

THE MAN AND THE TOWN.

LORD BURTON AND BURTON-ON-TRENT.

THE history of the famous firm of which Michael Arthur, the first Baron Burton, may be regarded as the head, is not quite that of Burton-on-Trent. Bass's ale was first made in 1777, but the career of Burton as a town of world-wide reputation did not begin till after 1839, the year in which the Midland Railway brought it into communication with London and the other principal cities. Its beer has been held in high estimation for centuries, even if it was not highly prized, as there is some reason to suppose, by the monks who first inhabited the Benedictine abbey, which, founded in 1004, has now all but disappeared. But for a very long time its production was confined to private houses, and even when, as in the case of Lord Burton's great-grandfather, capitalists were induced by the celebrity of the Burton waters to invest money in breweries there, the difficulty of conveyance practically limited the consumption of their product to a very small area. We consequently find it stated in an account of Burton published early in this century that "the principal manufactures of Burton are hats (of which large quantities are furnished for the army and navy), ironmongery, cotton and light woollen stuffs." It would puzzle the visitor to the town to-day to discover any evidence of the existence of either one of these industries. Most of them disappeared, indeed, within a dozen years of the opening of the railway, which convinced the people of Burton—and none more quickly than Mr. Michael Thomas Bass, the father of Lord Burton—that their labour and capital could be invested in nothing more profitable than beer.

But, although the present position of Burton-on-Trent is the direct result of the railway system, the family of Bass can claim to have been the architects of its growth. It began to exercise its influence over the fortunes of the town about 1796, when there were nine brewery firms in Burton, and this influence was considerably increased by a curious accident which occurred in 1823. It is generally known, I suppose, that

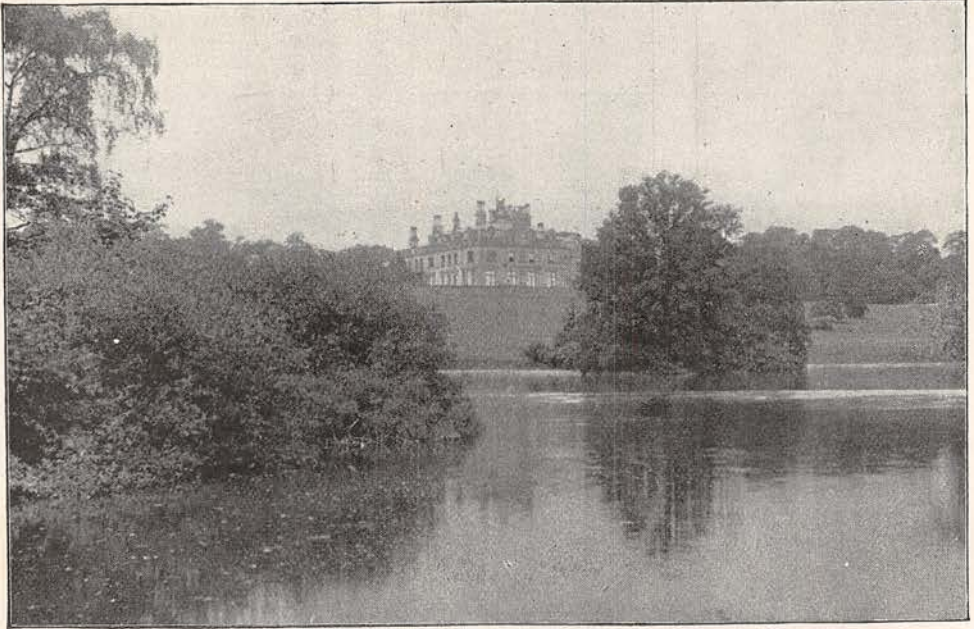
India Pale Ale is so called because it was originally made solely with a view to the climate of the East Indies. The strange circumstances under which the beverage was first sold in England are, on the other hand, known to few. A vessel containing a number of Bass's hogsheads for the East was wrecked in the Channel, but the greater part of the cargo was saved. Among other salvage, the underwriters sold the barrels of ale in London. The new beverage was warmly praised by the Londoners who happened to drink it, and in the course of a short time a demand sprang up throughout the country for India Pale Ale, which Messrs. Bass set themselves to satisfy on what was then considered a large scale. With the opening of the railway, the late Mr. M. T. Bass saw revealed a new vista of trade in "the glass of Burton," and the firm began a career of conquest which in a town of brewers has given it unquestioned supremacy.

With the tall chimneys and water-towers of the breweries for its most prominent features, there is nothing to distinguish Burton, as you approach it on the railway, from any other industrial town in the Midlands. On reaching the streets, however, you encounter, instead of grimy smoke, a vapoury mist, pervaded by a strong odour which is not at all offensive to one who is not a fervid disciple of Sir Wilfrid Lawson. Nor, judging from the looks of the people one passes, is the aroma of malt at all prejudicial to the health. In walking through the town, indeed, I was struck by the lack of pale faces; it was not that there was a predominance of the rubicund hue, but rather that—thanks to good ale or not—every cheek had been given a tinge of colour. Among the "upper crust" of Burton society, however, it seems rather the fashion to despise the staple product of the place. At the market "ordinary," in one of the old-fashioned inns which in Burton have not yet been supplanted by any modern caravansary, I was the only guest to accept "mine host's" offer of the jug of foaming Bass; the others drank their claret and Burgundy.



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THE RIGHT HON. LORD BURTON.



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RANGEMORE, THE SEAT OF THE RIGHT HON. LORD BURTON.



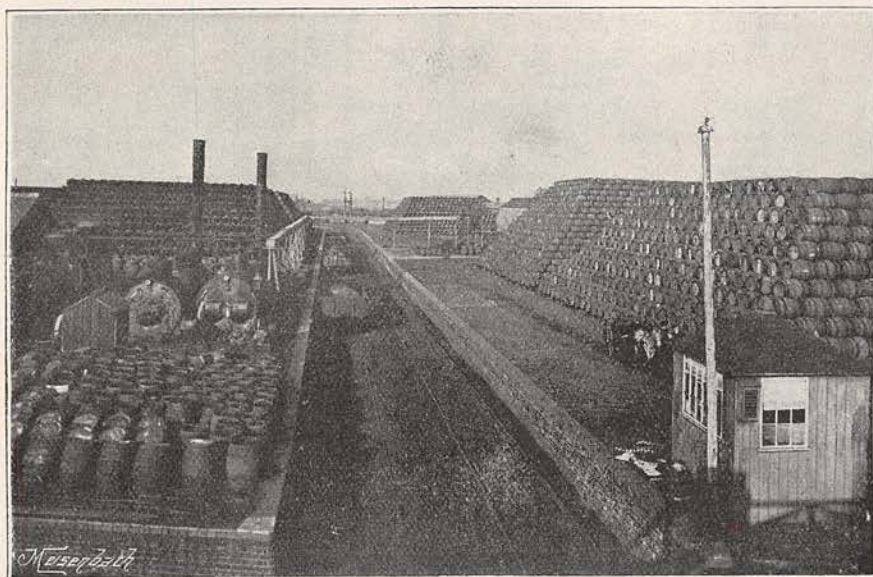
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THE FERRY BRIDGE, BURTON.

In the number of its "level crossings"—and thereby hangs the tale of the growth of its great beer business—Burton-on-Trent reminds an American of the towns of his native land. They have them in every street, and in the two main thoroughfares—High Street and Station Street—there must be half-a-dozen or more. But the "level crossing," as known in Burton, has no tragic significance; there is sure protection from its danger. The big white gates automatically close the street on the approach of an engine drawing several wagon-loads of barrels—or "tubs" as they are called locally—reopening in the

contemplate. So, about thirty years ago, when Lord Burton, having had his turn at Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge, had begun to take a practical part in the ancestral business, it was resolved to overcome the difficulty of getting the beer to the railway by bringing the railway to the beer. Messrs. Bass obtained Parliamentary powers and constructed lines which, measuring sixteen miles, now connect their various breweries, cooperages, and maltings with each other and with the great railway systems of the country. Allsopp's, Ind Coope's, Worthington's, and the smaller potentates in the town



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THE CASK STORES.

same way when it has passed over. There is much evil thought, if not language, on the part of people in a hurry to be laid to the account of these "level crossings." But, then, people are not often in a hurry at Burton-on-Trent, and except in these rare moments everyone would readily admit that the railway, with its many strange ramifications, is the good genius of the prosperity of the town. At one time the streets were often filled with loaded drays—"floaters" the Burtonians would term them—struggling to make their way to the railway station; and the amount of hard swearing, hideous shrieking, and positive peril to nervous foot-passengers that then occurred was, I am assured, too terrible even now to

quickly followed suit; hence the network of iron rails with which Burton is now cut up into a thousand fragments. Ten railway engines bearing the name of Bass are now constantly at work in the town; and apart from their passenger lines, the Midland Company alone have about forty miles of railway there.

A map of Burton coloured according to the land occupied by the various brewing firms would have one patch representing about 140 acres, the territory over which Lord Burton and his fellow-directors of Bass, Radcliffe, Gretton and Co., Limited, exercise control. But when you are in the town you can obtain no adequate idea of the extent of the Bass domain. To begin with, there are three breweries,

known officially as the "Old," "Middle," and the "New," and popularly as the "Red," "White," and "Blue," situated in different parts of the town. There is an ale and hop store, a cooperage, a repository for "empties," at some distance from each other, to say nothing of a number of maltings scattered here, there, and everywhere. All these establishments have a common centre, however, in the suite of offices which form a handsome red-brick building in the High Street, adjoining the Old Brewery. Entering these offices, one is at once impressed by the opulence which

years ago. But the land on which it stands between High Street and the river was the scene of the enterprise of the founder of the firm. There was obviously good reason for choosing the banks of the river, but it is a mistake to suppose, as I fancy many people do, that the water of the Trent plays any important part in the production of Burton ale. As a matter of fact, it is only used for washing the casks and similar purposes. The water which is made into beer is drawn from wells varying in depth from 30 ft. to 120 ft., and deriving their supply from



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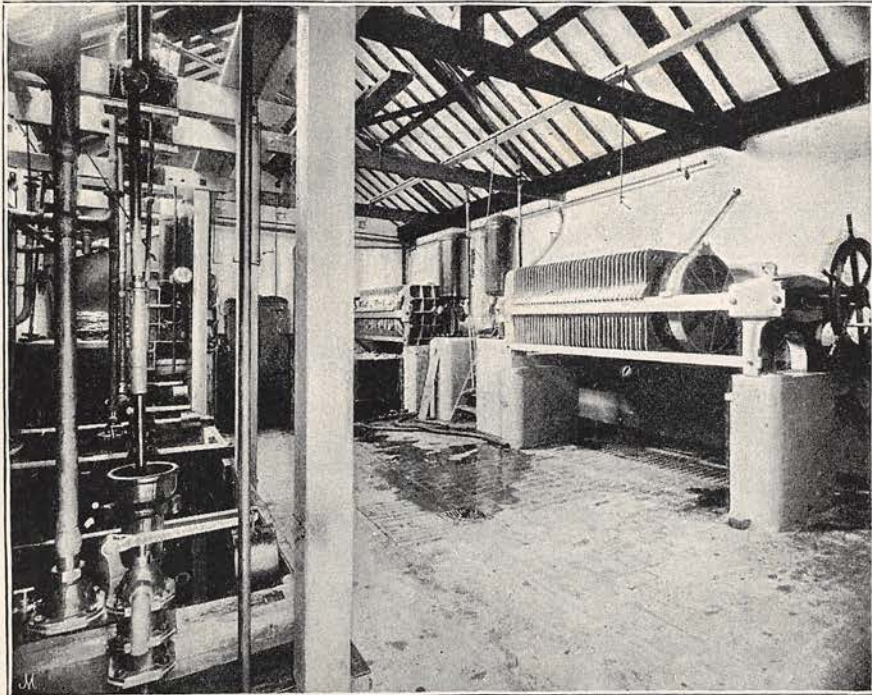
HOP STORES: WEIGHING-ROOM.

Lord Burton's surname spells. The gold-laced janitor conducts you past staircases of marble and alabaster, through panelled corridors in oak and mahogany, into a reception-room carpeted by the thickest and the softest Turkey. When residing at Rangemore, his picturesquely situated seat about five miles off, Lord Burton is at work in these offices pretty well every day. The people of Burton assure you that the conferment of a peerage upon him by Mr. Gladstone in 1886 had no effect upon his practical interest in the business.

The Old Brewery is really the newest of the three, for it was rebuilt only twelve

the springs in the Outward Hills on the other side of the valley of the Trent. The water from these springs, percolating through the earth, derives from it those saline and other peculiar qualities which render it invaluable in brewing.

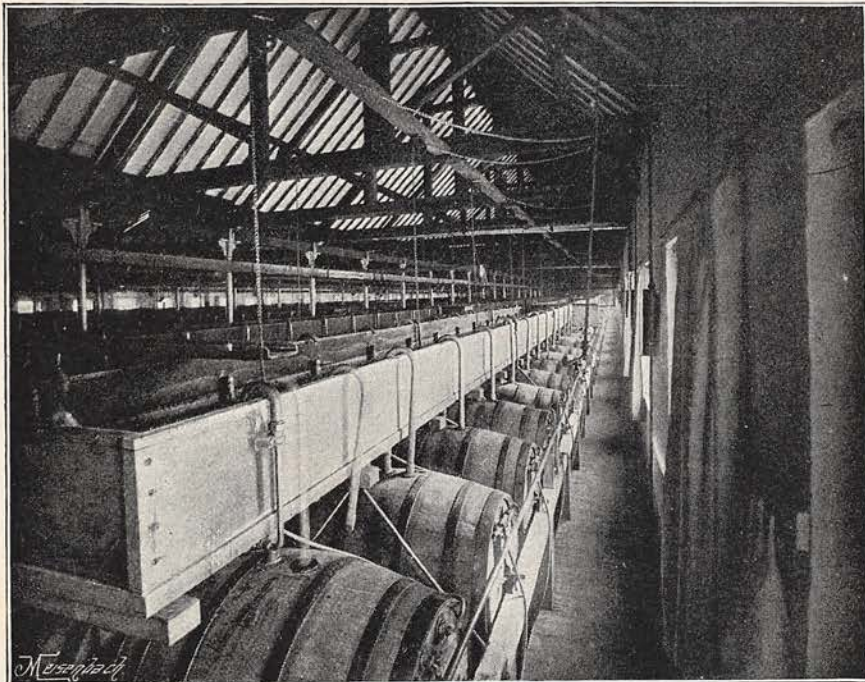
But good water is not the be-all and end-all of successful brewing. There is some difference in the quality of the wells even at Burton; but the superiority of those in the possession of Messrs. Bass over those of competing brewers does not alone explain the pre-eminence which the firm has obtained. In producing the "sparkling glass" of ale there is scope for scientific knowledge, and need for



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BARM-PRESSES.



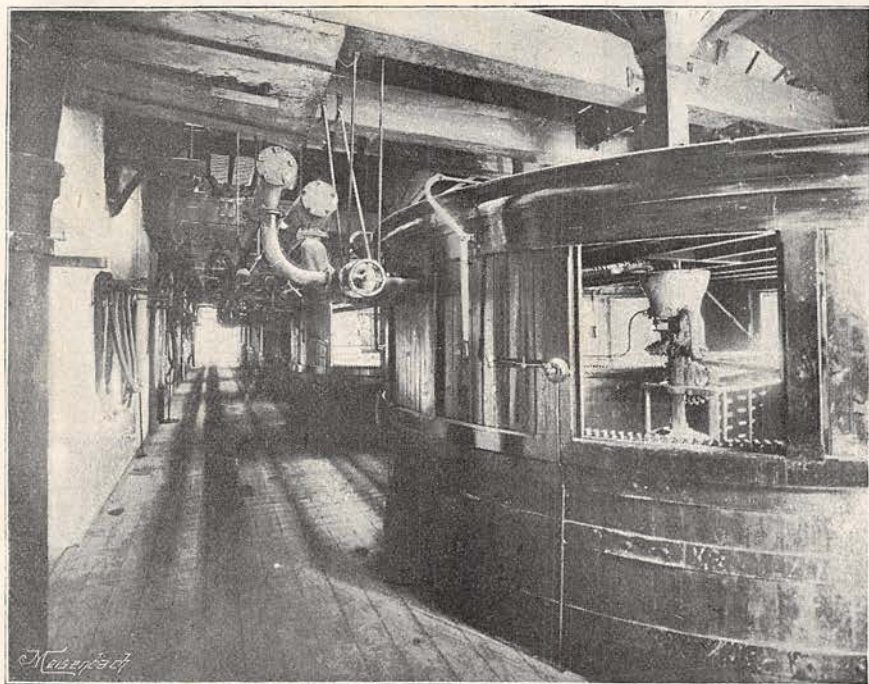
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UNION ROOM.

excellent judgment and infinite care. One could not make the tour of the Old Brewery without being convinced of this. In the hop store (which has two acres of floor-space, and sometimes contains 10,000 bales of hops) one learns for the first time of the enormous differences there are in the quality of this product, and it needs an experienced eye to distinguish between the best Kentish and the comparatively inferior hops of Sussex and Hants. Lord Burton and Mr. John Gretton buy all the hops between them, and, in consequence of the

drying of the barley, the crushing of the malt, the boiling of the "mash," the mixing of the "barm" with the "wort"—all these things require skilful workmen and ingenious machinery. To secure a high standard of care and skill, there is a chief brewer in charge of each of Bass's three establishments, one of whom is a Fellow of the Royal Society. Then Lord Burton and Mr. Gretton have at their elbows a chief brewer whose duty it is to test samples of the raw material purchased, which he does by conducting, in a little



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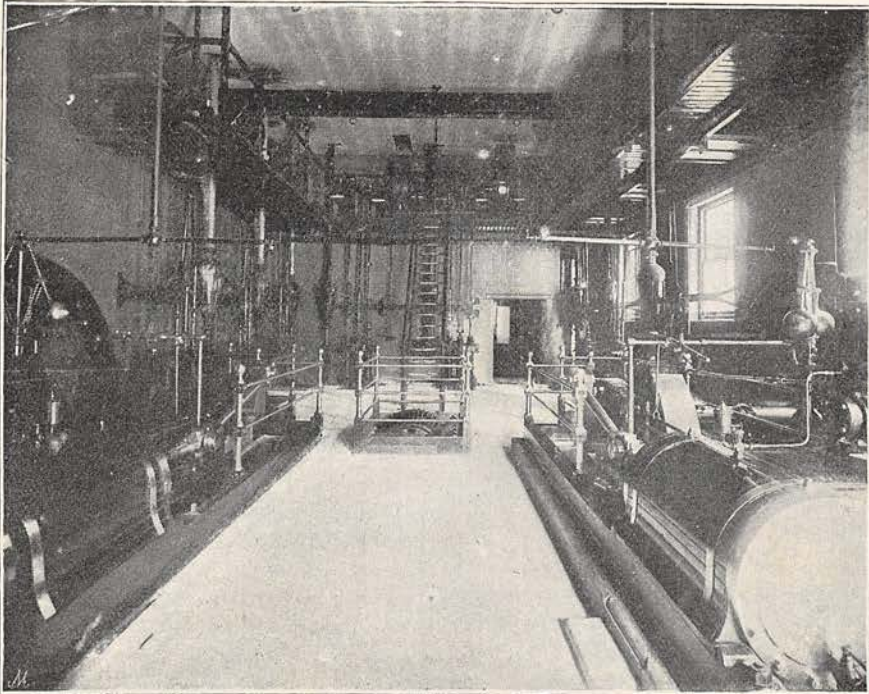
MASH-TUNS.

limited area of supply, on the one hand, and their enormous consumption of the best hops, on the other, the successful performance of the task calls for exceptional tact and shrewdness. In this respect, at any rate, Lord Burton can claim no small credit for the brilliant continuance of the business which he found, on attaining to manhood, in the full tide of its prosperity.

In going from floor to floor, from the granary at the top of the building to the "racking squares," it struck me that there was much more in the making of "a bottle of Bass" than is dreamt of in the philosophy of those who so glibly call for it in restaurant or tavern. The steeping and

establishment sacred to this purpose, the whole operation of brewing.

Many other illustrations could be given of the tender solicitude with which the reputation of the firm is safeguarded. If genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains, then Lord Burton and those who assist him in the direction of the Burton breweries must be said to bring genius into the making of beer. And considering the pains that are taken in order that "Bass" may live up to its reputation, it is natural that much trouble should also be taken to protect it from misuse. From the number of forged and counterfeit copies of the well-known labels on the



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PUMPING-ENGINES.



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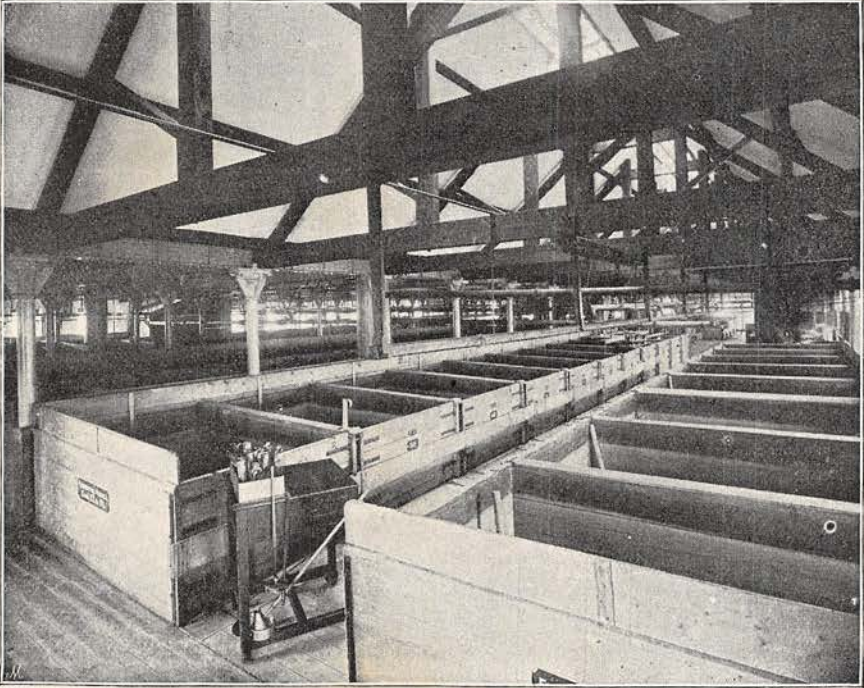
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THE CASK-BRANDING ROOM.

bottles of Bass, which Lord Burton has collected in an album, it would seem that constant efforts are made by unscrupulous traders to make improper profit out of the name.

From about 2500 to 3000 people are in the employ of Lord Burton's firm at

It need hardly be said that the present number of Lord Burton's *employés* does not fully correspond with the growth which has taken place in the business. Mechanical power plays as great a part in the production of beer as in most other industries. But perhaps the greatest saving



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FERMENTING-SQUARES.

Burton itself. The number varies slightly with the season of the year; the maltsters, for instance, coming from Norfolk and Suffolk for the autumn and winter and returning with the spring to their native fields. On the average, the men earn, I believe, about 18s. per week, and the working day is from six to six, with intervals of an hour and a half for meals. Each man is allowed three pints of ale per day, an old man being wholly employed in dispensing the liquor as it is required in the "allowance store," and, in observance of an old custom, all the *employés* of the firm are presented with a large joint of beef at Christmas. In satisfaction of the world's demand for Bass, which in one year has exceeded a million barrels, it is necessary that the breweries should be always at work, and the men accordingly work in two shifts, one for the day and the other for the night.

of labour has been effected in Burton's great subsidiary industry—the making of casks. In Messrs. Bass's extensive cooperage a cask is made from beginning to end by steam power, if we except the work of the man who selects the staves to fit the hoops. But although the average life of a cask is about twelve years—and owing to cheaper freight they are sent back even from India—some 300 or 400 have to be made every day, and the cooperages, notwithstanding steam power, give employment to a considerable number of men and boys in Burton.

For a town which has increased in population from 17,000 to nearly 50,000 during the last thirty years, there appears, on one's first acquaintance with it, to be a strange dearth of modern building. All the principal streets are much as Lord Burton knew them in his youth; and it is not till you have crossed the river on the

one side, or penetrated the maze of brewery buildings on the other, that you discover the newer parts of the town. Lord Burton did something to develop the growth of population across the river by building a new bridge a few years ago, that took the place of a ferry over which the Marquis of Anglesey—who is lord of the manor of Burton—levied toll. A century or two ago one of the Marquis's ancestors was required to maintain this ferry as a duty to the town. It is significant of much that what was originally a duty should have become a valuable privilege, for parting with which his Lordship received a considerable amount as compensation. Walking to this bridge, one passes the old parish church and a pretty little recreation-ground, from which the Abbey, even in a guise which, with the exception of a small portion of

A short walk along a shady road, or by the river-side, which has been laid out by the Corporation of Burton for recreative purposes and provided with a band-stand, brings one to the Trent Bridge. Until its rebuilding early in the century this bridge was one of the oldest in the country, the original structure dating from the Norman Conquest. The town mill, still standing by the side of the bridge, is the one surviving memorial of the Burton of the Domesday Book.

It is, of course, only about eleven years that Lord Burton has been the head of his family and his firm, and in the town there is naturally more evidence of the work of his father, who was M.P. for Derby from 1848 till 1883, than of his own. It is said that Mr. Michael Thomas Bass spent about £80,000 upon buildings in Burton,



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THE ABBEY, BURTON-ON-TRENT.

wall, is quite modern, forms an agreeable picture.

The river at Burton has two arms, with an island known as Broad Holme lying between, and, consequently, the Ferry Bridge is of great length. It takes you to Stapenhill, Burton's pleasantest suburb, where its richer people principally reside.

including St. Paul's Institute, a handsome structure which is now to be devoted to the municipal work of the town. Lord Burton has recently built and furnished a Liberal Club, whose elegance and comfort are out of all proportion to a subscription small enough to place it within reach of every working man.

To the Liberals of Burton the club must give additional gratification, inasmuch as it gives proof that in the Upper House, contrary to what has become a traditional practice, his Lordship remains true to the political creed he professed in the House of Commons—for two years as member for Stafford, for seventeen as member for East Staffordshire, and for

a few months in the 1885 Parliament as the first representative of the new division of the county to which Burton gave its name.

FREDERICK DOLMAN.

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RECREATION GROUND, BURTON-ON-TRENT.