

## ***Blackfriars***

**THE STORY OF TRADE UNIONISM.** By R. M. Rayner. (Longmans; 6/- net.)

This is a plain and straightforward story of the rise and development of the British trade union from the Combination Acts at the end of the eighteenth century to the General Strike of 1926. (Incidentally, there is also some useful information concerning the trade unions of America and the Continent.)

Mr. Rayner found at the time of the General Strike that there was no book 'which made even a claim to be an objective treatment of the subject'; and so, being neither trade unionist nor capitalist, he set out to supply an obvious want. With excellent results. The treatment is objective, as it should be, but sympathetic. The author writes as a historian not as an advocate, and he has taken a vast amount of pains to master the necessary documents and to understand the policy of the leaders of the trade unions—and no less the policy of the capitalists—during the last hundred years. To many of us it is an old, familiar story; the struggle of the workman to combine; the prohibition by law of all combination; the repeal of the combination laws; the Utopian unions of Robert Owen and their collapse; the rise of the unions of skilled workmen in the 'sixties; then the rise of the modern labour movement and the organisation of the labourer and the resolution to achieve by constitutional and political action the justice of a living wage. For in the main it is to win a living wage that the energies of the trade union are always directed. Unwisely, hostile critics deprecate the political activities of trade unions, not realising that the alternative to political and constitutional action is the method of the revolutionary syndicalist; for men and women will persist in the struggle for a living wage—and it would seem from the teaching of St. Thomas and the words of Pope Leo XIII, and Cardinal Manning, are not to be blamed for such persistence—and denied the political action, will fall back on the strike. (The employer will on no account give up his 'right' to lock-out the workman who declines to labour at a reduced wage.)

Mr. Rayner brings understanding as well as knowledge to his task. The illustrations—cartoons, portraits and documents—add to the interest. The story never flags; dullness never intrudes; a vital chapter in modern history is here that all who will may read. It is, in especial, a book for Catholic students of the social question, this *Story of Trade Unionism*, and for men and women of good will. Many trade unionists, too, know nothing of the history of labour organisation.

## Book Reviews

(Many Christians, alas, care nothing for Church history.) They will find in Mr. Rayner's book a pleasant illumination that should dispense the darkness of this regrettable ignorance.

J.C.

**GYPSY DOWN THE LANE.** By Thomas Williamson. (Crosby Lockwood; 7/6).

Why has 'Morse' done a picture suggesting footlights and a Spanish revue-scene, for this book? It is attractive, but wrong. *Gypsy Down the Lane* tells of a tribe of Romanies wandering in New England from the end of one winter to the threat of the next. It is a story of their loves and hates, their bravery, their adversities and pleasures, their magnificence and failings, a story of delightful descriptions cleverly subordinated to vivid action, splendidly told and splendid in the telling.

Mr. Williamson writes excellent prose and draws his characters with humour and deep sympathy, and how well he draws them!—the kindly tinker, Liubo, the debonair tumbler, *Milanko*, the magnificent Chief, the beautiful and distracting *Panna*, and, perhaps best of all, the 'mixed-blood' *Yurka*.

There is a freshness, a beauty, above all a sincerity about *Gypsy Down the Lane* that in these days of dreary sex novels is very gratifying. It would be unfair to describe it further; besides the book is so good that I want a lot of people not to read it!

R.R.

**GHOST HOUSE.** By Condé B. Pallen. (Harding and Rose; 5/-.)

Dr. Pallen, relaxing from his more scholarly work as an editor of *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, has written a ghost story on an intriguing new theme, but it is amateurish and very disappointing. The narrative is so free as to be slangy, yet conversations are stilted and unreal, and much is said that is irrelevant, particularly about Hawkins and the Pettigrews, and feminism. There are minor annoyances like slight Americanisms, the intrusion of the first person, and misprints (the worst of which is 'eyes set deep over heavy brows') and there is not much conviction about the character-drawing, except in the case of the dreadful detective; but what is serious is the awful obviousness of everything and the incredibly facile way of explaining the sleuth's discoveries. Dr. Pallen has mishandled a good idea.

R.R.