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**A Short History of the British
Working Class Movement**

A Short History of the
British Working Class
Movement 1789-1925

by

G. D. H. Cole

Volume I. 1789-1848

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PREFACE

THE following study, to be completed in a second volume, purports to be no more than an introductory survey of a field which needs much further research. There exist already full histories of the Trade Union Movement, by Mr. and Mrs. Webb, and of the Co-operative Movement, by G. J. Holyoake and by Benjamin Jones, as well as many excellent studies of particular phases and periods. But no one, to my knowledge, has attempted before to bring within a single book a general survey of the growth of the Working-class Movement in all its leading aspects, political as well as industrial and co-operative. As a teacher, I have long felt the want of such a book ; for the histories of separate phases of working-class activity fail to give just that synoptic view which seems to me essential for those who begin to study the subject. At a later stage, I hope to cover the ground far more adequately, and in a far larger book. But I venture to believe that this book as it is will be found useful, and to hope that it will encourage fellow-workers in this field to fill up by further research some of its obvious gaps and deficiencies.

Naturally, I owe a very great deal to writers who have studied, far more closely than I, particular branches of the subject—to Mr. and Mrs. Hammond, to Mr. and Mrs. Webb, to Mr. Max Beer, and to many others. They have done much to revive among British workers a knowledge of their own history, and thereby, I believe, to give them greater strength in facing the problems of the present. Nothing seems to me more important than this—that, as the working class grows towards the assumption of power, it should look back as well as forward, and shape its policy in the light of its own historic experience. Above all, I hope this book will serve a little to drive home the truth that the three great sections of the Working-class Movement—the Trade Unions, the Co-operative Societies, and the political organisations—are but three aspects of one single endeavour, deriving their strength from

a common necessity and a common inspiration, and, though their paths at times diverge, making for a common goal. The story recounted in this first volume is surely the plainest indication of this vital unity.

G. D. H. COLB.

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