



A Liberal Descent: Victorian historians and the English past (Cambridge Paperback Library)

J. W. Burrow

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The idea of a 'Whig interpretation' of English history incorporates the two fundamental notions of progress and continuity. The former made it possible to read English history as a 'success story', the latter endorsed a pragmatic, gradualist political style as the foundation of English freedom. Dr Burrow's book explore these ideas, and the tensions between them in studies of four major Victorian historians: Macaulay, Stubbs, Freeman and (as something of an anti type) Froude. It analyses their works in terms of their rhetorical suggestiveness as well as their explicit arguments, and attempts to place them in their cultural and historiographical context. In doing so, the book also seeks to establish the significance for the Victorians of three great crises of English history - the Norman conquest, the reformation and the revolution of the seventeenth century - and the nature and limits of the self-confidence they were able to derive from the national past. The book will interest students and teachers working on nineteenth-century English history, literature or social and political thought, the history of ideas, and legal and constitutional history. It will also be of value to the general reader interested in Victorian literature and cultural history.

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