

TRADE UNIONS

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Trade unions by Geoffrey Drage

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BY

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DEDICATED
TO THE
REV. TANCRED EARLE RAVEN, M.A.
IN MEMORY OF LONG-STANDING FRIENDSHIP
AND
AS A SLIGHT TOKEN OF GRATITUDE
FOR HIS
MOST VALUABLE LITERARY CRITICISM AND ADVICE

PREFACE

THE present little book owes its composition to the friendly importunities of the editor of the series, and not to any desire on the part of the author to volunteer enlightenment on so difficult a subject; but it claims to be an attempt to hold the balance level between the two parties to the Labour Contract—the Employer and the Employed—whose relations, be it remarked, are better in Great Britain than in any other country in the world.

The subject is not only difficult, it is also a matter of the most serious consequence. The working classes are taking from day to day a greater interest and a greater share in the government of the British Empire. The trade union is the school in which the pick of these men have learnt the earliest lessons of public life. It has won from them attachment and even a measure

of that fond regard with which a great public school inspires its members.

There would therefore appear to be a need for definite information in a brief, compact form concerning the history, constitution, and aims of trade unions, especially as the average man has little more accurate knowledge of these than he has of a Russian *artel* or an Italian co-operative association. One prevalent fallacy seems to be that a trade union exists solely to foster strikes, harass employers, and hamper industry. Many educated people would be surprised to learn that during the eleven years 1892-1902 the 100 principal trade unions spent 61 per cent. of the total income—that is, £10,300,000 out of £16,900,000—on the various friendly benefits to their members, while even more would receive with incredulity the assertion that only 19 per cent. of the same total was expended on labour disputes.

But there is a special body of men to whom a handy work on this problem will supply a long-felt want, namely, our statesmen and politicians, —who, as Lord Randolph Churchill once said, are expected to give an opinion on every subject as it turns up. There is little doubt that the Taff Vale decision will be a prominent question during