

Friendly Societies in Bridgwater and Neighbourhood. — The old "Breaking Clubs" — The Oddfellows — The Foresters — The Druids — The Shepherds — Teetotal Club — &c., &c.

BEFORE going into the matter of Friendly Societies it is necessary to notice the more primitive and time honoured "*breaking club*," which even now exists in many of our villages. Owing to the loose way in which they were managed there are no records from which authentic information may be gleaned with regard to them. It is evident, however, that a considerable number existed in Bridgwater, as well as in the villages of the neighbourhood, but at the present time there is not one worthy the name of club, with the single instance of the Bridgwater Teetotal Club, which is founded on good temperance principles, and which has stood the test of some twenty years. Even this old club is now giving undoubted evidence of the mistake of not paying strict attention to actuarial laws when forming a Friendly Society. It was originally founded by Alderman F. J. Thompson, an ex-Mayor of the borough, and notwithstanding its defects has been of immense benefit to its numerous members. (We shall refer to it at greater length later on.)

The largest of the once prosperous breaking-clubs was held at the "*Blue Boar*" Inn (Host Manchip) now known by the more euphonious appellation of the "*Tynte Arms*," on the Pig Cross; and the next most important had its place of meeting at the "*White Horse*" Inn, the site of which is now covered by Mr. James Alway's grocery stores, also on the Pig Cross. The pioneers of the affiliated Orders appear to have experienced some difficulty in planting their various standards in Bridgwater. They had to contend with great opposition from the leaders and promoters of the old breaking-clubs, which about that time (1843) were the most favourite means whereby the working classes provided for sickness and death, and for this reason they are entitled to a certain amount of respect on account of the good work they did, small though it may appear when compared with the benefits conferred by the great Friendly Societies.

A peep into the past is quite sufficient to show that previous to the Registration Acts and the passing of the Friendly Societies Act of 1875, none of the Friendly Societies were managed as now. It has been generally understood that the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows was the first affiliated society

that succeeded in establishing a Lodge in Bridgwater, in 1843, and as far as existing societies are concerned the supposition is correct. But there was one other Oddfellows Lodge in the town several years earlier, a copy of the rules of which is now in the possession of Mr. Samuel King, blacksmith, of this town. The title page contains the following "*Laws and Regulations of the Bridgwater Loyal and Independent Lodge of Oddfellows, held at the 'Albion' inn. By a Dispensation from the Provincial Grand Lodge of Taunton.*" The imprint set out "*Bro. Fawn, Printer, Bridgwater.*" This was probably a branch of the same old Order of Oddfellows to which the members who founded the Manchester Unity belonged. According to Mr. King, who is now the only living person who was a member of the "*Bridgwater Loyal and Independent Lodge*," it was opened in the year 1829, and continued to exist until 1835. It differed in many ways from the Oddfellowship of the present day. There were no regular payments for sickness or death, and the contributions amounted only to a few pence weekly to meet incidental expenses. It was a strictly secret society in every sense of the word, and the members were obligated to aid and assist each other in all times of difficulty and trouble. The Lodge did not long remain at the "*Albion*" (St. Mary-street), but removed to the "*Rose and Crown*," in the same locality, where it held its fortnightly meetings until it ceased to exist in 1835. The officers were the same as in the present day, with the exception of the post of Vulcan, who as will be seen by the following ceremony of "*making*" a member, had peculiar duties to perform, quite unknown at the present time. The candidate for membership of this old Lodge was led into the room blindfolded, and whilst in this state of darkness Vulcan would encircle his person with heavy chains: close at hand there would be a bucket of water, into which a number of hot irons would be thrown and a hammer set to work to produce the noise of a smith's shop. Presently Vulcan would commence to operate upon the chains with the hammer as though he were rivetting them, then a rough voice would give the command, "*Rivet him tight, Vulcan.*" The rivetting being completed, hot irons were held up to the candidate's face, sufficiently close for him to experience a great heat, but not near enough to scorch him. This being done, the poor fellow was next led through upon his hands and knees what was termed the "*howling wilderness*," whilst one would be dragging him along

some others would be employed in pressing some hard substance down upon his back. All this was accompanied by the not pleasant sounds of rattling chains, and a still more unpleasant sensation was created by the hideous noise made by all present with their voices. As soon as this "*howling wilderness*" was past the poor candidate was led up to the chairman, who asked him if he desired light. He would naturally respond in the affirmative, when with another noise made by hands and feet the bandage was suddenly removed from his eyes, and on looking round the room he would be unable to recognise a single person present, all being attired in the strangest of strange costumes, and disguised in other ways. It is somewhat interesting to note one or two of the toasts then in vogue — "*May every Noble be supported by a virtuous Vice,*" "*An odd shilling to the odd unfortunate,*" "*A warm house, a snug estate, and an agreeable wife to every Oddfellow.*" The form of funeral procession was far more elaborate than is the case in the present day, and on arriving at the grave it was customary to deliver a somewhat touching and teaching funeral oration over the remains of the departed brother.

THE MANCHESTER UNITY OF ODDFELLOWS.

A period of eight years passed away between the closing of the old and somewhat peculiar Order of Oddfellows (which so far as Bridgwater was concerned ceased to exist, as we have stated, in 1835) before a branch of either of the affiliated Orders succeeded in gaining a firm footing in the town. But although the period referred to proved to be one of failure in a certain sense, it was by no means a time of inactivity, for Forestry is credited with the distinction of having attempted to open a Court in the town at some period between 1835 and 1843. The movers, however, failed in their praiseworthy endeavours, seemingly through no fault of their own. There then existed the same difficulty of removing the prejudice which unfortunately is still prevalent in almost every rural district to-day against societies which allow of no division of accumulated funds — the latter idea apparently commending itself to the rural mind. It was doubtless this prejudice which operated against the Friendly Society movement in the neighbourhood of Bridgwater. The fact that a fair attempt was made to establish Forestry in the town at that time is vouched for by Mr. Samuel King (who has already been referred to, and who will again be cited as one of the

founder of the "*Fountain*" Lodge of Oddfellows), and Mr. George Sellick, formerly a member of the "*Halswell*" Lodge of Oddfellows, and the founder of Forestry in Bridgwater.

In 1843 a strong effort was made to plant the standard of the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows in Bridgwater, and to this end Mr. Samuel King set himself to work. He was at that time a member of the "*Bird-in-Hand*" Lodge, Swansea, and there were several other Oddfellows in the town who belonged to Lodges in various parts of the country, including Mr. Charles Atkins, Mr. George Guy, and Mr. J. Tweedy. Mr. King succeeded in obtaining their co-operation, and also the assistance of the late Mr. Richard Axford and some other gentlemen. The members mentioned decided to draw their clearances from their respective Lodges with the view of forming a local branch. They were met with difficulties at every turn, the people at the time seeming to regard such societies in the light of disloyal combinations, and they were even denounced as "*Chartist concerns.*" To obtain a place of meeting was no easy matter, and after an unsuccessful attempt to rent a room at the "*Salmon*" Inn, which stood on the site occupied by Mr. Baker's coal-yard on the Salmon Parade, they ultimately received a hearty welcome at the "*Fountain*" Inn, on the West Quay, by the then landlord, Mr. John Crocker. The dispensation was brought from Bristol to Bridgwater in Capt. John Crocker's vessel, the necessary twelve signatures having been obtained to lay before the Bristol district. The dispensation is dated July 15th, 1843, the number of the Lodge being 3,541. The first two Noble Grands were Bros. Henry Fawn and Samuel King, Bro. George Guy being the first secretary; the last named was succeeded in turn by Bros. Westlake and Whitehead, the latter being ultimately replaced by Bro. James Boulting, who held the office many years, and upon his retirement in 1872, was succeeded by the present energetic secretary, Bro. Oliver Bridges. The Lodge remained at the "*Fountain*" Inn from the date of formation, until the year 1888, when it removed to the *Golden Ball Hotel*. It was named the *Loyal Fountain* at the suggestion of Mr. King, whose idea of meeting every alternate Tuesday was also adopted, and has been kept up ever since. In 1888 the Lodge had 210 members, and possessed a capital of £2,150.

We have remarked on the mistaken notion of the times, and the groundless suspicion

with which the movement was at first regarded, and it may be interesting to state that in the Fountain Lodge-room is a most important document, being the opinion of Sir John Campbell, her Majesty's Attorney-General, on a case submitted to him by the G. M. and Board of Directors of the Independent Order of Oddfellows, January 10th, 1837. We quote the first question and answer

Question: Is the Manchester Unity of the Independent Order of Oddfellows a legal or an illegal society? — Answer: Some little doubt may be entertained whether the Order of Oddfellows may not be considered as coming within the letter of the provisions of the statutes respecting affiliated societies, but it appears to be a very loyal, useful and praiseworthy institution, and I think the members may continue to meet according to the rules of the Order, as they have so long done, without any danger of being in question for a breach of the law.

Amongst the most active members, both past and present, who have played a part in the "Fountain" Lodge and contributed towards its growth during the last 13 years, are the following:—John Crocker, Richard Axford (surgeon), George Knight, Frederick Jarman, Thomas Hill (late C. S.), James Boulting, Thomas Herbert, James Hayward, John Squire, Stephen Crocker, Robert Spratt, Wm. Luxton, C. Giles, B. Denner, E. Meacock, B. Handell, F. W. Rose, and Oliver Bridges (now Corresponding Secretary).

The *Loyal Halswell*, 3,975, was the next Lodge opened in Bridgwater, on May 8th, 1845, but no record is left showing who was its actual founder, except that its first Noble Grand was a Bro. J. Tweedy, whose name heads the long list of past officers placed upon the Lodge merit-board. But the fact of this name being the first upon the list referred to must not be taken as proof that he was the founder. He was also a member of the Loyal Fountain Lodge, from which he seceded for the purpose of taking office in the Halswell Lodge. His clearance from the Fountain, bearing the signatures, Thomas Hill, N.G., and Samuel Whitehead, secretary; and the old smoke seal is still extant, and among the Halswell records. This Lodge though does not seem to have been an outcome of the Fountain Lodge, for the latter belonged to the Bristol district, whilst the former was opened by the Cullompton district, which in 1846 had 20 Lodges. Probably some member who was or had been connected with the Cullompton district took the initiative in the formation of the Halswell. Whether this was so or not,

according to Samuel King the Lodge was subsequently encouraged and helped by members of the old Fountain Lodge. Mr. John Murlis, who was then the landlord of the "Rose and Crown" Inn, had probably as much to do with the founding of the Lodge as any other person. It was at his house that it was opened, as the following extract from the dispensation will show:—"Granted by consent of the Grand Master and past and present officers from various Lodges connected with the Manchester Unity assembled in Grand Committee—Witnesseth and these presents confirms unto officers and brothers of the Cullompton district, full authority to open, establish, and continue a Lodge, to be known and distinguished by the title or denomination of the Loyal Halswell Lodge, No. 3,975, of the Manchester Unity of the Independent Order of Oddfellows, and in the Cullompton district, to be held and continued, at the house of Brother John Murlis, 'Rose and Crown' Inn, St. Mary-street, Bridgwater." From this point the dispensation provides for disputes, future government, destruction by fire, and the circumstances under which it may be cancelled.

The witnesses were as follows:—H. Whaite, G.M.; T. Dickenson, D.G.M.; W. Batcliffe, C.S.; T. Western, Prov. G.M.; T. Kershaw, Prov. G.M.; B. Harris, Prov. C.S.

It was by the special permission of the late Colonel C. K. K. Tynte, of Halswell House, Goathurst, that the Lodge took the name of "Halswell," and the present Colonel C. K. K. Tynte has been an honorary member of it for some years. The Lodge seems to have only remained a few years at the "Rose and Crown," for when John Murlis left this house and went as landlord of the "Albion" Inn, it followed him, and remained at the "Albion" for another few years, and then removed to the "Three Crowns" (Host Joseph Pitman) in the same (St. Mary's) street, where it remained until about 1870, when it again changed its head-quarters to the "Market House" Inn, in High-street (Host Chas. Wilkins). This house is still the place of meeting.

In July, 1850, a very interesting incident appears recorded on the minutes of this branch; it is nothing more nor less than a resolution being carried unanimously to sever the connection of the Lodge with the Manchester Unity and "hold the funds." The mover of this suicidal motion is now dead, but the seceder is still a living member of the Lodge. Fortunately at a subsequent meeting held in the same year the decision of

the previous meeting was reversed and the resolution rescinded. Both the mover and seconder of the resolution, which would doubtless have made the Loyal Halswell Lodge a thing of the past, lived to regret the hasty and short-sighted step which they took. The names of members who have played a prominent part in this Lodge during the last 40 years, and are deserving special mention, are as follows Wm. Dight, Harry Singerton, George Hunt, James Tilley, George Hooper, Wm. Vivian, George Crocker, Robert Venn, J. Westcott, G. C. Fisher, Alfred Porter, Thos. Aldridge, Wm. Baker, John MacGowan, Albert J. Parker, and John Fackrell. Of these the names of Harry Singerton and James Tilley, now long since called to their rest, might truly be termed "*red letter*" names in the history of this Lodge, for its records plainly mark them out as zealous guardians of the rise and progress of this prosperous branch of the Manchester Unity. In 1888 the membership of the Lodge was 157, and its capital £1,457.

FORMATION OF BRIDGWATER DISTRICT OF ODDFELLOWS.

In the year 1846 an application was made by the Fountain and Halswell Lodges to secede from their own districts and form a Bridgwater district. This request was laid before the A. M. C. of that year with the result that it was granted, and the district formally opened in July, 1846. Henry Fawn and Samuel King were the first two Provincial G.M.'s of the district, and Bro. Guy was its first C. S., but he held the office for a very short period. He was succeeded by the late Mr. Thomas Hill, who carried on business as a baker in St. John-street. Mr. Hill held the office of C.S. for 29 years with credit to himself and advantage to the Order, and to him (although not a founder) must be ascribed the honour of establishing the Bridgwater district upon a firm basis. Age and feeble health made his resignation of the office unavoidable in 1875, when another, not less zealous member was appointed in his stead, Mr. Edward Chedzey, builder. The district made rapid progress under Mr. Chedzey. He held the office for a period of eight years, and at his death, which took place in August, 1884, Mr. Oliver Bridges, the present Prov. C.S., was appointed by the district meeting, which was held at Chilton Polden in that year.

In October, 1877, a juvenile branch was opened in connection with this district, and in addition to the Bridgwater branch there are

three others, viz :—One at Nether Stowey, one at Highbridge, and one at Chilton Polden.

The Loyal Perseverance Lodge, No. 5,105, was opened at Highbridge as a branch of the Bridgwater district ; date of opening, January 22nd, 1863. Mr. Joseph Mulford, of the "*City of Bristol*" Lodge, was the founder of this Lodge, and Messrs. Henry Marchent, J. Holmes, and the present secretary (Mr. Edwin Brooks) have been its most prominent workers. In 1888 its membership was 74, and its capital £1,145. It is held at the "*Cooper's Arms*" (Host Card).

The Loyal Polden-Hill Lodge, No. 6,269, was established at Chilton Polden in 1878 by the Bridgwater District. The original movers to open were Mr. E. T. Roberts, of the Fountain Lodge, Bridgwater, and Mr. John C. Moore, of The Halswell Lodge, Bridgwater. The Lodge is held at the "*White Hart*" Hotel. In 1888 its membership was 45, with a capital of £124.

Loyal Lodge of Friendship, No. 6,189, was opened at the *Ship-a-Ground Inn* (Host Aplin), Eastover, June 23rd, 1876. The late Mr. Edward Chedzey and Mr. Thos. Aplin were its founders. Mr. Oliver Bridges was its first secretary, and Mr. Thomas Herbert its first N.G. Mr. Philip Headford is its present secretary. In 1888 it had a membership of 81, and its capital was over £600.

Loyal Pride of the West Lodge, No. 6,285. — Another branch of the Bridgwater District was opened at Burnham in 1878. In 1888 it had a membership of 40, and a capital of £184. Its present secretary is Mr. John Bodger.

Loyal Pride of North Petherton Lodge was established at the "*New*" Inn (Host Rogers), May, 1880. Mr. J. MacGowan, of the Halswell Lodge, assisted by Mr. B. A. Ferguson, late of the Halswell Lodge, was its founder, and the Lodge was officered by Mr. MacGowan as its first N.G.; and Mr. W. E. Smith, late of the Friendship Lodge, as its first V.G. These officers attended each fortnightly Lodge meeting from Bridgwater for fourteen months without any remuneration. Bro. Smith resigned before the expiration of his last two months of office, and was replaced by Mr. John Norman, late of the Fountain Lodge. In 1888 it had a membership of 55, and a capital of considerably over £100. Its first secretary was Mr. R. A. Ferguson, its present Mr. John Weeks, under whose management the Lodge has flourished.

The Loyal Quantock Lodge opened in 1880 at

the "*Rose and Crown*" Inn, Nether Stowey (Host Sweeting). Last year it had a membership of 42, with a capital of £268. Its first secretary was Mr. McCullum, and its present secretary Mr. Geo. Sellick.

There is also a Past Grands' Lodge in connection with the District, established in 1883.

THE ORDER OF FORESTERS.

As already stated Mr. George Sellick (currier), a former member of the Loyal Halswell Lodge of Oddfellows, was the founder of Forestry in Bridgwater. This now worthy Forester left the Halswell Lodge about the year 1846, under the following circumstances. He was obliged to go in search of employment, and to find it had to leave the town and go elsewhere, and it was then that he allowed his membership of the Oddfellows to lapse. But about the year 1849 he returned to Bridgwater, and thought of making an effort to renew his membership of the Halswell Lodge, but did not do so, remaining outside the pale until about 1855, when he met with an old Bristol Forester, who persuaded him to take steps to establish a Court of Foresters in the town. Mr. Sellick next mentioned the matter to Mr. Thomas Herbert, who was then a very active Oddfellow. Mr. Herbert said "*it would be quite useless*" to attempt to introduce a Court of Foresters. Mr. Sellick evidently did not look upon his mission as "*useless*," for he next consulted Mr. Neck, then of the "*King's Arms*" Tavern, on the River-side, who consented to allow a Court of Foresters to open and meet at his house, and he also agreed to become a member. Mr. Sellick next obtained the signatures of fifteen persons (who were willing to join) to the application which was made to the Bristol District of Foresters, and a dispensation, dated March 10th, 1855, was granted. Under this dispensation the present Court "*Duke of Bridgwater*," No. 2,682, is held. The name which this Court bears was given it by George Sellick, and the names of the persons to whom the dispensation was granted were George Sellick, Richard Axford (surgeon) and John Neck. According to Mr. Sellick, within about six months from the opening the Court had a roll of 70 members, and he also states that there are but two of the fifteen members left who signed the application, and those are himself and Captain Henry Boon; the remainder having died or left the Court.

The Court remained for about two years at the "*King's Arms*," when it removed to the

"*Commercial*" Hotel, in Eastover; from thence it went to the "*Lamb*" Inn, and from this house it removed to the "*Albion*" Inn, in St. Mary-street, which stood where Mr. Coombs, builder, now lives. On leaving the "*Albion*" it returned to the "*Commercial*" Hotel, in Eastover, where it now holds its meetings, and has done for some years. In 1888 it had a membership of 231 financial, : and 27 honorary, and a capital of £2646.

Mr. George Sellick's work in founding this old Court did not stop at this point, as the following facts will show:—In 1862 Court "*Admiral Blake*," No. 3,828, which was an outcome of Court "*Duke of Bridgwater*," was opened, and in 1888 it had a membership of 205 financial and 53 honorary members and a capital of £869. This Court held its meetings for some years at the "*Old Salmon*" Inn, on Salmon Parade, from which place it went to the "*Duke of Wellington*" on the Pig Cross, and thence to the "*Lamb*" Inn, and after remaining there for some time it removed to the "*Tynte*" Arms; from here it went to the "*Admiral Blake*" Coffee Tavern, but now its place of meeting is at the "*Bristol Arms*" Hotel. In the same year (1862) Court "*Bold Robin Hood*," No. 4,009 (which was also an outcome of the "*Duke of Bridgwater*" Court) was opened at Taunton, and this Court had in 1887 a membership of 582 with a capital of £2,753. In the next year (1863) Court "*Fairfield*," was opened at Stogursey or Stoke Courcy, near Bridgwater; the number of this Court is 4,295, and in 1887 it had 81 members, with a capital of £740. In 1864 Court "*Pride of Highbridge*," No. 4,485, was opened at Highbridge, and it had 118 members with a capital of £843. Court "*Duke of Somerset*," 4,865, was next opened in 1865, and held its meetings for some years at the "*Rose and Crown*" Inn, St. Mary-street, but it now meets at the "*Dolphin*" Inn (Host Storey), River-side, Bridgwater, and in 1888 it had 89 members, with £358 capital. In 1873 Forestry was planted in Cannington, Court "*Brymore*," No. 5,850, being opened there in that year; in 1887 it had £259 capital and 37 members. Ten years passed away, when in 1883 Mr. E. C. Jones, who was then secretary of the "*Admiral Blake*" Court, with the assistance of others, established Court "*Excelsior*," No. 7,075, at North Petherton. This Court holds its meetings at the "*Lamb*" Inn (Host Phillips) and had a membership of 47 and £70 capital in 1887.

There is a somewhat interesting letter, framed and kept hung up in the "*Admiral*

Blake " Court-room, showing that at one time Forestry interested itself in town improvements. It is as follows :—

" To the Officers and Committee of the Ancient Order of Foresters.

" Bridgwater, March 12th, 1867.

" Dear Sirs,—I have much pleasure in receiving from your society the proceeds of the evening concert they lately provided at the Town Hall, amounting to a net sum of £9 5s., and I beg that you will convey to each member of your excellent Order my best thanks. I congratulate you on the success attending your efforts, and also that the Ancient Order of Foresters have thus been the first to inaugurate in our Town Hall a concert for town improvements, and your society will, I trust, in the future reap continued pleasure in having contributed so handsomely towards the illuminated clock, and completing the peal of bells at St. Mary's.—I am, dear Sirs, yours very truly, J. B. Hammill, Mayor."

This letter is in a good state of preservation, and is also in the handwriting of our late highly-respected townsman, Mr. J. Hammill.

Amongst the men who have been most active during the local growth of this society since its introduction to Bridgwater are Isaac Hooper, who was for five years secretary of the Court "*Duke of Bridgwater*," his predecessor in that office being one Wm. King, who was but a short time secretary. On the resignation of Mr. Hooper, who left the town for a while, the present secretary, Mr. Chas. Hydon, was appointed, and he has held the office up to the time of writing. Mr. Hydon is also secretary of Court "*Duke of Somerset*", which office he has held since the formation of the Court, except during six months of the year 1867. Mr. Edward Chappell is another who has done good work for Forestry, and Mr. Frank Bellringer, as secretary of the juvenile branch, has served the Order well; Messrs. E. Jones, Chas. Bryer, G. Hewett, Wm. Hornsby, M. O'Brien, and now within the last few years the Rev. A. J. C. Scoles has taken an interest in Forestry and Druidism. There are other names no doubt which ought to be mentioned, but they cannot now be ascertained.

BRIDGWATER TEETOTAL CLUB.

One summer evening in the year 1862, at the close of a social tea held in the "*Home field*" adjoining the residence of Mr. F. J. Thompson, at Hamp, a few earnest teetotallers gathered around their chief (Alderman Thompson), and there beneath the

shade of an apple tree they discussed the propriety of establishing a Teetotal Benefit Club. At that time the existing benefit societies were, as already shown, generally held at public-houses, where the publican looked to the members to drink sufficient to partly pay for the use of his room and fire and light. Such a system as this very naturally became distasteful to those who considered it right to abstain from the use of alcoholic drinks, and hence the movement for the establishment of a Teetotal Club. The system under which men were expected to drink has (be it said to the honour of at least the Bridgwater societies) died: out, and the landlord is now paid fully in cash, which leaves members free to attend the meetings without being expected to drink; of course a member may do so if he pleases; still he is not expected to do so as in former days.

The movement to establish the club received immediate support, and as soon as it was agreed upon to form the society the candidates for membership became numerous. The following are some of the names of those who attended the first meeting which was held:—Messrs. Charles Shopland, William Bishop, Robert Pitman, Thomas Sayers, Henry T. Cook, Thomas Hill, John Lee, George Loekyer, F. J. Thompson, and John Redman. Of these Messrs. Thompson, G. Lockyer, Cook, and Hill are still members.

At this meeting Mr. George Lockyer, the present clerk of St. Mary's Church, who was then in the service of the Post-office, was elected to the office of secretary, which post he held until the year 1883, when the duties of the office were transferred to Mr. Henry Trapnell Cook, who is now the club secretary. At the same meeting Mr. F. J. Thompson was elected president, which has so far proved a life presidency, and his son, Mr. William Thompson, was appointed treasurer, which office he still holds. Once established, the club made rapid progress, and at one time had a muster-roll of over 400 members. But during the past few years some of the old registered friendly societies have become wiser, and have made other places (not inns) their headquarters. This fact, together with the advantages and security of the graduated scales of payments, also the benefits being placed on a more permanent basis, has induced many total abstainers to transfer their membership to the more permanent societies. With the experience of the past behind them and the responsibilities of the future before them the leaders of the club

took steps in the year 1887 to place the society on a sounder basis. They caused the abolition of the "breaking" system to be discussed, and an attempt was made to place the benefits on a more satisfactory footing, also to cause all future contributors to be charged upon that graduated principle which has undoubtedly made the great Friendly Societies what they are at present—a bulwark against poverty and sickness, and a stumbling-block to crime. At the Whitsuntide general meeting in 1888, the secretary was in a position to report that 119 members had agreed to adopt the principal of "non-breaking" by consenting to leave their dividends then due in the club funds, but unfortunately the system of graduated payment of contributions was not adopted. This section of the History of Bridgwater would not be complete unless the reader was reminded that, with all its actuarial faults, this grand old club has during the past quarter of a century rendered considerable aid by carrying the means of much comfort to the homes of its members. The amount paid per week was fairly good, and the period for which it was so paid was reasonable, and upon the death of a member or a member's wife the funeral gift often reached the handsome sum of £16.

During the five years and nine months ending February, 1889, the relatives of 43 of its members, and members' wives, received in death claims alone the sum of £541 14s., and the sick allowance paid to members during the same period amounted to £618 7s. 0d., making a total payment during a comparatively short period to members and members' relatives of £1160 1s. 0d. It is beyond doubt that had this institution been built upon the same firm foundation as the affiliated orders, it would have more than held its place as a local means of aid in sickness and death. Students of thrift and the science of Friendly Society finance should therefore bear in mind, when dealing with or dwelling upon the shortcomings of such organisations as this old club, that when it, and many others of its class, sprang into existence, the affiliated orders themselves were in a state of financial darkness, and like the ancient village club only charged the man of 40 years of age the same contributions as the man at 18 years of age, which of course proved in every instance to be a fatal error. Twenty-five years' experience have, however, taught the leaders of all societies wisdom, and things have certainly changed since that evening when on the now historic spot at Hamp Green the Bridgwater Teetotal Club

was formed. Fortune has favoured its President—Civic, County, and Aldermanic honours have been conferred upon him, but still he points to the old club as the one thing by which he has been enabled to do the greatest amount of good to his fellow townsmen.

THE ORDER OF DRUIDS.

The connection of the Order of Druids with Bridgwater dates from September 18th, 1875, when the "Abraham Lincoln" Lodge (Ho. 1484) was established at the Beaufort Arms Inn, St. John-street (Host James Culverwell), and was opened as a branch of the Bristol Equalised District, the prime mover or founder being Mr. S. Owen, of the Oswestry District. The honour of giving the first Lodge its name was, however, left to Mr. S. R. Greenslade, who made the proposition, which was seconded by Mr. George Gillespie, that the Lodge be called the "Abraham Lincoln." It opened with 15 members, but the membership last year was 121.

On May 22nd, 1880, another Lodge of Druids, called the "Star of the West" (No. 1620) was opened at the "Nag's Head" Inn, West-street (Host W. Cooze). Mr. Cooze himself would seem to have been the prime mover in the formation of this Lodge. There were 61 members initiated on the opening night, and 1888 the Lodge had 125 members.

On June 26th, 1880, Lodge "Prosperity" (No. 1633) was established at the "Swan" Inn, North Petherton (Host James Coram). It opened with 15 members, and has now (1888) a membership of 68.

Early in the year 1881 a movement was set on foot by Mr. Greenslade and others belonging to this Order to secede from the Bristol District and form a Bridgwater District. An application was therefore made to the A.M.D. meeting, which was held at Birkenhead in June, 1881, when the request of the Bridgwater Lodges was acceded to, and they were allowed to form the present Bridgwater Equalised District. In this Order the members' contributions to the sick and funeral funds are received by the Lodges, but they (the Lodges) only hold a small balance to pay current expenses, and the remainder is paid over to the district. When, therefore the Bridgwater Lodges left the Bristol District they also left their money behind them, and in consequence of this, they applied to the Bristol District asking that they might be granted a portion of the money which they had paid into that district, but the application was refused. The Bridgwater Druids were,

however, not to be beaten or discouraged, for they at once called a meeting of the members in the school-room behind the Mariners' chapel, in St. John-street, and at this memorable meeting they decided upon the name of the district and fixed the "*Beaufort Arms*" Inn, St. John-street, as the district house, and elected their first district officers as follows:—Bro. E. A. Hayman, D.D.G.M.; Bro. E. Goodland, D.D.G.M.; Bro. Samuel B. Greenslade, District Corresponding Secretary; Bro. James Culverwell, District Treasurer; Bros. John Rossiter and W. J. Cook, Auditors; Bro. Webber, D.K.O., and Bros. G. Podger, Wm. Boyce and Martin Dibble, Trustees.

On July 31st, 1881, the "*Hope of Spaxton*" Lodge (1660) was opened at the "*Crown*" Inn (Host Headford), Spaxton, as a branch of the Bridgwater Equalised District. There were 17 members initiated on the opening night, and it has now a membership of 78.

On July 17th, 1882, the "*Pride of St. John's*" Lodge (No. 1685) opened at the "*Admiral Blake*" Coffee-tavern, (Host Nichols). Thirty members were initiated on the first night, and the present membership of the lodge is 69.

On September 19th, 1882, Lodge "*Royal George*" (No. 1688), was opened at the George Coffee-tavern, Wembdon (Host Wm. Bishop). It has now a membership of 17.

On October 21st, 1882, the "*Castle*" Lodge (Ho. 1689), was opened at the "*Tynte Arms*" Inn, Enmore (Host E. Collard).

Its membership is now 31. On the same date the "*Duke of Monmouth*" Lodge (No. 1690) was established at the School-room, Westonzoyland. It opened with 20 members, and has now 45.

On November 12th, 1883, the "*Druids' Pride*" Lodge was opened at the "*Mason's Arms*" Inn, Bridgwater (Host E. Goodland).. Membership last year, 39. This Lodge now meets at the "*Punch Bowl*" Inn, West Quay.

On January 24th, 1884, Lodge "*Pride of Boroughbridge*" (No. 1714) was opened at the "*King Alfred*" Inn (Host Jenkins) with 20 members, and it now has 23.

On May 19th, 1885, the "*Star*" Lodge (Ho. 1730) was opened at the "*Star*" Inn, Creech St. Michael (Host Day), and in 1888 it had 25 members.

Lodge "*Brymore*" was opened at Cannington, in August, 1886.

In July, 1887, another branch of this Order was opened at the "*King William*" Inn, Catcott

(Host Samuel Gillard). The name of this last addition to an apparently prosperous society is the same as that of the house at which it now meets. Its membership in 1888 was 28.

On June 4th, 1888, the "*Lord Paulett*" Lodge was established at Pawlet, and "*Moorland's Pride*" Lodge, at Moorland, in January, 1889.

The, "*Annual Moveable Delegation*" of the Order held its 29th annual meeting in Bridgwater in the year 1888. The Delegation held its meetings and transacted its business in the Council-chamber during the whole of Whitsun week, and a deputation consisting of 24 representatives from all the Friendly Societies, led by Mr. J. MacGowan, of the Oddfellows, presented an address of congratulation and welcome to the members of this Druidical annual Parliament. They were also well received by the Mayor (Mr. A. Peace) and Corporation, and Mr. E. J. Stanley, M.P. The latter gentleman was afterwards made the recipient of an illuminated address in recognition of his kindly services to the Order. This is the first Society which has ever held its annual gathering in Bridgwater.

The Bridgwater District of the Order of Druids has now a total capital of over £1388 5s. 9½d. Bro. S. B. Greenslade is the District Corresponding Secretary.

UNITED ANCIENT ORDER OF DRUIDS.

The first branch of this Order was established in Bridgwater in the year 1883, when the "*Loyal Pride of Bridgwater*" Lodge (Ho. 696) was opened in connection with the Taunton District, at the "*Mansion House*" Inn, in High-street. Unfortunately, the Lodge did not prosper, and in 1888 it amalgamated with "*Loyal Pride of Cannington*" Lodge.

The "*Loyal Pride of Cannington*" Lodge (No. 708) was opened in connection with the same district in the year 1885, and in 1888 it had a membership of 50. Mr. J. Chidsey is the Secretary of this Lodge. A Lodge of this Order was opened at Holford, in 1887, and another was established at Lyng, in 1888. The Taunton District of this Order had in 1886 a capital of £1,074 3s. 5d., and a total membership of 573.

LOYAL ORDER OF ANCIENT SHEPHERDS (ASHTON UNITY).

The "*Loyal Pride of Bridgwater*" Lodge (No. 1116) was opened in connection with the Bristol District July 19th, 1864, at the "*King's Arms*" Inn, on the West Quay. The first host and member of the lodge was Mr. John F. Frape, and the names of W. Towler, F. B.

MacDonald, S. C. Jones, and James Palmer, are found amongst those who figure upon the first muster roll. The meetings of the Lodge were held at the "*King's Arms*" for some years until it was removed to the "*Mansion House*" Inn, High-street, where it met for a few more years, and from thence it was removed to Curry's Coffee-tavern in the same street, where it still meets. Mr. John Fursland is its present secretary, and in 1888 it had a membership of 107 with a capital of £274. Mr. Fursland was for some years a member of the Fountain Lodge of Oddfellows, but he resigned his membership for the purpose of becoming secretary of his present Lodge, which he has ably served.

There is also another branch of this Order in Bridgwater, bearing the name of the "*Shepherd's Crown*." It is a younger Lodge than the "*Pride of Bridgwater*" and holds its meetings at the "*Castle*" Inn, Binford Place. Its membership in 1887 was 33, and capital £63. The Bristol District, to which these Lodges belong, had in January, 1888, a capital of £37,308, and a membership of 9,043.

**UNITED PATRIOTS NATIONAL
BENEFIT SOCIETY.**

The Bridgwater branch of this society was opened at the "*Rose and Crown*" Inn in 1870 by Mr. James Tucker, of London, who was at the time, and is still, one of the Society's directors. Subsequently the branch removed to the house of Mr. W. J. Coles, in Eastover, who is its present Secretary, but it now meets at the Y. M. C. A. George Williams Memorial Hall. Mr. Joseph French was its first Secretary, and its first committee of management was as follows:—Messrs. H. Williams, W. Wheatly (Bristol), J. Need, Edward Cottle (Bristol), John Templar and George Williams. The membership of the branch was 152 in 1888. The Society being centralised, it holds only sufficient funds for current expenses, and sends the remainder to the head office. In or about the year 1879 a branch of this society was established at North Petherton. It was opened in the old Church of England schoolroom. Mr. Henry Painter, grocer and draper, is the Secretary.

NATIONAL SICK AND BURIAL ASSOCIATION.

The Bridgwater Branch (No. 286) was opened at the "*Masons' Arms*" Inn on the Pig Cross, July 2nd, 1873, where it remained until the year 1876, when it was removed to the house of Mr. Richard H. Hobbs, in Back-street. Mr. Hobbs, who was mainly instrumental in establishing the Society in

Bridgwater, has been the local Secretary from the first. The organization, like the "*Patriots*," is centralised, and holds only sufficient funds to meet local current expenses, sending the remainder to the central office. The membership in 1888 was 300.

In August, 1888, a second branch of the National Sick and Burial Association was established in Bridgwater. Its first meeting was held at the "*Admiral Blake*" Coffee Tavern, Eastover. At the opening meeting Mr. F. G. Medway was appointed chairman, and Mr. Sidney Jones Secretary. In January, 1889, the Branch had 35 members.

**INDEPENDENT ORDER OF RECHABITES
(SALFORD UNITY).**

A public meeting was held at the Friends' Meeting House, Bridgwater, on Thursday, January 19, 1888, to consider the advisability of opening a Tent of the "*Independent Order of Rechabites*." At this meeting Messrs. Jno. H. Casely, H.C.R. of Exeter, and C. W. Hore, A.D.S. of Exmouth, delivered addresses, after which it was decided to institute a Tent; when the following were initiated as its first members Bros. Tom Martin, Moses Turner, Thomas Hawkes, Geo. Creedy, Jas. Davey, George Porter, Walter Chapman, Albert Allen, Joseph King, Fredk. Symons, William Perryman, William Rockett, John Turner, and as honorary members—Mr. F. J. Thompson, Mr. Lewis Thompson, and Mr. H. Roberts, Rev. E. J. Dukes, and Mr. H. Brook. It was agreed that the name of the Tent should be the "*King Alfred*," in connection with the Exeter District, No. 23. Its first Chief Ruler was Bro. Frederick Symons, and its Secretary Mr. Wm. Rockett.

A Branch of the West of England Temperance Friendly Society or Bath District Rechabites was established in the town many years ago, so many, that even Wm. Edward Chappel, of Eastover, and Secretary of the Branch which still exists, is quite unable to throw any light, upon the date or circumstances of its local formation. The headquarters of the Society are at Bath, and it has about 30 branches. The Bridgwater Branch has a membership of 10.

**UNITED SISTERS' FRIENDLY SOCIETY.
(SUFFOLK UNITY).**

Towards the close of the year 1885 a paragraph appeared in the *Oddfellows' Magazine* announcing that the above Society had been established at Long Melford, in Suffolk, and that its principles were the same, as those of the Oddfellows and Foresters —

non-sectarian, non-political, non-breaking, and continuous benefits for the duration of illness. Mr. J. MacGowan at once wrote to the founder (Rev. J. F. Wilkinson) for particulars, which were subsequently sent him, and after making himself fully acquainted with the information thus afforded him he obtained the permission of the Mayor to use the committee-room at the Town Hall, in which to hold a preliminary meeting of ladies and others to discuss the objects and principles of this Order for women. Amongst those who responded to his call to attend the meeting were Miss Kate Spiller, Mrs. Hammill, Mrs. Holland, Mrs. Brook, Miss Rennie, Miss Perry, Miss Good, Mrs. Rounsall, Mr. Oliver Bridges, Prov. C.S. of the Oddfellows, and Mr. Charles Hydon, Secretary of Court "*Duke of Bridgwater*," of the Foresters. At this meeting it was decided that a branch of the Order should, if possible, be established in Bridgwater, and a provisional Management Committee was at once formed to take the necessary steps. The number of names required to sign the application for a dispensation was soon obtained, and in January, 1886, Court "*Bud of Hope*" (No. 3) and the Bridgwater District were formally opened at the "*Admiral Blake*" Coffee Tavern, in Eastover. The first Court officers appointed were as follows:—Mrs. Hammill, President; Mrs. Rounsall, Vice-President (the latter, however, resigned, and Miss Mears was appointed); Miss Kate Spiller, Secretary; Mrs. Perry, Assistant Secretary; Miss E. M. Rees, Treasurer; Miss Rennie and Mrs. MacGowan, sick visitors; and the other members of the Management Committee were Miss E. Vernon, Messrs. O. Bridges, C. Hydon, S. B. Greenslade, and J. MacGowan, the latter being also appointed District Secretary. At the close of the year 1888 the Court had a total membership of 71, and a capital of £101. In January, 1887, the Rev. J. Frome Wilkinson, President and founder of the Order, visited Bridgwater, and attended the first anniversary meeting of the Court, which was held in the Halswell-hall. The Court now meets at the Y.M.C.A. Rooms, East Quay.

Numerous attempts have been made throughout England in the past to establish Friendly Societies for women on the fast decaying and breaking system, but we believe that the effort made by the Rev. J. Frome Wilkinson, and seconded by members of the old Friendly Societies, is the first on record in which the affiliated principle, as understood in the Friendly Societies world,

has ever been applied for the benefit of women.

In closing this history of the rise and progress of the Friendly Societies' movement in Bridgwater and its surrounding neighbourhood, it may be of some interest to the reader if we draw a slight contrast between the year 1829 and the year 1886, or between the old Order of Oddfellows and the last addition to the grand network of societies which we now have in our midst. In 1829 we had in the old and now defunct Order of Oddfellows the principles of self-help and independence, but without the sound financial basis to rest upon to enable them to carry out their grand ideas and good intentions. The great principles of self-help and independence as held by them have, however, been handed to us intact, and although the old Lodge and little band of men which held them have at the time of writing almost passed away, the same grand old principle of men standing shoulder to shoulder is still the guiding star by which the leaders of the Friendly Society movement are led to-day. In the course of the sixty years which have passed since that little group met around the table in an upper room at the "*Albion*" and "*Rose and Crown*" there have been countless changes; but still the spirit which pervaded the Friendly Society pioneers remains the same. But financially the aspect of Friendly Society organization has entirely changed—so changed that even whilst we have the old and noble idea of fraternity and brotherhood preserved in the "*sisterhood*" now located at the Y.M.C.A. Rooms, we have in this latest addition to a gigantic movement a rigid financial system securing to members the fulfilment of promises made. Finally, whilst we would say that women must do all that in their power lies to advance their own well-founded Order, we would at the same time urge that men who know by experience the great blessings which the Friendly Society movement has conferred upon mankind, should by their counsel, and if needs be by their practical assistance, help the women of not only Bridgwater, but all England, to build up the "*United Sisters' Friendly Society*," and thus save thousands of our women at the pit's brow, in the factory, in the workshop, and those who are engaged in so many other ways, from the depressing and degrading influence of pauperism.