allied together. In less than a year, Victoria and Albert planned to invite the entire world to Great Britain's capital city, London, for the biggest fair ever held: "The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations." Countries from all across the globe would bring their inventions, their machines,

and their goods to this fair. But such a huge fair needed an enormous building to hold all those exhibits.

Prince Albert had looked at 245 different plans for buildings—and had rejected all of them. Finally, he found the perfect exhibition hall: a glass building made out of almost a million feet of glass, attached to four thousand tons of iron columns and beams. This glass building had been designed by a man named Joseph Paxton, a gardener who had spent years building greenhouses. It was bigger than any building in England, and it would shine in the sun like a jewel.

But when the people of London heard about the glass building, they objected. If huge crowds milled around underneath the glass ceiling, shaking the ground with their feet, the building might collapse and kill everyone beneath.

So Joseph Paxton made a smaller model of his glass building and asked the troop of soldiers to jump and stamp around underneath it, shaking the ground. The model remained standing. Plans to build the giant greenhouse could go ahead!

There was no time to waste. The Great Exhibition was due to open in less than nine months. Every glassmaker in England was called upon to help. Thousands of sheets of glass and hundreds of iron bars and columns were brought to an open green space in the center of London called Hyde Park. There, the iron and glass were put together into a huge greenhouse that covered nineteen acres—the same space as seventeen football fields. A huge dome rose from it, big enough so that the towering elm trees in the park could fit right into the building. Paxton's building, the Crystal Palace, was ready for the fair.

Countries from all over the world brought thirteen thousand different exhibits. Vases and hats from Russia, furniture from Austria, farming tools from the United States, rich clothing and embroidery made in Prussia, fine cloth and weapons from France, and Swiss watches filled the halls. There were statues and pictures, a life-sized lead mine, the first gigantic models of dinosaurs, cuneiform tablets just discovered in the ancient land of Assyria, and a fountain hundreds of feet high.

On May 1, 1851, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert arrived in their state carriage to open the very first day of the Great Exhibition. The Crystal Palace shone in the sun. Flags waved from the roof. Sunshine flooded through the glass walls and illuminated the queen as she walked into the central dome. As she entered, a huge choir began to sing the Hallelujah Chorus.

Victoria and Albert walked through the Crystal Palace, admiring the beautiful clothing and furniture and the ingenious inventions from other countries. Later, Queen Victoria wrote in her diary, “We were quite dazzled by the most splendid [Indian] shawls and tissues ... [and] charming Turkish stuffs,



Queen Victoria, ruler of the British Empire
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including very fine silks. . . . [And] there were ‘Bowie’ knives in profusion, made entirely for Americans, who never move without one.”

But Albert and Victoria were the most pleased by exhibits from all parts of the British Empire—an empire that stretched around the world. Australian convicts from the British colony of Australia had sent bonnets made out of palm leaves. British New Zealand sent carved wood. British-run factories in India sent beautiful silks and cottons. The British colony of Canada sent a brand-new kind of fire engine. Throughout the Crystal Palace, visitors marveled at British machines: a huge locomotive engine, a diving bell, models of steamships, cranes, pumps, plows and reapers, and architects’ models of bridges and buildings.

The *real* reason for the Great Exhibition was to show the entire world how powerful and modern the British Empire was. Britain itself was just a tiny island off the coast of Europe. But British governors were in charge of British colonies and territories in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India, South Africa, and many more places. Victoria’s empire was so big that the British said, “The sun never sets on the British Empire!” No matter where the sun’s light fell as the Earth travelled around it, the rays would warm land governed by the British.

British colonies sent coal, silk, furs, and other valuable goods back to Britain itself. But the British didn’t spread their empire just for money. They were sure that they could improve every part of the world—if they could just take control of it. Englishman Cecil Rhodes wrote, “We are the first [best] race in the world, and . . . the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race.”

The Great Exhibition made this clear! Only half of the Crystal Palace was given over to exhibits from the rest of the world. The other half was filled entirely with British goods. The six million visitors who came to the Great Exhibition could see exactly what the British thought of themselves: Britain was as powerful as the rest of the world, put together. The British historian and writer Thomas Babington Macaulay exclaimed,

“[The Great Exhibition was] a most gorgeous sight. . . I cannot think that the Caesars ever exhibited a more splendid spectacle.” Just like the Caesars of the Roman Empire, the kings and queens of Britain had spread their laws, their customs, and their language across the world.

But just like the Romans of old, the British would soon have to fight to keep their empire together.



The Sepoy Mutiny

Not long after the close of the Great Exhibition, Britain found itself fighting a war in India—a war in which the eighty-two-year-old emperor of India, Bahadur Shah, would be forced to hide in a tomb while fighting raged outside.

Long before Bahadur Shah was born, English merchants who wanted to buy rare silks, cotton, and tea from India asked the emperor of India, Jahangir, for permission to build little settlements called *trading posts* along the Indian coast. These settlements would be safe places for their ships to land.

Jahangir agreed. So the merchants, joining together into a group called the East India Company, began to build their trading posts. For a hundred years, the East India Company went on building trading posts throughout India. More and more Englishmen and women settled around the trading posts. The trading posts put guns on their walls to defend the settlers. The trading posts began to look more like English cities!

One of the largest of these “English cities,” Calcutta, lay on India’s northeast coast, in the province of Bengal. The governor of Bengal began to grow nervous about this large settlement of Englishmen with guns, right in the middle of his country. He decided that it was time for the English to leave—so he assembled an army and marched out to fight against them.