

**WALTER  
BESANT**

THE HISTORY  
OF LONDON

Walter Besant

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# The History of London

## 1. THE FOUNDATION OF LONDON

### PART I

'In the year 1108 B.C., Brutus, a descendant of Æneas, who was the son of Venus, came to England with his companions, after the taking of Troy, and founded the City of Troynovant, which is now called London. After a thousand years, during which the City grew and flourished exceedingly, one Lud became its king. He built walls and towers, and, among other things, the famous gate whose name still survives in the street called Ludgate. King Lud was succeeded by his brother Cassivelaunus, in whose time happened the invasion of the Romans under Julius Cæsar. Troynovant, or London, then became a Roman city. It was newly fortified by Helena, mother of Constantine the Great.'

This is the legend invented or copied by Geoffrey of Monmouth, and continued to be copied, and perhaps believed, almost to the present day. Having paid this tribute to old tradition, let us relate the true early history of the City, as it can be recovered from such documents as remain, from discoveries made in excavation, from fragments of architecture, and from the lie of the ground. The testimony derived from the lie of the ground is more important than any other, for several reasons. First, an historical document may be false, or inexact; for instance, the invention of a Brutus, son of Æneas, is false and absurd on the face of it. Or a document may be wrongly interpreted. Thus, a fragment of architecture may through ignorance be ascribed to the Roman, when it belongs to the Norman, period – one needs to be a profound student of architecture before an opinion of value can be pronounced upon the age of any monument: or it may be taken to mean something quite apart from the truth, as if a bastion of the old Roman fort, such as has been discovered on Cornhill, should be taken for part of the Roman wall. But the lie of the ground cannot deceive, and, in competent hands, cannot well be misunderstood. If we know the course of streams, the height and position of hills, the run of valleys, the site of marshes, the former extent of forests, the safety of harbours, the existence of fords, we have in our hands a guide-book to history. We can then understand why towns were built in certain positions, why trade sprang up, why invading armies landed at certain places, what course was taken by armies, and why battles have been fought on certain spots. For these things are not the result of chance, they are necessitated by the geographical position of the place, and by the lie of the ground. Why, for instance, is Dover one of the oldest towns in the country? Because it is the nearest landing ground for the continent, and because its hill forms a natural fortress for protecting that landing ground. Why was there a Roman station at Portsmouth? On account of the great and landlocked harbour. Why is Durham an ancient city? Because the steep hill made it almost impregnable. Why is Chester so called? Because it was from very ancient times a fort, or stationary camp (*L. castra*), against the wild Welsh.

Let us consider this question as regards London. Look at the map called 'Roman London' (p. 15). You will there see flowing into the river Thames two little streams, one called Walbrook, and the other called the Fleet River. You will see a steep slope, or cliff, indicated along the river side. Anciently, before any buildings stood along the bank, this cliff, about 30 feet high, rose over an immense marsh which covered all the ground on the south, the east, and the west. The cliff receded from the river on the east and on the west at this point: on either side of the Walbrook it rose out of the marsh at the very edge of the river at high tide. There was thus a double hill, one on the east with the Walbrook on one side of it, the Thames on a second side, and a marsh on a third side, and

the Fleet River on the west. It was thus bounded on east, south, and west, by streams. On the north was a wild moor (hence the name Moorfields) and beyond the moor stretched away northwards a vast forest, afterwards called the Middlesex forest. This forest covered, indeed, the greater part of the island, save where marshes and stagnant lakes lay extended, the haunt of countless wild birds. You may see portions and fragments of this forest even now; some of it lies in Ken Wood, Hampstead; some in the last bit left of Hainault Forest; some at Epping.

The river Thames ran through this marsh. It was then much broader than at present, because there were no banks or quays to keep it within limits: at high tide it overflowed the whole of the marsh and lay in an immense lake, bounded on the north by this low cliff of clay, and on the south by the rising ground of what we now call the Surrey Hills, which begin between Kennington and Clapham, as is shown by the name of Clapham Rise. In this marsh were a few low islets, always above water save at very high tides. The memory of these islands is preserved in the names ending with *ea* or *ey*, as Chelsea, Battersea, Bermondsey. And Westminster Abbey was built upon the Isle of Thorns or Thorney. The marsh, south of the river, remained a marsh, undrained and neglected for many centuries. Almost within the memory of living men Southwark contained stagnant ponds, while Bermondsey is still flooded when the tide is higher than is customary.

## 2. THE FOUNDATION OF LONDON

### PART II

On these low hillocks marked on the map London was first founded. The site had many advantages: it was raised above the malarious marsh, it overlooked the river, which here was at its narrowest, it was protected by two other streams and by the steepness of the cliff, and it was over the little port formed by the fall of one stream into the river. Here, on the western hill, the Britons formed their first settlement; there were as yet no ships on the silent river where they fished; there was no ferry, no bridge, no communication with the outer world; the woods provided the first Londoners with game and skins; the river gave them fish; they lived in round huts formed of clay and branches with thatched roofs. If you desire to understand how the Britons fortified themselves, you may see an excellent example not very far from London. It is the place called St. George's Hill, near Weybridge. They wanted a hill – the steeper the side the better: they made it steeper by entrenching it; they sometimes surrounded it with a high earthwork and sometimes with a stockade: the great thing being to put the assailing force under the disadvantage of having to climb. The three river sides of the London fort presented a perpendicular cliff surmounted by a stockade, the other side, on which lay the forest, probably had an earthwork also surmounted by a stockade. There were no buildings and there was no trade; the people belonged to a tribe and had to go out and fight when war was carried on with another tribe.

The fort was called Llyn-din – the Lake Fort. When the Romans came they could not pronounce the word Llyn – Thlin in the British way – and called it Lon – hence their word Londinium. Presently adventurous merchants from Gaul pushed across to Dover, and sailed along the coast of Kent past Sandwich and through the open channel which then separated the island of Thanet from the main land, into the broad Thames, and, sailing up with the tide, dropped anchor off the fishing villages which lay along the river and began to trade. What did they offer? What Captain Cook offered the Polynesians: weapons, clothes, adornments. What did they take away? Skins and slaves at first; skins and slaves, and tin and iron, after the country became better known and its resources were understood. The taste for trading once acquired rapidly grows; it is a delightful thing to exchange what you do not want for what you do want, and it is so very easy to extend one's wants. So that when the Romans first saw London it was already a flourishing town with a great concourse of merchants.

How long a period elapsed between the foundation of London and the arrival of the Romans? How long between the foundation and the beginnings of trade? It is quite impossible even to guess. When Cæsar landed Gauls and Belgians were already here before him. As for the Britons themselves they were Celts, as were the Gauls and the Belgians, but of what is called the Brythonic branch, represented in speech by the Welsh, Breton and Cornish languages (the last is now extinct). There were also lingering among them the surviving families of an earlier and a conquered race, perhaps Basques or Finns. When the country was conquered by the Celts we do not know. Nor is there any record at all of the people they found here unless the caves, full of the bones which they gnawed and cut in two for the marrow, were the homes of these earlier occupants.

When the Romans came they found the town prosperous. That is all we know. What the town was like we do not know. It is, however, probable that the requirements of trade had already necessitated some form of embankment and some kind of quay; also, if trade were of long standing, some improvement in the huts, the manner of living, the wants, and the dress of the people would certainly have been introduced.

Such was the beginning of London. Let us repeat.

It was a small fortress defended on three sides by earthworks, by stockades, by a cliff or steeply sloping bank, and by streams; on the fourth side by an earthwork, stockade, and trench. The ground was slightly irregular, rising from 30 to 60 feet. An open moor full of quagmires and ponds also protected it on the north. On the east on the other side of the stream rose another low hill. The extent of this British fort of Llyn-din may be easily estimated. The distance from Walbrook to the Fleet is very nearly 900 yards; supposing the fort was 500 yards in depth from south to north we have an area of 450,000 square yards, i.e. about 100 acres was occupied by the first London, the Fortress on the Lake. What this town was like in its later days when the Romans found it; what buildings stood upon it; how the people lived, we know very little indeed. They went out to fight, we know so much; and if you visit Hampstead Heath you may look at a barrow on the top of a hill which probably contains the bones of those citizens of London who fell in the victory which they achieved over the citizens of Verulam when they fought it out in the valley below that hill.



### 3. ROMAN LONDON

#### PART I

The Romans, when they resolved to settle in England, established themselves on the opposite hillock, the eastern bank of the Walbrook. The situation was not so strong as that of the British town, because it was protected by cliff and river on two sides only instead of three. But the Romans depended on their walls and their arms rather than the position of their town. As was their habit they erected here a strong fortress or a stationary camp, such as others which remain in the country. Perhaps the Roman building which most resembles this fort is the walled enclosure called Porchester, which stands at the head of Portsmouth Harbour. This is rectangular in shape and is contained by a high wall built of rubble stone and narrow bricks, with round, hollow bastions at intervals. One may also see such a stationary camp at Richborough, near Sandwich; and at Pevensey, in Sussex; and at Silchester, near Reading, but the two latter are not rectangular. One end of this fort was on the top of the Walbrook bank and the other, if you look in your map, on the site of Mincing Lane. This gives a length of about 700 yards by a breadth of 350, which means an enclosure of about 50 acres. This is a large area: it was at once the barrack, the arsenal, and the treasury of the station; it contained the residences of the officers, the offices of the station, the law court and tribunals, and the prisons; it was the official residence. Outside the fort on the north was the burial place. If we desire to know the character of the buildings we may assure ourselves that they were not mean or ignoble by visiting the Roman town of Silchester. Here we find that the great Hall of Justice was a hall more spacious than Westminster Hall, though doubtless not so lofty or so fine. Attached to this hall were other smaller rooms for the administration of justice; on one side was an open court with a cloister or corridor running all round it and shops at the back for the sale of everything. This was the centre of the city: here the courts were held; this was the Exchange; here were the baths; this was the place where the people resorted in the morning and lounged about to hear the news; here the jugglers and the minstrels and the acrobats came to perform; it was the very centre of the life of the city – as was Silchester so was London.

Outside the Citadel the rude British town – if it was still a rude town – disappeared rapidly. The security of the place, strongly garrisoned, the extension of Roman manners, the introduction of Roman customs, dress, and luxuries gave a great impetus to the development of the City. The little ports of the rivers Walbrook and Fleet no longer sufficed for the shipping which now came up the river; if there were as yet no quays or embankments they were begun to be erected; behind them rose warehouses and wharves. The cliff began to be cut away; a steep slope took its place; its very existence was forgotten. The same thing has happened at Brighton, where, almost within the memory of living man, a low cliff ran along the beach. This embankment extended east and west – as far as the Fleet River, which is now Blackfriars, on the west, and what is now Tower Hill on the east. Then, the trade still increasing, the belt of ground behind the embankment became filled with a dense population of riverside people – boatmen, sailors, boat-builders, store-keepers, bargemen, stevedores, porters – all the people who belong to a busy mercantile port. As for the better sort, they lived round the Citadel, protected by its presence, in villas, remains of which have been found in many places.

The two things which most marked the Roman occupation were London Wall and Bridge. Of the latter we will speak in another place. The wall was erected at a time between A.D. 350 and A.D. 369 – very near the end of the Roman occupation. This wall remained the City wall for more than a thousand years; it was rebuilt, repaired, restored; the scanty remains of it – a few fragments here and there – contain very little of the original wall; but the course of the wall was never altered, and

we know exactly how it ran. There was first a strong river wall along the northern bank. There were three water gates and the Bridge gate; there were two land gates at Newgate and Bishopsgate. The wall was 3 miles and 205 yards long; the area enclosed was 380 acres. This shows that the population must have been already very large, for the Romans were not accustomed to erect walls longer than they could defend.

## 4. ROMAN LONDON

### PART II

We must think of Roman London as of a small stronghold on a low hill rising out of the river. It is a strongly-walled place, within which is a garrison of soldiers; outside its walls stretch gardens and villas, many of them rich and beautiful, filled with costly things. Below the fort is a long river wall or quay covered with warehouses, bales of goods, and a busy multitude of men at work. Some are slaves – perhaps all. Would you like to know what a Roman villa was like? It was in plan a small, square court, surrounded on three sides by a cloister or corridor with pillars, and behind the cloister the rooms of the house; the middle part of the court was a garden, and in front was another and a larger garden. The house was of one storey, the number and size of the rooms varying according to the size of the house. On one side were the winter divisions, on the other were the summer rooms. The former part was kept warm by means of a furnace constructed below the house, which supplied hot-air pipes running up all the walls. At the back of the house were the kitchen, stables, and sleeping quarters of the servants. Tesselated pavements, statues, pictures, carvings, hangings, pillows, and fine glass adorned the house. There was not in London the enormous wealth which enabled some of the Romans to live in palaces, but there was comparative wealth – the wealth which enables a man to procure for himself in reason all the things that he desires.

The City as it grew in prosperity was honoured by receiving the name of Augusta. It remained in Roman hands for nearly four hundred years. The Citadel, which marks the first occupation by the Romans, was probably built about A.D. 43. The Romans went away in A.D. 410. During these four centuries the people became entirely Romanised. Add to this that they became Christians. Augusta was a Christian city; the churches which stand – or stood, because three at least have been removed – along Thames Street, probably occupied the sites of older Roman churches. In this part of the City the people were thickest; in this quarter, therefore, stood the greater number of churches: the fact that they were mostly dedicated to the apostles instead of to later Saxon saints seems to show that they stood on the sites of Roman churches. It has been asked why there has never been found any heathen temple in London; the answer is that London under the Romans very early became Christian; if there had been a temple of Diana or Apollo it would have been destroyed or converted into a church. Such remains of Augusta as have been found are inconsiderable: they are nearly all in the museum of the Guildhall, where they should be visited and examined.

The history of Roman London is meagre. Seventeen years after the building of the Citadel, on the rebellion of Boadicea, the Roman general Suetonius abandoned the place, as unable to defend it. All those who remained were massacred by the insurgents. After this, so far as we know, for history is silent, there was peace in London for 200 years. Then one Carausius, an officer in command of the fleet stationed in the Channel for the suppression of piracies, assumed the title of emperor. He continued undisturbed for some years, his soldiers remaining faithful to him on account of his wealth: he established a Mint at London and struck a large amount of money there. He was murdered by one of his officers, Allectus, who called himself emperor in turn and continued to rule in Britain for three years. Then the end came for him as well. The Roman general landing with a large force marched upon London where Allectus lay. A battle fought in the south of London resulted in the overthrow and death of the usurper. His soldiers taking advantage of the confusion began to plunder and murder in the town, but were stopped and killed by the victors.

Constantine, who became emperor in 306, was then in Britain, but his name is not connected with London except by coins bearing his name.

Tradition connects the name of Helena, Constantine's mother, with London, but there is nothing to prove that she was ever in the island at all.

Late in the fourth century troubles began to fall thick upon the country. The Picts and the Scots overran the northern parts and penetrated to the very walls of London. The general Theodosius, whose son became the emperor of that name, drove them back. About this time the wall of London was built; not the wall of the Roman fort, but that of the whole City. From the year 369, when Theodosius the general landed in Britain, to the year 609 we see nothing of London except one brief glimpse of fugitives flying for their lives across London Bridge. Of this interval we shall speak in the next chapter. Meanwhile it is sufficient to say that the decay of the Roman power made it necessary to withdraw the legions from the outlying and distant portions of the Empire. Britain had to be abandoned. It was as if England were to give up Hong Kong and Singapore and the West Indies because she could no longer spare the ships and regiments to defend them. The nation which abandons her possessions is not far from downfall. Remember, when you listen to those who advocate abandonment of our colonies, the example of Rome.

## 5. AFTER THE ROMANS

### PART I

The Romans left London. That was early in the fifth century; probably in the year 410.

Two hundred years later we find the East Saxons in London.

What happened during this long interval of seven generations? Not a word reaches us of London for two hundred years except once when, after a defeat of the British by the Saxons at Crayford in the year 457, we read that the fugitives crossed over London Bridge to take refuge within the walls of the City. What happened during this two hundred years?<sup>1</sup>

We know what happened with other cities. Anderida, now called Pevensey, was taken by the Saxons, and all its inhabitants, man, woman and child, were slaughtered, so that it became a waste until the Normans built a castle within the old walls. Canterbury, Silchester, Porchester, Colchester – all were taken, their people massacred, the walls left standing, the streets left desolate. For the English – the Saxons – loved not city walls. Therefore, we might reasonably conclude that the same thing happened to London. But if it be worthy of the chronicler to note the massacre of Anderida, a small seaport, why should he omit the far more important capture of Augusta?

Let us hear what history has to tell. Times full of trouble fell upon the country. Long before the Romans went away the Picts and Scots were pouring their wild hordes over the north and west, sometimes getting as far south as the Middlesex Forest, murdering and destroying. As early as the year 368, forty years before they left the country, the Romans sent an expedition north to drive back these savages. Already the Saxons, the Jutes and the Angles were sending piratical expeditions to harry the coast and even to make settlements. The arm of the Roman was growing weak, it could not stretch out so far: the fleets of the Romans, under the officer called the 'Count of the Saxon Shore' – whose duty was to guard the eastern and southern coasts – were destroyed and their commander slain. So that, with foes on the eastern seaboard, foes in the Channel, foes in the river, foes in the north and west, it is certain that the trade of Augusta was declining long before the City was left to defend itself.

What sort of defence were the people likely to offer? For nearly four hundred years they had lived at peace, free to grow rich and luxurious, with mercenaries to fight for them. Between the taking of the City by Boadicea and the departure of the Romans, a space of three hundred and fifty years, the peace of the City was only disturbed by the lawlessness of Allectus's mercenaries. Their attempt to sack the City was put down, it is significant to note, not by the citizens but by the Roman soldiers who entered the City in time. The citizens were mostly merchants: they were Christians in name and in form of worship, they were superstitious, they were luxurious, they were unwarlike. Many of them were not Britons at all, but foreigners settled in the City for trade. Moreover, for it is not true that the whole British people had grown unfit for war, a revolt of the Roman legions in the year 407 drew a large number of the young men into their ranks, and when Constantine the usurper took them over into Gaul for the four years' fighting which followed, the country was drained of its best fighting material. The City, then, contained a large number of wealthy merchants, native and foreign; it also contained a great many slaves who were occupied in the conduct of the trade, and few, since the young men went away with Constantine, who could be relied upon to fight.

One more point may be made out from history. Since London was a town which then, as now, lived entirely by its trade and was the centre of the export and import trade of the whole country, the merchants, as we have seen, must have suffered most severely long before the Romans went away. We

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<sup>1</sup> On this subject, see the author's book *London* (Chatto & Windus).

are, therefore, in the year 410, facing a situation full of menace. The Picts and Scots are overrunning the whole of the north, the Saxons are harrying the east and the south-east, trade is dying, there is little demand for imports, there are few exports, it is useless for ships to wait cargoes which never arrive, it is useless for ships to bring cargoes for which there is no demand.

A declining city, a dying trade, enemies in all directions, an unwarlike population. When the curtain falls upon the scene in the year 410 that is what we see.

## 6. AFTER THE ROMANS

### PART II

Consider, again, the position of London. It stood, as you have seen, originally on two low hills overlooking the river. A strong wall built all along the bank from Blackfriars (now so called) to the present site of the Tower kept the river from swamping the houses and wharves which sprang up behind this wall. The walls of the City later on, but only about fifty years before the Romans went away, enclosed a large area covered over with streets, narrow near the river and broad farther north, and with residences, warehouses, villas, and workshops. There was probably a population of 70,000 or even more. On the west, in the direction of Westminster, the City wall overlooked an immense marsh: on the south across the river there was a still broader and longer marsh: on the east there was another great marsh with the sea overflowing the sedgy meadows at every high tide: on the north there was a wild moor and beyond the moor there was an immense forest. Four roads not counting the river-way kept the City in communication with the rest of the island. The most important of these roads was that afterwards called Watling Street, which passed out at Newgate and led across the heart of the country to Chester and Wales, to York and the north. The second, afterwards called Ermin Street, left the City at Bishopsgate and ran through Lincoln to York, a third road called the Vicinal Way ran into the eastern counties, and by way of London Bridge Watling Street was connected with Dover.

London, therefore, standing in its marshes had no means of providing for itself. All the food for its great population was imported. It was brought on pack asses along these roads. It came from the farms and gardens of the country inland by means of these high roads, strong, broad, and splendid roads, as good as any we have since succeeded in making. In peaceful times these roads were crowded all the way from Chester and Lincoln and Dover with long trains of animals laden with provisions for the people of London, as well as with goods for export from the Port of London. They were met by long trains of animals laden with imports being carried to their destination. The Thames in the same way was filled with barges laden with provisions as well as with goods going down the river to the people and the Port of London. Below Bridge the river was filled with merchant ships bringing cargoes of wine and spices and costly things to be exchanged for skins and slaves and metals. Let us remember that the daily victualling of 70,000 people means an immense service. We are so accustomed to find everything ready to hand in cities containing millions as well as in villages of hundreds, that we forget the magnitude of this service. No mind can conceive the magnitude of the food supply of modern London, Paris, New York, or even such towns as Portsmouth, Plymouth, Bristol. Yet try to understand what it means to feed every day, without interruption, only a small town of 70,000 people. So much bread for every day, so much meat, so much fish, so much wine, beer, mead, or cider – because at no time did people drink water if they could get anything else – so much milk, honey, butter, cheese, eggs, poultry, geese and ducks, so much beans, pease, salad, fruit. All this had to be brought in regularly – daily. There was salted meat for winter; there was dried fish when fresh could not be procured; there were granaries of wheat to provide for emergencies. All the rest had to be provided day by day.

First, the East Saxons, settling in Essex and spreading over the whole of that county, stopped the supplies and the trade over all the eastern counties; then the Jutes, landing on the Isle of Thanet, stopped the ships that went up and down the river; they also spread over the south country and stopped the supplies that formerly came over London Bridge. Then the Picts and Scots, followed by more Saxons, harassed the north and middle of the island, and no more supplies came down Watling Street.

Lastly, the enemy, pressing northward from the south shore, gained the middle reaches of the Thames, and no more supplies came down the river.

London was thus deprived of food as well as of trade.

This slowly, not suddenly, came to pass. First, one source of supply was cut off, then another. First, trade declined in one quarter, then it ceased in that quarter altogether. Next, another quarter was attacked. The foreign merchants, since there was no trade left, went on board their own ships and disappeared. Whether they succeeded in passing through the pirate craft that crowded the mouth of the river, one knows not. The bones of many lie at the bottom of the sea off the Nore. They vanished from hapless Augusta; they came back no more.

Who were left? The native merchants. Despair was in their hearts; starvation threatened them, even amid the dainty appointments of their luxurious villas; what is the use of marble baths and silken hangings, tessellated pavements, and pictures, and books, and statues, if there is no food to be had, though one bid for it all the pictures in the house? With the merchants, there were the priests, the physicians, the lawyers, the actors and mimics, the artists, the teachers, all who minister to religion, luxury, and culture. There were next the great mass of the people, the clerks and scribes, the craftsmen, the salesmen, the lightermen, stevedores, boatmen, marine store keepers, makers of ships' gear, porters – slaves for the most part – all from highest to lowest, plunged into helplessness. Whither could they fly for refuge? Upon whom could they call for help?



## 7. AFTER THE ROMANS

### PART III

Abroad, the Roman Empire was breaking up. The whole of Europe was covered with war. Revolts of conquered tribes, rebellions of successful generals, invasions of savages, the murders of usurpers, the sacking of cities. Rome itself was sacked by Alaric; the conquest of one country after another made of this period the darkest in the history of the world. From over the seas no help, the enemy blocking the mouth of the river, all the roads closed and all the farms destroyed.

There came a day at length when it was at last apparent that no more supplies would reach the City. Then the people began to leave the place: better to fight their way across the country to the west where the Britons still held their own, than to stay and starve. The men took their arms – they carried little treasure with them, because treasure would be of no use to them on their way – their wives and children, ladies as delicate and as helpless as any of our own time – children as unfit as our own to face the miseries of cold and hunger and nakedness – and they went out by the gate of Watling Street, not altogether, not the whole population, but in small companies, for greater safety. They left the City by the gate; they did not journey along the road, but for safety turned aside into the great forest, and so marching across moors and marshes, past burned homesteads, and ruined villages, and farm buildings thrown down, those of them who did not perish by the way under the enemies' sword or by malarious fever, or by starvation, reached the Severn and the border of the mountains where the Saxon could not penetrate.

There was left behind a remnant – after every massacre or exodus there is always left a remnant. The people who stayed in the City were only a few and those of the baser sort, protected by their wretchedness and poverty. No one would kill those who offer no defence and have no treasures; and their condition under any new masters would be no worse. They shut the gates and barred them: they closed and barred the Bridge: they took out of the houses anything that they wanted – the soft warm mantles, the woollen garments, the coverlets, the pillows and hangings, but they abode in their hovels near the river banks; as for the works of art, the pictures, statues, and tessellated pavements, these they left where they found them or for wantonness destroyed them. They fished in the river for their food: they hunted over the marshes where are now Westminster, Battersea, and Lambeth: the years passed by and no one disturbed them: they still crouched in their huts while the thin veneer of civilisation was gradually lost with whatever arts they had learned and all their religion except the terror of the Unknown.

Meanwhile the roofs of the villas and churches fell in, the walls decayed, the gardens were overgrown. Augusta – the proud and stately Augusta – was reduced to a wall enclosing a heap of ruins with a few savages huddled together in hovels by the riverside.

For the East Saxon had overrun Essex, the Jute covered Kent and Surrey, the South Saxon held Sussex, the West Saxon held Wessex. All around – on every side – London was surrounded by the Conqueror of the Land. Why, then, did they not take London? Because London was deserted; there was nothing to take: London was silent. No ships going up or down the river reminded the Saxon of the City. It lay amid its marshes and its moors, the old roads choked and overgrown; it was forgotten; it was what the Saxons had already made of Canterbury and Anderida, a 'Waste Chester,' that is, a desolated stronghold.

Augusta was forgotten.

This is the story that we learn from the actual site of London – its position among marshes, the conditions under which alone the people could be maintained.

How long did this oblivion continue? No one knows when it began or when it ended. As I read the story of the past, I find a day towards the close of the sixth century when there appeared within sight of the deserted walls a company of East Saxons. They were hunting: they were armed with spears: they followed the chase through the great forest afterwards called the Middlesex Forest, Epping Forest, Hainault Forest, and across the marshes of the river Lea, full of sedge and reed and treacherous quagmires. And they saw before them the gray walls of a great city of which they had never heard.

They advanced cautiously: they found themselves on a firm road, the Vicinal Way, covered with grass: they expected the sight of an enemy on the wall: none appeared. The gates were closed, the timbers were rotten and fell down at a touch: the men broke through and found themselves among the streets of a city all in ruins. They ran about – shouting – no one appeared: the City was deserted.

They went away and told what they had found.

But Augusta had perished. When the City appears again it is under its more ancient name – it is again London.

## 8. THE FIRST SAXON SETTLEMENT

A hundred and fifty years passed away between the landing of the East Saxons and their recorded occupation of the City. This long period made a great difference in the fierce savage who followed the standard of the White Horse and landed on the coast of Essex. He became more peaceful: he settled down contentedly to periods of tranquillity. Certain arts he acquired, and he learned to live in towns: as yet he was not a Christian. This means that the influence of Rome with its religion, its learning and its arts had not yet touched him.

But he had begun to live in towns; and he lived in London.

Perhaps the first of the new settlers were the foreign merchants returning, as soon as more settled times allowed, with their cargoes. London has always been a place of trade. But for trade no one would have settled in it. Therefore, either the men of Essex invited the foreign merchants to return; or the foreign merchants returned and invited the men of Essex to come into the City and to bring with them what they had to exchange.

In the year 597 Augustine, prior of a Roman monastery, was sent by Pope Gregory the Great with forty monks, to convert the English. Ethelbert, King of Kent, and most powerful of the English kinglets, was married to Bertha, a Christian princess. She had brought with her a chaplain and it was probably at her invitation or through her influence, that the monks were sent. They landed at Thanet. They obtained permission to meet the King in the open air. They appeared wearing their robes, carrying a crucifix, and chanting Psalms. It is probable that the conversion of the King had been arranged beforehand; for without any difficulty or delay the King and all his Court, and, following the King's example, all the people were baptised.

Augustine returned to Rome where he was consecrated Archbishop of the English nation. A church was built at Canterbury, and the work of preaching the Faith went on vigorously. The East Saxons made no more hesitation at being baptised than the men of Kent. Ethelbert, indeed, could command obedience; he was Over Lord of all the nations south of the Humber. He it was, according to Bede, who built the first church of St. Paul in London, a fact which proves his authority and influence in London, and his sincere desire that the East Saxons should become Christians.

They did, in a way. But when King Siebehrt died, they relapsed and drove their Bishop into exile.

Then – Bede says that they were punished for this sin – the East Saxons fell into trouble. They went to war with the men of Wessex and were defeated by them. After this, we find London in the hands of the Northumbrians and the Mercians – that is to say – these nations one after the other obtained the supremacy. It was in the year 616 or thereabouts, that Bishop Mellitus had to leave his diocese. Forty years later another conversion of London took place under Bishop Cedd, consecrated at Lindisfarne. The new faith was not strong enough to stand against a plague, and the East Saxons of London went back once more to their old gods. After another thirty years, before the close of the seventh century, London was again converted: and this time for good.

In the eighth century London passed again out of the hands of the East Saxon kings into those of the Mercians. The earliest extant document concerning London is one dated 734, in which King Ethelbald grants to the Bishop of Rochester leave to send one ship without tax in or out of London Port.

A witan – i.e. a national council – was held in London in 811. It is then spoken of as an illustrious place and royal city. The supremacy of Mercia passed to that of Wessex – London went with the supremacy. In 833 Egbert, King of Wessex, held a witan in London.

When Egbert died the supremacy of Wessex fell with him. Then the Danish troubles fell thick and disastrous upon the country. When Alfred succeeded to the Crown the Danes held the Isle of Thanet, which commanded the river; they had conquered the north country from the Tweed to the

Humber; they had overrun all the eastern counties twice – viz., in 839 and in 852: they had pillaged London, which they presently occupied, making it their headquarters. With this Danish occupation ends the first Saxon settlement of the City.

## 9. THE SECOND SAXON SETTLEMENT

The Danes held the City for twelve years at least. One cannot believe that these fierce warriors, who were exactly what the Saxons and Jutes had been four hundred years before – as fierce, as rude, as pagan – suffered any of the inhabitants, except the slaves, to remain. Massacre and pillage – or the fear of both – drove away all the residents. But the City was the headquarters of the Danes. Alfred recovered it in the year 884.

He found it as the East Saxons had found it three hundred years before, a city of ruins; the wall a ruin; the churches destroyed.

King Alfred has left many imperishable monuments of his reign. One of the greatest is the City of London, which he rebuilt. A recent historian (Loftie, *Historic Towns*, 'London') says that it would hardly be wrong to write, 'London was founded, rather more than a thousand years ago, by King Alfred – who chose for the site of his city a place formerly fortified by the Romans but desolated successively by the Saxons and the Danes.'

The first thing he did was to rebuild the wall. This work re-established confidence in the minds of the citizens. Alfred placed his son-in-law Ethelred, afterwards Alderman (i.e. Chief man – Governor) of the Mercians, in command of the City, which seems to have been immediately filled with people. The London citizens went out with Ethelred to defeat the Danes at Benfleet, and with Alfred to defeat the Danes at the mouth of the river Lea; they went out with Athelstan to fight at Brunanburgh. London was never again taken by the Danes. Twice Sweyn endeavoured to take the City but was repulsed. Nor did London open her gates to him until the King had left the City. And when the Danes again entered the City there was no more pillage or massacre; London was too strong to be pillaged or massacred, and too rich to be abandoned to the army.

King Ethelred came back and died, and was buried in St. Paul's; the old St. Paul's – that of King Ethelbert or that of Bishop Cedd – was burned down and the Londoners were building a new cathedral.

Edmund Ironside was elected and crowned within the City walls. Then followed a siege of London by Canute. He dug a canal through the swamps, and dragged his ships by its means from Redriff to Lambeth. But he could not take the City. But the Treaty of Partition between Edmund and himself was agreed upon and the Dane once more obtained the City. He has left one or two names behind him. The church of St. Olave's in Hart Street, and that in 'Tooley,' or St. Olave's Street, Southwark, and the Church of St. Magnus, attest to the sovereignty of the Dane.

At this time the two principal officers of the City were the Bishop and the Portreeve: there was also the 'Staller' or Marshal. The principal governing body was the 'Knighten Guild,' which was largely composed of the City aldermen. But these aldermen were not like those of the present day, an elected body: they were hereditary: they were aldermen in right of their estates within the City. What powers the Knighten Guild possessed is not easy to define. Besides this, the aristocracy of the City, there were already trade guilds for religious purposes and for feasting – but, as yet, with no powers. The people had their folk mote, or general gathering: their ward mote: and their weekly hustings. We must not seek to define the powers of all these bodies and corporations. They overlapped each other: the aristocratic party was continually innovating while the popular party as continually resisted. In many ways what we call the government of the City had not begun to be understood. That there was order of a kind is shown by the strict regulations, as strictly enforced, of the dues and tolls for ships that came up the river to the Port of London.

## 10. THE ANGLO-SAXON CITIZEN

The Londoner of Athelstan and Ethelred was an Anglo-Saxon of a type far in advance of his fierce ancestor who swept the narrow seas and harried the eastern coasts. He had learned many arts: he had become a Christian: he wanted many luxuries. But the solid things which he inherited from his rude forefathers he passed on to his children. And they remain an inheritance for us to this day. For instance, our form of monarchy, limited in power, comes straight down to us from Alfred and Athelstan. Our nobility is a survival and a development of the Saxon earls and thanes; our forms of justice, trial by jury, magistrates – all come from the Saxons; the divisions of our country are Saxon, our municipal institutions are Saxon, our parliaments and councils are Saxon in origin. We owe our language to the Anglo-Saxon, small additions from Latin, French, and other sources have been made, but the bulk of our language is Saxon. Three-fourths of us are Anglo-Saxon by descent. Whatever there is in the English character of persistence, obstinacy, patience, industry, sobriety, love of freedom, we are accustomed to attribute to our Anglo-Saxon descent. In religion, arts, learning, literature, culture, we owe little or nothing to the Anglo-Saxon. In all these things we are indebted to the South.

Let us see how the Anglo-Saxon Londoner lived.

He was a trader or a craftsman. As a trader he received from the country inland whatever it had to produce. Slaves, who were bred like cattle on the farms, formed a large part of the exports; hides, wool, iron, tin, the English merchant had these things, and nothing more, to offer the foreigner who brought in exchange wine, spices, silk, incense, vestments and pictures for the churches and monasteries, books, and other luxuries. The ships at first belonged to the foreign merchants: they traded not only at London, but also at Bristol, Canterbury, Dover, Arundel, and other towns. Before the Conquest, however, English-built ships and English-manned fleets had already entered upon the trade.

The trader, already wealthy, lived in great comfort. He was absolute master in his own house, but the household was directed or ruled by his wife. Everything was made in the house: the flour was ground, the bread was baked, the meat and fish were salted; the linen was woven, the garments were made by the wife, the daughters, and the women servants. The Anglo-Saxon ladies were remarkable for their skill in embroidery; they excelled all other women in this beautiful art.

The Anglo-Saxon house developed out of the common hall. Those who know the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge can trace the growth of the house in any of them. First there is the Common Hall. In this room, formerly, the whole family, with the serving men and women, lived and slept. There still exists at Higham Ferrars, in Northampton, such a hall, built as an almshouse. It is a long room: at the east end, raised a foot, is a little chapel; on the south side is a long open stove; the almsmen slept on the floor on reeds, each man wrapped in his blanket.

Everybody lived and slept in the Common Hall. All day long the women worked at the spinning and weaving and sewing and embroidery. Women were defined by this kind of work – we still speak of spinsters. Formerly relationship through the mother was called 'on the spindle side,' while, long after the men had to fight every day against marauding tribes, relationship through the father was called 'on the spear side.' All day long the men worked outside in the fields, or in the warehouse, and on the quays or at their craft. In the evening they sat about the fire and listened to stories, or to songs with the accompaniment of the harp.

The first improvement was the separation of the kitchen from the hall: in the Cambridge College you see the hall on one side and the kitchen the other, separated by a passage. The second step was the construction of the 'Solar,' or chamber over the kitchen, which became the bedroom of the master and the mistress of the house. Then they built a room behind the solar for the daughters and the maidservants; the sons and the menservants still sleeping in the Hall. Presumably the house was at this

stage in the time of King Ethelred, just before the Norman Conquest. The ladies' 'bower' followed, and after that the sleeping rooms for the men.

There was no furniture, as we understand it. Benches there were, and trestles for the tables, which were literally laid at every meal: a great chair was provided for the Lord and Lady: tapestry kept out the draughts: weapons, musical instruments, and other things hung upon the walls. Dinner was at noon: supper in the evening when work was over: they made great use of vegetables and they had nearly all our modern fruits: they drank, as the national beverage, beer or mead.

But everybody was not a wealthy merchant: most of the citizens were craftsmen of some kind. These lived in small wooden houses of two rooms, one above the other: those who were not able to afford so much slept in hovels, consisting of four uprights with 'wattle and daub' for the sides, a roof of thatch, no window, and a fire in the middle of the floor. They lived very roughly: they endured many hardships: but they were a well-fed people, turbulent and independent: their houses were crowded in narrow lanes – how narrow may be understood by a walk along Thames Street; they were always in danger of fire – in 962, in 1087, in 1135, the greater part of the City was burned to the ground. They lived in plenty: there was work for all: they had their folk mote – their City parliament – and their ward mote – which still exists: they had no feudal lord to harass them: as for the dirt and mud and stench of the narrow City streets, they cared nothing for such things. They were free: and they were well fed: and they were cheerful and contented.

## 11. THE WALL OF LONDON

Let us examine into the history and the course of the Wall of London, if only for the very remarkable facts that the boundary of the City was determined for fifteen hundred years by the erection of this Wall; that for some purposes the course of the Wall still affects the government of London; and that it was only pulled down bit by bit in the course of the last century.

You will see by reference to the map what was the course of the Wall. It began, starting from the east where the White Tower now stands. Part of the foundation of the Tower consists of a bastion of the Roman wall. It followed a line nearly north as far as Aldgate. Then it turned in a N.W. direction just north of Camomile Street and Bevis Marks to Bishopsgate. Thence it ran nearly due W., north of the street called London Wall, turning S. at Monkwell Street. At Aldersgate it turned W. until it reached Newgate, where it turned nearly S. again and so to the river, a little east of the present Blackfriars Bridge. It ran, lastly, along the river bank to join its eastern extremity. The river wall had openings or gates at Dowgate and Bishopsgate, and probably at Queen Hithe. The length of the Wall, without counting the river side, was 2 miles and 608 feet.

This formidable Wall was originally about 12 feet thick made of rubble and mortar, the latter very hard, and faced with stone. You may know Roman work by the courses of tiles or bricks. They are arranged in double layers about 2 feet apart. The so-called bricks are not in the least like our bricks, being 6 inches long, 12 inches wide and 1½ inch thick. The Wall was 20 feet high, with towers and bastions at intervals about 50 feet high. At first there was no moat or ditch, and it will be understood that in order to protect the City from an attack of barbarians – Picts or Scots – it was enough to close the gates and to man the towers. The invaders had no ladders.

In the course of centuries a great many repairs and rebuildings of the Wall took place. The Saxons allowed it to fall into a ruinous condition. Alfred rebuilt it and strengthened it. The next important repairs were made in the reign of King John in 1215, by Henry III., Edward I., Edward II., Edward III., Richard II., Edward IV. After these various rebuildings there would seem to be little left of the original Wall. That, however, a great part of it continued to be the hard rubble core of the Roman work seems evident from the fact that the course of the Wall was never altered. The only alteration was when they turned the Wall west at Ludgate down to the Fleet River and so to the confluence of the Fleet and the Thames. The river side of the Wall was also allowed to be removed.

The City was thus protected by a great wall pierced by a few gates, with bastions and towers. At the East End after the Norman Conquest rose the Great White Tower still standing. At the West End was a tower called Montfichet's Tower.

But a wall without a ditch, where a ditch was possible, became of little use as soon as scaling ladders were invented with wooden movable towers and other devices. A ditch was accordingly constructed in the year 1211 in the reign of King John. It appears to have been from the very first neglected by the citizens, who trusted more to their own bravery than to the protection of a ditch. It was frequently ordered to be cleansed and repaired: it abounded, when it was clean, with good fish of various kinds: but it was gradually allowed to dry up until, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, nothing was left but a narrow channel or no channel at all but a few scattered ponds, with market gardens planted in the ditch itself. In Agas's map of London these gardens are figured, with summer houses and cottages for the gardeners and cattle grazing. On the west side north of Ludgate the ditch has entirely disappeared and houses are built against the Wall on the outside. Houndsditch is a row of mean houses facing the moat. Fore Street is also built over against the moat. Within and without the Wall they placed churchyards – those of St. Alphege, Allhallows, and St. Martin's Outwich, you may still see for yourselves within the Wall: that of St. Augustine's at the north end of St. Mary Axe, has vanished. Those of the three churches of St. Botolph, Bishopsgate, Aldgate, Aldersgate, and that of St. Giles are churchyards without the Wall. Then the ditch became filled up and houses were built all



along the Wall within and without. Thus began unchecked, perhaps openly encouraged, the gradual demolition of the Wall. It takes a long time to tear down a wall of solid rubble twelve feet thick. It took the Londoners about 160 years. In the year 1760 they finally removed the gates. Most of the Wall was gone by this time but large fragments remained here and there. You may still see a considerable piece, part of a bastion in the churchyard of St. Giles, and the vestry of All Hallows on the Wall is built upon a bastion. In Camomile Street and in other places portions of the Wall have been discovered where excavations have been made: and, of course, the foundation of the Wall exists still, from end to end.

## 12. NORMAN LONDON

When William the Conqueror received the submission of the City he gave the citizens a Charter – their first Charter – of freedom. There can be no doubt that the Charter was the price demanded by the citizens and willingly paid by the Conqueror in return for their submission. The following is the document. Short as it is, the whole future of the City is founded upon these few words: —

'William King greets William Bishop and Gosfrith Portreeve and all the burghers within London, French and English, friendly.

'I do you to wit that I will that ye be all law worthy that were in King Edward's day, and I will that every child be his father's heir after his father's day: and I will not endure that any man offer any wrong to you.

'God keep you.'

The ancient Charter itself is preserved at Guildhall. Many copies of it and translations of it were made from time to time. Let us see what it means.

The citizens were to be 'law worthy' as they had been in the days of King Edward. This meant that they were to be free men in the courts of justice, with the right to be tried by their equals, that is, by jury. 'All who were law worthy in King Edward's day.' Serfs were not law worthy, for instance. That the children should inherit their father's property was, as much as the preceding clause, great security to the freedom of the City, for it protected the people from any feudal claims that might arise. Next, observe that there was never any Earl of London: the City had no Lord but the King: it never would endure any Lord but the King. An attempt was made, but only one, and that was followed by the downfall of the Queen – Matilda – who tried it. Feudal customs arose and flourished and died, but they were unknown in this free city.

But the City with its strong walls, its great multitude of people, and its resources, might prove so independent as to lock out the King. William therefore began to build the Tower, by means of which he could not only keep the enemy out of London but could keep his own strong hand upon the burghers. He took down a piece of the wall and enclosed twelve acres of ground, in which he built his stronghold, within a deep and broad ditch. The work was entrusted to Gundulph, Bishop of Rochester, who left it unfinished when he died thirty years after.

The next great Charter of the City was granted by Henry the First. He remitted the payment of the levies for feudal service, of tax called Danegeld, originally imposed for buying off the Danes: of the murder tax: of wager of battle, that is, that form of trial in which the accused and the accuser fought it out, and from certain tolls. He also gave the citizens the county of Middlesex to farm on payment to the Crown of 300*l.* a year – a payment still made: they were to appoint a Sheriff for the county: and they were to have leave to hunt in the forests of Middlesex, Surrey, and the Chiltern Hills. They were also empowered to elect their own justiciar and allowed to try their own cases within their own limits.

This was a very important Charter. No doubt, like the first, it was stipulated as a price for the support of the City. William Rufus was killed on Thursday – Henry was in London on Saturday. He must therefore have ridden hard to get over the hundred and twenty miles of rough bridle track between the New Forest and London. But the City supported him and this was their reward.

We are gradually approaching the modern constitution of the City. The Portreeve or first Magistrate, in the year 1189, in the person of Henry Fitz Aylwin, assumed the title of Mayor – not Lord Mayor: the title came later, a habit or style, never a rank conferred. With him were two Sheriffs, the Sheriff of the City and the Sheriff of the County. There was the Bishop: there was the City Justiciar with his courts. There were also the Aldermen, not yet an elected body.

The Londoners elected Stephen King, and stood by him through all the troubles that followed. The plainest proof of the strength and importance of the City is shown in the fact that when Matilda

took revenge on London by depriving the City of its Charters the citizens rose and drove her out of London and made her cause hopeless.

## 13. FITZSTEPHEN'S ACCOUNT OF THE CITY

### PART I

The White Tower is the only building in modern London which belongs to Norman London. Portions remain – fragments – a part of the church of St. Bartholomew the Great, a part of the church of St. Ethelburga, the crypt of Bow Church: very little else. All the rest has been destroyed by time, by 'improvements,' or by fire, the greatest enemy to cities in every country and every age. Thus, three great fires in the tenth and eleventh century swept London from end to end. No need to ask if anything remains of the Roman or the Saxon City. Not a vestige is left – except the little fragment, known as the London Stone, now lying behind iron bars in the wall of St. Swithin's Church. Churches, Palaces, Monasteries, Castles – all perished in those three fires. The City, no doubt, speedily sprang again from its ashes, but of its rebuilding on each occasion we have no details at all.

Most fortunately, there exists a document priceless and unique, short as it is and meagre in many of its details, which describes London as it was in the reign of Henry II. It is written by one FitzStephen, Chaplain to Thomas Becket. He was present at the murder of the Archbishop and wrote his life, to which this account is an introduction.

He says, first of all, that the City contained thirteen larger conventual churches and a hundred and twenty-six parish churches. He writes only fifty years after the Great Fire, so that it is not likely that new parishes had been erected. All the churches which had been destroyed were rebuilt. Most of them were very small parishes, with, doubtless, very small churches. We shall return presently to the question of the churches.

On the east was the White Tower which he calls the 'Palatine Castle:' on the west there were two towers – there was the Tower called Montfichet, where is now Blackfriars station, and Baynard's Castle, close beside it. The walls of the City had seven double gates. The river wall had by this time been taken down. Two miles from the City, on the west, was the Royal Palace (Westminster), fortified with ramparts and connected with the City by a populous suburb. Already, therefore, the Strand and Charing Cross were settled. The gates were Aldgate, Bishopsgate, Cripplegate, Aldersgate, Newgate, Ludgate, and the Bridge.

FitzStephen says that the citizens were so powerful that they could furnish the King with 20,000 horsemen and 60,000 foot. This is clearly gross exaggeration. If we allow 500 for each parish, we get a population of only 63,000 in all, and in the enumeration later on, for the poll tax by Richard the Second, there were no more than 48,000. This, however, was shortly after a great Plague had ravaged the City.

But the writer tells us that the citizens excelled those of any other city in the world in 'handsomeness of manners and of dress, at table, and in way of speaking.' There were three principal schools, the scholars of which rivalled each other, and engaged in public contests of rhetoric and grammar.

Those who worked at trades and sold wares of any kind were assigned their proper place whither they repaired every morning. It is easy to make out from the surviving names where the trades were placed. The names of Bread Street, Fish Street, Milk Street, Honey Lane, Wood Street, Soapers' Lane, the Poultry, for instance, indicate what trades were carried on there. Friday Street shows that the food proper for fast days was sold there – namely, dried fish. Cheapside preserves the name of the Chepe, the most important of all the old streets. Here, every day, all the year round, was a market held at which everything conceivable was sold, not in shops, but in *selds*, that is, covered wooden sheds, which could be taken down on occasion. Do not think that 'Chepe' was a narrow street: it was a

great open space lying between St. Paul's and what is now the Royal Exchange, with streets north and south formed by rows of these *selds* or sheds. Presently the sheds became houses with shops in front and gardens behind. The roadway on the south side of this open space was called the Side of Chepe. There was another open space for salesmen called East Chepe, another at Billingsgate, called Roome Lane, another at Dowgate – both for purposes of exposing for sale imports landed on the Quays and the ports of Queenhithe and Billingsgate. Those who have seen a market-place in a French town will understand what these places were like. A large irregular area. On every side sheds with wares for sale: at first all seems confusion and noise: presently one makes out that there are streets in orderly array, in which those who know can find what they want. Here are mercers; here goldsmiths; here armourers; here glovers; here pepperers or grocers; and so forth. West Chepe is the place of shops where they sell the things made in the City and all things wanted for the daily life.

On the other side of the Walbrook, across which there is a bridge where is now the Poultry, is East Chepe, whither they bring all kinds of imported goods and sell them to the retailers: and by the river side the merchants assemble in the open places beside Queenhithe and Billingsgate to receive or to buy the cargoes sent over from France, Spain, and the Low Countries. One more open space there was, that round St. Paul's, the place where the people held their folk-motes. But London was not, as yet, by any means built over. Its northern parts were covered with gardens. It was here, as we shall see, that the great monasteries were shortly to be built.

## 14. FITZSTEPHEN'S ACCOUNT OF THE CITY

### PART II

Outside the walls, he says, there were many places of pleasant resort, streams and springs among them. He means the Fleet River winding at the bottom of its broad valley: farther west Tyburn and Westbourne: on the south the Wandle, the Effra, the Ravensbourne. There was a well at Holywell in the Strand – it lies under the site of the present Opéra Comique Theatre: and at Clerkenwell: these wells had medicinal or miraculous properties and there were, no doubt, taverns and places of amusement about there. At Smithfield – or Smooth Field – just outside the City walls, there was held once a week – on Friday – a horse fair. Business over, horse racing followed. Then the river was full of fish: some went fishing for their livelihood: some for amusement: salmon were plentiful and great fish such as porpoises sometimes found their way above Bridge.

Then there were the sports of the young men and the boys. They played at ball – when have not young men played at ball? The young Londoners practised some form of hockey out of which have grown the two noble games of cricket and golf. They wrestled and leaped. Nothing is said about boxing and quarterstaff. But perhaps these belonged to the practice of arms and archery, which were never neglected, because at any moment the London craftsman might have to become a soldier. They had cock fighting, a sport to which the Londoner was always greatly addicted. And they loved dancing with the girls to the music of pipe and tabor. In the winter, when the broad fens north of the walls were frozen, they skated. And they hunted with hawk and hound in the Forest of Middlesex, which belonged to the City.

The City, he tells us, is governed by the same laws as those of Rome. Like Rome, London is divided into wards: like Rome the City has annually elected magistrates who are called Sheriffs instead of Consuls: like Rome it has senatorial and inferior magistrates: like Rome it has separate Courts and proper places for law suits, and like Rome the City holds assemblies on ordered days. The writer is carried away by his enthusiasm for Rome. As we have seen, the government, laws, and customs of London owed nothing at all, in any single respect, to Rome. Everything grew out of the Anglo-Saxon laws and customs.

By his loud praise of the great plenty of food of every kind which could be found in London, FitzStephen reminds us that he has lived in other towns, and especially in Canterbury, when he was in the service of the Archbishop. We see, though he does not mention it, the comparison in his mind between the plentiful market of London and the meagre market of Canterbury. Everything, he says, was on sale. All the roasted meats and boiled that one can ask for; all the fish, poultry, and game in season, could every day be bought in London: there were cookshops where dinners and suppers could be had by paying for them. He dwells at length upon this abundance. Now in the country towns and the villages the supplies were a matter of uncertainty and anxiety: a housewife had to keep her pantry and her larder well victualled in advance: salt meat and salt fish were the staple of food. Beef and mutton were scarce: game there was in plenty if it could be taken; but game laws were strict; very little venison would find its way into Canterbury market. To this cleric who knew the country markets, the profusion of everything in London was amazing.

Another thing he notices – 'Nearly all the Bishops, Abbots, and Magnates of England are, as it were, citizens and freemen of London; having their own splendid houses to which they resort, where they spend largely when summoned to great Councils by the King, or by their Metropolitan, or drawn thither by their own private affairs.'

In another century or two London will become, as you shall see, a City of Palaces. Observe that the palaces are already beginning. Observe, also, that London is already being enriched by the visits and residence of great lords who, with their retinues, spend 'largely.' Down to the present day the same thing has always gone on. The wealthy people who have their town houses in the West End of London and the thousands of country people and foreigners who now flock to the London hotels are the successors of the great men and their following who came up to London in the twelfth century and spent 'largely.'

'I do not think,' says FitzStephen, 'that there is any city with more commendable customs of church attendance, honour to God's ordinances, keeping sacred festivals, almsgiving, hospitality, confirming, betrothals, contracting marriages, celebration of nuptials, preparing feasts, cheering the guests, and also in care for funerals and the interment of the dead. The only pests of London are the immoderate drinking of fools and the frequency of fires.'

## 15. LONDON BRIDGE

### PART I

Nobody knows who built the first Bridge. It was there in the fourth century – a bridge of timber provided with a fortified gate, one of the gates of the City. Who put it up, and when – how long it stood – what space there was between the piers – how broad it was – we do not know. Probably it was quite a narrow bridge consisting of beams laid across side by side and a railing at the side. That these beams were not close together is known by the fact that so many coins have been found in the bed of the river beneath the old Bridge.

Besides the Bridge there were ferries across the river, especially between Dowgate and the opposite bank called St. Mary Overies Dock, where was afterwards erected St. Mary Overies Priory, to which belonged the church now called St. Saviour's, Southwark. The docks at either end of the old ferry still remain.

The Bridge had many misfortunes: it is said to have been destroyed by the Danes in 1013. Perhaps for 'destruction' we should read 'damage.' It was, however, certainly burned down in the Great Fire of 1136. Another, also of wood, was built in its place and, in the year 1176, a bridge of stone was commenced, which took thirty years to build and remained standing till the year 1831, when the present Bridge was completed and the old one pulled down.

The Architect of this stone Bridge, destined to stand for six hundred and fifty years, was one Peter, Chaplain of St. Mary Colechurch in the Old Jewry (the church was destroyed in the Great Fire and not rebuilt).

Now the building of bridges was regarded, at this time, as a work of piety. If we consider how a bridge helps the people we shall agree with our forefathers. Without a bridge, those living on one side of a river can only carry on intercourse with those on the other side by means of boats. Merchants cannot carry their wares about: farmers cannot get their produce to market: wayfarers can only get across by ferry: armies cannot march – if you wish to follow an army across a country where there are no bridges you must look for fords. Roads are useless unless bridges cross the rivers. The first essential to the union of a nation is the possibility of intercommunication: without roads and bridges the man of Devon is a stranger and an enemy to the man of Somerset. We who have bridges over every river: who need never even ford a stream: who hardly know what a ferry means: easily forget that these bridges did not grow like the oaks and the elms: but were built after long study of the subject by men who were trained for the work just as other men were trained and taught to build cathedrals and churches. A religious order was founded in France in the twelfth century: it was called the Order of the 'Pontife' Brethren —*Pontife* is Pontifex – that is – Bridge Builder. The Bridge Building Brothers constructed many bridges in France of which several still remain. It is not certain that Peter of Colechurch was one of this Brotherhood, perhaps not. When he died, in 1205, before the Bridge was completed, King John called over a French 'Pontife' named Isembert who had built bridges at La Rochelle and Saintes. But the principal builders are said to have been three merchants of London named Serle Mercer, William Almain, and Benedict Botewrite. The building of the Bridge was regarded as a national work: the King: the great Lords: the Bishops: as well as the London Citizens, gave money to hasten its completion. The list of donors was preserved on 'a table fair written for posterity' in the Chapel on the Bridge. It was unhappily destroyed in the Great Fire.

It must not be supposed that the Bridge of Peter Colechurch was like the present stately Bridge of broad arches. It contained twenty arches of irregular breadth: only two or three being the same: they varied from 10 feet to 32 feet: some of them therefore were very narrow: the piers were



also of different lengths. These irregularities were certainly intentional and were based upon some observations on the rise and fall of the tide. No other great Bridge had yet been constructed across a tidal river.

When the Bridge was built it was thought necessary to consecrate it to some saint. The latest saint, St. Thomas Becket, was chosen as the titular saint of this Bridge. A chapel, dedicated to him, was built in the centre pier of the Bridge: it was, in fact, a double chapel: in the lower part, the crypt, was buried Peter of Colechurch himself: the upper part, which escaped the Great Fire, became, after the Reformation, a warehouse.

## 16. LONDON BRIDGE

### PART II

Houses were erected in course of time along the Bridge on either side like a street, but with intervals; and along the roadway in the middle were chain posts to protect the passengers. As the Bridge was only 40 feet wide the houses must have been small. But they were built out at the back overhanging the river, and the roadway itself was not intended for carts or wheeled vehicles. Remember that everything was brought to the City on pack horse or pack ass. The table of Tolls sanctioned by King Edward I. makes no mention of cart or waggon at all. Men on horseback and loaded horses can get along with a very narrow road. Perhaps we may allow twelve feet for the road which gives for the houses on either side a depth of 14 feet each.

These houses were occupied chiefly by shops, most of which were 'haberdashers and traders in small wares.' Later on there were many booksellers. Paper merchants and stationers, after the Reformation, occupied the chapel. The great painter Hans Holbein lived on the Bridge and the two marine painters Peter Monamy and Dominic Serres also lived here.

The narrowness of the arches and the rush of the flowing or the ebbing tide made the 'shooting' of the Bridge a matter of great danger. The Duke of Norfolk in 1429 was thrown into the water by the capsizing of his boat and narrowly escaped with his life. Queen Henrietta, in 1628, was nearly wrecked in the same way by running into the piers while shooting the Bridge. Rubens the painter was thrown into the water in the same way.

One of the twenty arches formed a drawbridge which allowed vessels of larger size than barges to pass up the river and could be used to keep back an enemy. In this way Sir Thomas Wyatt in 1557 was kept out of London. Before this drawbridge stood a tower on the battlements of which were placed the heads of traitors and criminals. The heads of Sir William Wallace, Jack Cade, Sir Thomas More and many others were stuck up here. On the Southwark side was another tower.

The Bridge, which was the pride and boast of London, was endowed with lands for its maintenance: the rents of the houses were also collected for the same purpose: a toll was imposed on all merchandise carried across, and a Brotherhood was formed, called the Brothers of St. Thomas on the Bridge, whose duty it was to perform service in the chapel and to keep the Bridge in repair.

Repairs were always wanting: to keep some of the force of the water off the piers these were furnished with 'starlings,' i.e. at first piles driven down in front of the piers, afterwards turned into projecting buttresses of stone. Then corn mills were built in some of the openings, and in the year 1582 great waterworks were constructed at the southern end. The tower before the drawbridge was by Queen Elizabeth rebuilt and made a very splendid house – called Nonesuch House. The Fire destroyed the houses on the Bridge, some of which were not rebuilt: and in the year 1757 all the houses were removed from the Bridge.

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