

of the unavoidable distress of precarious employment, the honourable desire of being decently buried, drew men into association for mutual help. The oppressive loneliness of individual lives inspired efforts to relieve this misery by social gatherings. The annual feast, long centuries ago, as it is yet, was a very attractive feature, so were, as they are to-day, the periodic gatherings for business and recreation. Without Lodge, or Court meetings, fortnightly or monthly, the friendly societies would collapse. In the dreary days of olden times these meetings were about the only pleasure open to workmen and traders.

The Guild grew naturally out of such conditions as existed in days of yore and the evils which brought their doom, if evils they were, which is disputable, developed out of a commendable desire to associate the Guilds with such religious ordinances and customs as, in those days, were universally established and practiced, which, to-day, command the reverence of millions of Christians.

These Guilds existed in England before the Conquest. One existed in many villages. Each owned its hall, or hired a meeting room. The income was partly derived from contributions from members and from property acquired. The village Guild was open to the inhabitants generally. They all knew each other and so protected themselves and the locality from strangers, against whose settlement there was a stringent law. Free labour was unknown, each labourer was bound to the soil. To be a member of a Guild was a birthright, it conferred rights of maintenance and such privileges as a monopoly of manufacturing and selling within the district. The Guild also issued trade-marks and protected members from these being fraudulently used, as is done to-day by the Cutler's Company of Sheffield.

In the exclusive privileges of these old Guilds we see the germs of the modern Trades Union, the efforts of which to prevent non-members from following their calling are exactly on the lines of the Guilds. These organizations may be generalized as a combination of the objects of a Fraternal Society with those of a Trades' Union, as those objects were to restrain labour competition and care for the economic and social welfare of members and their families.

The Guild meetings naturally developed a taste and capacity for combinations, out of and by virtue of which a military force became organized of the nature of a local militia, which, in London, stood the city in good stead, partly as a defensive force, but more popularly as a restraint upon the tyrannous exercise of despotic power by the Crown. The "trainbands" associated with Guilds promoted the freedom of citizens. Civil liberty owes much to the Guilds.

That municipal Government in some crude, prac-

tically unorganized form existed from the earliest times may be assumed. As soon as a town began to develop out of a few scattered settlers, there would necessarily be regulations established for protection. To some of such towns royal charters were granted by which certain privileges were conferred, not very agreeable at times to the local lord of the soil. But the local governing bodies were very loosely, if at all, organized. As the Guilds strengthened they became the precursors of municipal corporations, the Guild Hall was practically the Town Hall. "Guild Hall" is still the name of the Town Hall in some English cities. Some functions of a municipal corporation they discharged. They prepared the way for local Government by exhibiting the advantages of associated citizenship, by training men in the management of public affairs, and by infusing in the members a sense of corporate responsibilities. English self-government owes much to the Guilds.

As fraternal, or benefit societies these bodies were invaluable. They were not obliged to relieve the destitute, or to otherwise help members, but in this benevolent work they were zealous. Their income came from admission fees, payments by members, and fines for breaches of rules. In this feature they were identical with modern friendly societies. In another respect they differed widely from any modern institution. The members comprised merchants and manufacturers, some of them wealthy—as wealth was known in these days—who frequently gave lands, houses and money to the Guild. These gifts were made chargeable for religious offices, which provision was the excuse for the confiscation of Guild properties, as they were declared to be "devoted to superstitious uses." To some such uses they possibly may have been, but, if Parliament, or King were justified in confiscating property devoted to what they choose to think is a "superstitious use" we fear some Christian churches would be in danger of being stripped of their possessions. The alleged evil might have been suppressed without robbing the Guilds to enrich court favourites, or find a king money for extravagant expenditures. Schools, for instance, might have been built and endowed as one was at Birmingham, in King Edward the Sixth's reign, which, with its offshoots, is as noble an educational institution as any in the world.

Other members founded almshouses for their aged, or destitute brethren, the properties of which were confiscated. Some of the Guilds were rich, as is shown by two of those at Cambridge having founded a new college.

The Guilds by their services to freedom, by helping so effectually to break up the serfdom of workmen aroused the animosity of the land-lords whose tyrannous claims over the persons and services of all classes of laborers the Guilds resisted.