

**THE VICTORIAN ERA
SERIES. THE RISE AND
GROWTH OF DEMOCRACY
IN GREAT BRITAIN**

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The Victorian Era Series. The Rise and Growth of Democracy in Great Britain by J. Holland
Rose

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J. HOLLAND ROSE

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The Victorian Era Series

**The Rise and Growth of
Democracy in Great Britain**

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The Rise and Growth of
Democracy
in Great Britain

By

J. HOLLAND ROSE, M.A.

Late Scholar of Christ's College, Cambridge; author of
"The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Era"

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General Preface.

As the present volume is introductory to the Victorian Era Series, it is proper to explain the purport of the series as a whole. It aims at describing in attractive and scholarly form the chief movements of our age and the lifework of its influential men. Each volume will deal with a well-defined subject, which it will exhibit in its historical setting and in its relation to present conditions. Collaboration, recognized as being an essential of modern historical work, has been adopted in this series, in that each volume will be the work of a writer who has made its subject a special study. This will, it is hoped, ensure the coherence of the individual volumes, and the unity and balance of the series as a whole.

In this volume I have endeavoured to describe, as fully as limits of space permit, the course of the political movement which has profoundly modified the whole of our public life. One remark as to the usage of terms seems to be called for here. Throughout my inquiry I have used the term *democracy* in its strict sense, as *government by the people*, and not in the slipshod way in which it is now too often employed to denote the *wage-earning classes*. That this misuse of the term is responsible for much slipshod thought on political matters, will, I trust, be made clear in the latter part of this little work.

The Radical movement attained strength and persistence in the first years of Queen Victoria's reign; and its peaceful character has been due in no small degree to the loyalty awakened by the Queen's personal character and life. But in order to understand the aims of the Radicals who drew up the Charter, it is necessary to review the trend of events during the preceding generation, and to connect the political history of the present reign with the social and economic problems which became an urgent part of practical politics on the conclusion of the great war. After tracing the origin and general course of the Chartist movement, I have endeavoured to show its connection with the latter-day Radicalism, which led up to the Reform Acts of 1867

and 1884-85; and in the two closing chapters I have ventured on a brief examination of two of the burning questions of the day. In regard to these topics—Labour Legislation and Foreign Policy—I have striven calmly to look facts in the face, and to inquire by the light of the teachings of the past, what is the significance of the present situation. In one respect, the present time seems opportune for some such inquiry as is hazarded in this little work. The lull in the strife of political parties affords a good opportunity for a quiet consideration of our actual position and a deliberate survey of the course of the struggle. That there has been a striking change in the relations of parties and the conduct of the fight will be evident to all who contrast the political speeches of to-day with the excited harangues of 1880-5; while those again will seem tame beside the fervid declamations of the "forties".

In my treatment of the more strictly historical parts of the subject, I have purposely given only the briefest reference to many politicians who figure largely in Parliamentary annals or in the gossip of Pall Mall. My desire has been rather to dwell on the efforts of humbler individuals, who stirred up the artisans of England to action which finally compelled responsible statesmen to listen to their demands. I have accordingly bestowed more attention on William Cobbett than on Viscount Melbourne, on Henry Vincent than on Lord John Russell. In some directions this little work essays to open up new ground, and where I have described well-known events I have endeavoured to invest them with a new significance by approaching them from the point of view of the workman's club rather than of the lobby of St. Stephen's. In relation to Free-trade, Irish affairs, educational efforts, and the work of several influential thinkers and statesmen, my narrative may seem incomplete; but these topics will be handled in other volumes of the series.

My indebtedness to other workers in this field is, I believe, everywhere acknowledged in foot-notes. For valuable advice on several topics I must express my grateful acknowledgments to Mr. G. Laurence Gomme, and to Messrs. C. V. Coates and G. W. Johnson, both of Trinity College, Cambridge.

J. H. ROSE.

BALHAM, S.W., October 15, 1897.

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The Rise of Democracy.

Chapter I.

The Origin of English Radicalism.

Any inquiry into the course of democratic progress in England would be confessedly flimsy and superficial which did not endeavour, however briefly, to indicate the nature of the movement in its earlier stages. Is English democracy of home growth, or does it owe its chief impulse to the cognate movement in France? Was it propelled onwards by a conscious striving after new ideals, or was it merely the result of discontent aroused by material discomforts and unjust laws? Did our Radical reformers claim that they were initiating a new era for humanity at large, or were they content with redressing the ills of the time? To these and similar questions it is hoped that this little work will furnish some reply, not, as a rule, explicitly and in set terms, but rather by means of an unbiassed narrative which will leave the reader free to draw his own conclusions as to the drift of events, the full significance of which cannot as yet be fully realized.

A few words may not be out of place here to suggest one important difference which separates the democracy of the last hundred years from that of the ancient world. Popular government, as we now know it, aims at conceding full political rights and duties to all adult males who are not obviously disqualified properly to discharge