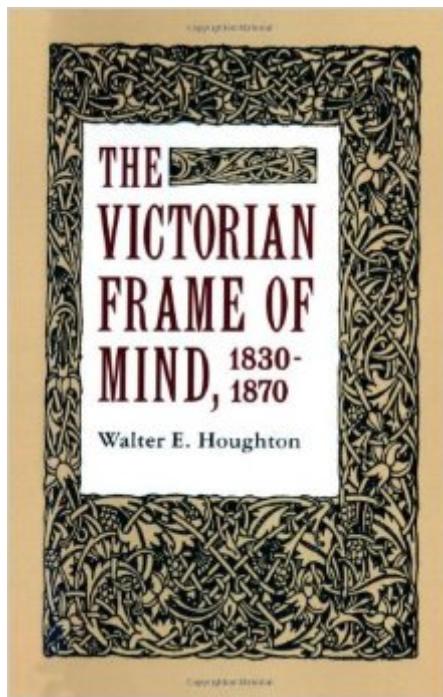


The book was found

The Victorian Frame Of Mind, 1830-1870 (Yale Paperbound, Y-99)



Synopsis

It is now forty years, • Walter Houghton writes, since Lytton Strachey decided that we knew too much about the Victorian era to view its culture as a whole. • Recently the tide has turned and the Victorians have been the subject of sympathetic period pieces, • critical and biographical works, and extensive studies of their age, but the Victorian mind itself remains blurred for us; a bundle of various and often paradoxical ideas and attitudes. Mr. Houghton explores these ideas and attitudes, studies their interrelationships, and traces their simultaneous existence to the general character of the age. His inquiry is the more important because it demonstrates that to look into the Victorian mind is to see some of the primary sources of the modern mind.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

First published in 1957 with the intent to show some of the roots of the "modern mind" (which was then still recovering from McCarthyism), Walter Houghton's book more than accomplishes its stated goals. THE VICTORIAN FRAME OF MIND is divided into three parts in which Houghton examines Victorian emotional, intellectual and moral attitudes. He bases these discussions on the premise that 1830-1870 was an "age of transition," and that the Victorian English were the first to think of their own time as "an era of change FROM the past TO the future." The Victorians found the pace of their life compared to that of their grandfathers to be inordinately fast, they both lamented and welcomed the breakdown of old regimes and the coming into its own of the Industrial Revolution. Darwin's theory of evolution made thousands of them quake in their boots--even though so many of

them were raised on a wrathful God more than a loving God, the prospect of no God at all sent many running for the metaphorical hills. Throughout the book, Houghton extensively quotes the Victorians themselves (e.g. Ruskin, Arnold, Carlyle, Charles Kingsley) and it is shocking and uncanny how many times what was written a good 150 years ago resembles what you might find in the press and literature of today. This from 1851: "everybody has his own little ISM . . . by which the country can be saved." How about this line from Carlyle's *PAST AND PRESENT*: "we have profoundly forgotten everywhere that Cash-payment is not the sole relation of human beings.

This book could just as well be called The Modern Frame of Mind or more generally The Western Frame of Mind for the issues that perplexed and divided the Victorians have always perplexed and divided westerners and continue to do so. Religion and Science have never been compatible realms of thought and western civilization has always been marked by an unresolved tension between the two. The eighteenth-century is often referred to as the Age of Reason but reason alone does not fulfill all of man's needs and the Romantic period that followed marked a return to faith and feeling. The Victorian Age is marked by a restless search to find a balance between the reasoning head and the feeling heart and soul. Houghton sees the English as a very pragmatic people and though he is careful to show that on no issue did any two Victorians think alike, he does show that the English shared certain habits of mind. Houghton does not mention Nationalism by name but that word was constantly in my mind as I read this book for Houghton shows that the English were aware that they shared certain characteristics with each other which made them distinct from say the French. After 1789 the English saw the French as nation destroyers while they saw themselves as nation builders -- the fact that they defeated the French and presided over the building of the largest empire the world had ever known made them acutely aware that they were part of a special breed. The most famous men of the age did not merely speak to the English masses but preached to them -- and that tone and style of speaking is perhaps even more important and revealing than the actual substance of what they were saying for the English felt they were on a mission.

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