

CHAPTER XXI

BIRMINGHAM AND THE WEST MIDLANDS

OF all the limited companies originating from, and connected with, the South Staffordshire and Birmingham district, the firm of Guest Keen & Nettlefolds is the largest. Its name is the result of the amalgamation in 1902 of two old businesses, each of which had previously absorbed other smaller firms trading on similar lines. The first firm was Guest Keen & Co. It was registered in 1900 on the amalgamation of Guest & Co. with the Patent Nut & Bolt Co., and carried on a large business in pig iron, heavy steel materials, ship and boiler plates, steel rails and bolts and nuts, having besides considerable colliery interests. At the Dowlais Ironworks of the Guest firm in the year 1865 the first Bessemer acid steel rails were rolled in this country, but some of the Welsh works under its control date back to 1758 and 1800. The other firm was Nettlefolds, which has passed through many phases. Founded in 1854, it became Nettlefolds & Chamberlain, absorbing during the period to 1874 many smaller firms. In 1874 it became Nettlefolds, Ltd., and it is interesting as being the business with which the Chamberlain family, which has produced so many statesmen, has been long connected.

More recently the united firm has secured controlling interests in John Lysaght of Bristol, Joseph Sankey & Sons of Bilston, Bayliss Jones & Bayliss of Wolverhampton, and four firms at Darlaston making bolts and nuts, besides other local industries. In South Wales the Meiros Col-