

THE NEW PHOENIX OF THE 20th CENTURY



Queen Victoria's funeral signalled the death and birth of a century.

Oscar Wilde, the poet and playwright, is quoted as saying on his deathbed in November 1900: “It’s the wallpaper or me—one of us has to go.” In fact, both went. For with his death the 19th century died, and the room, with its traditionally patterned conservative wallpaper, was replaced with designs that were both colorful and chaotic. Outside the window a new dawn arose, and with it, a bright fiery phoenix flew from the ashes of the past—a bird unlike anything seen before. Spreading its wings, it flew off at an incredible speed, singing *The Song of the Century* loudly in everyone’s ears.

Queen Victoria had been on the throne of England for the past sixty years, ruling over a vast empire. Her presence symbolized security, calm and unchanging values. Britain governed nearly one fifth of the earth’s surface, including a quarter of the world’s population, and was quite content with this balance. Furthermore, France was enjoying colonial rule in Africa and Indochina, Russia was extending its territories towards northern China, and Germany was claiming rights of ownership in Africa and the Pacific. There had been three decades of peace, and Europe, the center of political power, was obviously satisfied with the situation.

But change was in the air—a change that came quickly, that came by surprise, and that would eventually overturn virtually every tradition of the old world order.

■ The Century of the Common Man



Mahatma Gandhi—people's power personified. His message brought down the great British empire.

The American politician Henry Wallace announced that the 20th century would be “the century of the common man.” He was right. For this was the first time in history that the voice of the common man was heard. Until now, it had been the privileged minority who spoke for a silent majority. But, no longer would this be so. No longer would the direction of the world be determined by an elite few.

The 20th century saw the rise of “People’s Power.” With education becoming the right of every citizen in all developed countries, the opportunity open to a literate public was like water to dry land. Thus the “rights of all” became a central social issue—one clearly seen in a century

filled with revolutions and political struggles.

In 1917 Vladimir Lenin and his Bolshevik workers stormed the city of St Petersburg, attacked the Winter Palace, killed the czar and his family and brought communism to the people. In 1931 Mahatma Gandhi visited London and brought his simple message (“oppose hate with love, greed with openhandedness, lust with self control and harm no feeling creature.”) to the rulers of his country—a message that would eventually bring down the mighty British empire and give India its freedom and independence. In 1949, China’s “peasant army” entered the city of Beijing, and their leader, Mao Zedong, standing on the top of the Gate of Heavenly Peace, promised the people “freedom of thought, speech, and religion, together with equal rights for women.” And in 1994, Nelson Mandela became the president of South Africa, ending the rule of racial persecution and division by a white minority government.

Almost overnight, societies around the world changed shape. Cultures that had remained stable for hundreds of years suddenly underwent a radical metamorphosis. In the 20th century the old decayed and the new rapidly unfolded.

■ Sudden Speed

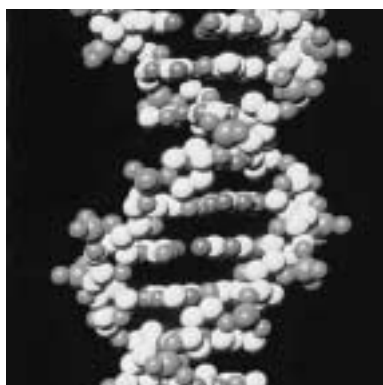
The 20th century was an Age of Energy, at full speed from start to finish—

a speed that is perfectly symbolized by the arrival of the “horseless carriage”—the car. In 1908 Henry Ford brought out his famous Model T—the first car that the common people could afford to buy—and instantly, Man became mobile. He sat behind the steering wheel and left the past lying in the dust.

And he has not looked back since—traveling at faster and faster speeds, not only over the surface of the land but up into the sky, through the clouds and onwards to the distant planets. In 1903 the Wright Brothers flew 15 feet above the ground in the first motorized aircraft. It was an event that signaled the way ahead. Within the century, there was a triumphant landing of a man on the moon, visits by spaceships to Mars and Jupiter, and the advent of permanently manned space stations circling the Earth.

■ A Brand New Universe

Not only had Man found the means to travel through the universe, but in the 20th century the actual laws that governed this universe were radically altered. The basic principles of time and energy, light and motion were rethought. In the 19th century the universe obeyed very strict scientific laws. But in 1905 when a young man named Albert Einstein suggested that time and space were, in fact, not constant but flexible and that time and mass changed with speed, the world suddenly became a different place—one not so ordered, not so predictable.



Science spiraled away from the common man into the realms of mystery and misunderstanding.

What was just as important though, was that science moved further and further away from the average man in the street. Science became a secret, a puzzle. Invisible radio signals, voices through telephone wires, images on a television screen, sound recordings on revolving discs, spirals of DNA, genetic codes, robots, clones and computers were part of everyday life, but at the same time quite mysterious. Science became something that few understood, but that many still blindly trusted.

■ Journeys to an Inner World

If the outside world was becoming a technological wilderness beyond most people’s comprehension, there was also an inner world that was