The Story of London

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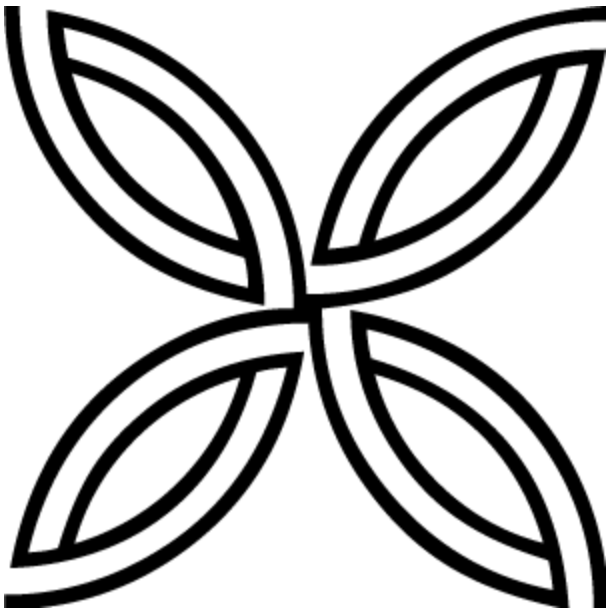

PREFACE

‘History! What is history but the science which teaches us to see the throbbing life of the present in the throbbing life of the past.’—Jessopp’s *Coming of the Friars* , p. 178.

THERE can be no doubt that our interest in the dim past is increased the more we are able to read into the dry documents before us the human character of the actors. As long as these actors are only names to us we seem to be walking in a world of shadows, but when we can realise them as beings like ourselves with the same feelings and aspirations, although governed by other conditions of life, all is changed, and we take the keenest interest in attempting to understand circumstances so different from those under which we live.

The history of London is so varied and the materials so vast that it is impossible to compress into a single volume an account of its many aspects.

This book therefore is not intended as a history but as, to some extent, a guide to the manners of the people and to the appearance of the city during the mediæval period.

An attempt is here made to put together some of the ample materials for the domestic history of the city which have been preserved for us.

The City of London possesses an unrivalled collection of contemporary documents respecting its past history, some of which have been made available to us by the late Mr. H. T. Riley, and others are being edited with valuable notes by Dr. Reginald Sharpe.

The Middle Ages may be considered as a somewhat indefinite period, and their chronology cannot be very exactly defined, but for the purposes of this book the portion of the mediæval period dealt with is that which

commences with the Norman Conquest and ends with the Battle of Bosworth.

It is impossible to exaggerate the enormous influence of the Norman Conquest. The Saxon period was as thoroughly mediæval as the Norman period, but our full knowledge of history begins with the Conquest because so few historical documents exist before that event. Moreover, the mode of life in Saxon and Norman London was so different that it would only lead to confusion to unite the two in one picture.

In order, however, to show the position of the whole mediæval period in the full history an introductory chapter is given which contains a short notice of some of the events during the Saxon rule, and a chapter at the end is intended to show what remains of the mediæval times were left when Shakespeare lived and Johnson expressed his opinion of the pre-eminent position of London.

It is necessary for the reader to bear in mind that London means the city and its liberties up to the end of the eighteenth century. The enlarged idea of a London in the north and the south, the east and the west, is a creation of the nineteenth century.

The City of London is still the centre and heart of London, and the only portion of the town which has an ancient municipal history.

Other cities have shifted their centres, but London remains as it always was. The Bank, the Royal Exchange and the Mansion House occupy ground which has been the ‘Eye of London’ since Roman times.

There is no greater mistake than to suppose that things were quiescent during the Middle Ages, for these pages at least will show that that was a time of constant change, when great questions were fought out.

The first seven chapters of this book refer to life in the Old Town. Here we see what it was to live in a walled town, what the manners of the citizens were and what was done

to protect their health and morals. The following five chapters deal with the government of the city. Some notice is taken of the governors and the officials of the Corporation, the tradesmen and the churchmen.

The subject of each chapter is of enough importance to form a book by itself, and it is therefore hoped that the reader will not look for an exhaustive treatment of these subjects. There is more to be said in each place, but I have been forced to choose out of the materials that which seemed most suitable for my purpose.

During the editing of this volume a vivid picture of the mediæval life has ever been before my mind, and I can only regret that it has been so difficult to transfer that picture to paper. I can only hope that my readers may not see the difference between the conception and the performance so vividly as I do myself.

In the preparation of these pages I have received the kind assistance of more friends than I can mention here, but I wish especially to thank Mr. Hubert Hall, Mr W. H. St. John Hope, Mr. J. E. Matthew, General Milman, C.B., Mr D’Arcy Power, Sir Walter Prideaux, Sir Owen Roberts, Mr. J. Horace Round, Dr Reginald Sharpe and Sir William Soulsby, C.B.

CHAPTER I Introduction: Early History of London to the Norman Conquest

THE question as to the great antiquity of London has formed a field for varied and long-continued disputes. An elaborate picture of a British London, founded by Brut, a descendant of Æneas, as a new Troy, with grand and noble buildings, was painted by Geoffrey of Monmouth. The absurdity of this conception, although it found credence for centuries, was at last seen, and some antiquaries then went to the opposite extreme of denying the very existence of a British London.

The solid foundation of facts proving the condition of the earliest London are the waste, marshy ground, with little hills rising from the plains, and the dense forest on the north—a forest that remained almost up to the walls of the city even in historic times, animal remains, flint instruments, and pile dwellings. All the rest is conjecture. We must call in the aid of geography and geology to understand the laws which governed the formation of London. The position of the town on the River Thames proves the wisdom of those who chose the site, although the swampiness of the land, caused by the daily overflowing of the river before the embankments were thrown up, must have endangered its successful colonisation. When the vast embankment was completed the river receded to its proper bed, and the land which was retrieved was still watered by several streams flowing from the higher ground in the north into the Thames.

Animal remains, very various in character, have been found in different parts of London. Examples of mammoth, elephant, rhinoceros, elk, deer, and many other extinct as

well as existing species are represented. Of man, the mass of flint instruments in the ‘Palæolithic floor’ which prove his early existence is enormous.

General Pitt Rivers (then Colonel Lane Fox) in 1867 made the discovery of the remains of pile dwellings near London Wall and in Southwark Street. The piles averaged 6 to 8 inches square, others of a smaller size were 4 inches by 3 inches, and one or two were as much as a foot square. They were found in the peat just above the virgin gravel, and with them were found the refuse of kitchen middens and broken pottery of the Roman period. There is reason to believe that the piles were sunk by the Britons rather than by the Romans, and General Pitt Rivers was of opinion that they are the remains of the British capital of Cassivellaunus, situated in the marches, and, of necessity, built on piles. [1] Dr. Munro, however, who alludes to this discovery in his book on Lake Dwellings, believes that these piles belong to the post-Roman times, and supposes that in the early Saxon period these pile dwellings were used in the low-lying districts of London. [2]

The strongest point of those who disbelieve in a British London is that Julius Cæsar does not mention it, but this negative evidence is far from conclusive.

We learn from Tacitus that in A.D. 61 the Roman city was a place of some importance—the chief residence of merchants and the great mart of trade—therefore we cannot doubt but that to have grown to this condition it must have existed before the Christian era. The Romans appear to have built a fort where the Tower of London now stands, but not originally to have fortified the town. London grew to be a flourishing centre of commerce, though not a place capable of sustaining a siege, so the Roman general, Paullinus Suetonius, would not run the risk of defending it against Boadicea. Afterwards the walls were erected, and Londinium took its proper position in the Roman Empire. It was on the high road from Rome to York, and the starting-

point of half the roads in Britain.
Bishop Stubbs wrote: ‘Britain had been occupied by the Romans, but had not become Roman.’ Probably few Romans settled here. The inhabitants consisted of the Governor and the military officers and Romanised Britons. When the Roman legions left this country Londinium must have had a very mixed population of traders. There were no leaders, and a wail went up from the defenceless inhabitants. In the year 446 we hear of ‘The groans of the Britons to Aetius, for the third time Consul,’ which took this form of complaint: ‘The savages drive us to the sea, and the sea casts us back upon the savages; so arise two kinds of death, and we are either drowned or slaughtered.’ [3]
In this place, however, we have not to consider the condition either of British or Roman London, for the Middle Ages may be said to commence with the break up of the Roman Empire. Saxon London was a wooden city, surrounded by walls, marking out the same enclosure that existed in the latest Roman city. We have the authority of the Saxon Chronicle for saying that in the year 418 the Romans collected all the treasures that were in Britain, and hid some of them in the earth.
From the date of the departure of the Roman legions to that of the Norman Conquest nearly six centuries and a half had elapsed. Of this long period we find only a few remains, such as some articles discovered in the river, and some entries in that incomparable monument of the past—the Saxon Chronicle. All we really know of Saxondom we learn from the Chronicle, Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* , and the old charters. The history of England for the greater portion of this time was local and insular, for the country was no longer a part of a great empire.
Professor Earle tells us that the name London occurs fifty times in the Chronicle, and Londonburh thirteen times, but we do not know whether any distinction between the two names was intended to be indicated.

The Chronicler tells us of the retreat of the Roman legions, and how Hengist and Horsa, invited by Vortigern, King of the Britons, landed in Britain. Then comes the ominous account of the Saxons, who turned against the friends that called upon them for succour and totally defeated the British at Crayford in Kent:—

‘457. This year Hengist and Æsc, his son, fought against the Britons at the place which is called Crecganford, and there slew four thousand men; and the Britons then forsook Kent, and in great terror fled to Lundenbyrg.’

Then for a century and a half there is no further mention of London in the Chronicle. We are not told what became of the fugitives, nor what became of the city; as Lappenberg says: ‘No territory ever passed so obscurely into the hand of an enemy as the north bank of the Thames.’

It is as difficult to suppose what some have supposed—that the city was deserted and remained desolate for years—as to imagine that trade and commerce continued in the city while all around was strife. There may have been some arrangement by which the successful Saxon who did not care to live in the city agreed that those who wished to do so should live there. But all is conjecture in face of this serious blank in our history.

If there had been a battle and destruction of the city we should doubtless have had some account of it in the Chronicle. Gradually the Saxons settled on the hithes or landing places on the river side, and at last overcame their natural repugnance to town life and settled in the city.

When London is again mentioned in the Chronicle it appears to have been inhabited by a population of heathens still to be converted. Under the date 604 we are told:—

‘This year Augustine consecrated two bishops; Mellitus and Justus. He sent Mellitus to preach baptism to the East Saxons, whose King was called Sebert, son of Ricole, the sister of Ethelbert, and whom Ethelbert had then appointed King. And Ethelbert gave Mellitus a bishop’s See in

Lundenwic, and to Justus he gave Rochester, which is twenty-four miles from Canterbury.'

The Christianity of the Londoners was of an unsatisfactory character, for after the death of Sebert, his sons, who were heathens, stirred up the multitude to drive out their bishop. Mellitus became Archbishop of Canterbury, and London again relapsed into heathenism. In this, the earliest period of Saxon London recorded for us, there appears to be no relic left of the Christianity of the Britons which at one time was well in evidence. Godwin recorded a list of sixteen ecclesiastics, styled by him Archbishops of London, and Le Neve adopted the list in his *Fasti Ecclesiæ Anglicanæ* , on the authority of Godwin.

The list begins with Theanus during the reign of Lucius, King of the Britons in the latter half of the second century. The second is Eluanus, who was said to have been sent on an embassy to Eleutherius, Pope from A.D. 171 to 185. The twelfth on the list is Restitutus, whose name is found on the list of prelates present at the Council of Arles in the year 314.

Perhaps the answer to the question as to the extinction of British Christianity in London is to be found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's statement that when the Saxons drove the British fugitives into Wales and Cornwall, Theon, the sixteenth and last on this list of British bishops, fled into Wales with the Archbishop of Caerleon, the Bishop Thadiac of York, and their surviving clergy. The traditional date of this flight is A.D. 586, not many years before the appearance of Mellitus. Geoffrey of Monmouth is not a very trustworthy authority, but there is no reason to doubt his belief in his own story, and it is interesting to note that he specially mentions Theonus. At all events, we know from other sources that there were Bishops of London during the Roman period.

The bold statement that King Lucius founded the Church of St. Peter, Cornhill, can scarcely be said to find any

credence among historians of the present day, but a reference to the doings of this ancient King will be found imbedded in the Statute Book of St. Paul's Cathedral:—'In the year from the Incarnation of the Lord one hundred and eighty-five, at the request of Lucius, the King of Greater Britain, which is now called England, there were sent from Eleutherius the Pope to the aforesaid King two illustrious doctors, Fagnus and Dumanus, who should incline the heart of the King and of his subject people to the unity of the Christian faith, and should consecrate to the honour of the one true and supreme God the temples which had been dedicated to various and false deities.' [4]

To return from the wild statements of tradition to the facts of sober history, we find that London, after the driving out of Mellitus, remained without a bishop until the year 656, when Cedda, brother of St. Chad of Lichfield, was invited to London by Sigebert who had been converted to Christianity by Finan, Bishop of the Northumbrians. Cedda was consecrated Bishop of the East Saxons by Finan about 656, and held the See till his death on the 26th October 664. The list of bishops from Cedda to William, who is addressed in the Conqueror's Charter, is a long one, and each of these bishops apparently held a position of great importance in the government of the city.

In the seventh century the city seems to have settled down into a prosperous place and to have been peopled by merchants of many nationalities. We learn that at this time it was the great mart of slaves. It was in the fullest sense a free trading town; neutral to a certain extent between the kingdoms around, although the most powerful of the Kings successively obtained some authority over it, when they conquered their feebler neighbours. [5] As to this there is still more to be said. During the eighth century, when a more settled condition of life became possible, the trade and commerce of London increased in volume and prosperity. A change, however, came about towards the end

of the century, when the Scandinavian freebooters, known to us as Danes, began to harry our coasts. The Saxons had become law-abiding, and the fierce Danes treated them in the same way that in former days they had treated the Britons. Freeman divided the Danish invasions into three periods:—

1. 787-855. A period when the object was simply plunder.
2. 902-954. Attempts made at settlement.
3. 980-1016. During this period the history of England was one record of struggle with the power of Denmark till Cnut became undisputed King of England. [6]

We still have much to learn as to the movements of the Danes in this country, and when the old charters are more thoroughly investigated we shall gain a great accession of light. Thus we learn from an Anglo-Saxon charter, printed in De Gray Birch's *Cartularium Saxonicum* (Nos. 533, 534), that in the year 872 a great tribute was paid to the Danes which is not mentioned in the Chronicle. London was specially at the mercy of the fierce sailors of the North, and the times when the city was in their hands are almost too numerous for record here.

Even when Alfred concluded with Guthrun in 878 the Treaty of Wedmore, as it is still commonly called, [7] and by which the country was divided between the English and the Danes, London suffered much.

With the reign of Alfred we come to the consideration of a very difficult question in the history of London. It has been claimed for this King that he rebuilt London. Mr Loftie expresses this view in the very strongest terms. He writes:—

'So important, however, is this settlement, so completely must it be regarded as the ultimate fact in any continuous narrative relating to the history of London, that it would be hardly wrong to commence with some such sentence as this; "London was founded exactly 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.” ’
There is certainly no evidence for so sweeping a statement. Nothing in the Chronicle can be construed to contain so wide a meaning. The passage upon which this mighty superstructure has been formed is merely this:—
‘886. In the same year King Alfred restored (*gesette*) London, and all the Angle race turned to him that were not in the bondage of the Danish men, and he then committed the burgh to the keeping of the Alderman Æthered.’
The great difficulty in this passage is the word *gesette* , which probably means occupied, but may mean much more, as founded or settled. Some authorities have therefore changed the word to *besaet* , besieged.
Professor Earle proposed the following solution of the problem, which seems highly probable. London was a flourishing, populous and opulent city, the chief emporium of commerce in the island, and the residence of foreign merchants. Properly it had become an Angle city, the chief city of the Anglian nation of Mercia, but the Danes had settled there in great numbers, and they had many captives whom they had taken in the late wars. Thus the Danes preponderated over the free Angles, and the latter were glad to see Alfred come and restore the balance in their favour. It was of the greatest importance for Alfred to secure this city, not only the capital of Mercia, but able to do what Mercia had not done, to bar the passage of pirate ships to the Upper Thames. Accordingly, Alfred in 886 planted the garrison of London, *i.e.* , introduced a military colony of men, and gave them land for their maintenance, in return for which they lived in and about a fortified position under a commanding officer. Professor Earle would not have *Lundenburh* taken as merely an equivalent to London. Alfred therefore founded not London itself but the burh of London. [8]
Under Athelstan we find the city increasing in importance

and general prosperity. There were then eight mints at work, which shows great activity and the need of coin for the purposes of trade. The folkmoot met in the precincts of St. Paul's at the sound of the bell, which also rang out when the armed levy was required to march under St. Paul's banner. For some years after the decisive Battle of Brunanburh (937) the Danes ceased to trouble the country. But one may affirm that fire was almost as great an enemy as the Dane. Fabyan, when recording the entire destruction of London by fire in the reign of Ethelred (981), makes this remarkable statement: 'Ye shall understande that this daye the cytie of London had most housynge and buyldinge from Ludgate toward Westmynstre, and lytell or none wher the chief or hart of the citie is now, except [that] in dyvers places were housyng, but they stod without order.' [9] The good government of Athelstan and his successors kept the country free from foreign freebooters, but when Ethelred II., called the Unready (or rather the Redeless), came to the throne, the Danes saw their opportunity. In 991 he tried to bribe his enemies to stay away, and was the first English King to institute the Danegelt, which was for so many years a severe tax upon the resources of the country. The bribe was useless, and the enemy had to be bought off again. A Danish fleet threatened London in 992, and in 994 Olaf (or Anlaf) Trygwason (who appears first as harrier of English soil in 988), with Sweyn, the Danish King, laid siege to London, but failed to take it. They then harried, burned and slew all along the sea coasts of Essex, Kent, Sussex and Hampshire. The English paid £10,000 to the Danes in 991, and in 994 they had to produce the still larger sum of £16,000 in order to purchase peace. Olaf then promised never again to visit England, except in peace. Subsequently Ethelred brought disaster upon himself and his country by his treachery. In 1002 he issued secret orders for a massacre of all the Danes found in England, and in this massacre Gunhild, sister of Sweyn,

was among the victims. In consequence of Ethelred's conduct the Danes returned in force to these shores and had to be bought off with a sum of £36,000. They came again and made many unsuccessful assaults upon London, upon which the Chronicler remarks: 'They often fought against the town of London, but to God be praise that it yet stands sound, and they have ever fared ill.'

In 1010 Ethelred took shelter in London, and in 1013 Sweyn again attacked the city without success, but having conquered a great part of England the Londoners submitted to him, and Ethelred fled to Normandy. After Sweyn's death, in 1014, Ethelred was invited to return to England, as the country was not willing to receive Sweyn's son Cnut as its King. When Ethelred returned to England he was accompanied by another Olaf (Anlaf Haroldson) who succeeded by a clever manœuvre in destroying the wooden London Bridge, and taking the city out of the hands of the Danes. The story is told in Snorro Sturleson's *Heimskringla* (The Story of Olaf the Holy, the son of Harold): 'Olaf covered the decks of his ship with a roof of wood and wicker work to protect them from the stones and shot which were ready to be cast at them by the Danes. King Olaf and the host of the North-men rowed right up under the bridge, and lashed cables round the poles that upheld the bridge, and then they fell to their oars and rowed all the ships down stream as hard as they might. The poles dragged along the ground, even until they were loosened under the bridge. But inasmuch as an host under weapons stood thickly arrayed on the bridge, there were on it both many stones and many war-weapons, and the poles having broken from it, the bridge broke down by reason thereof, and many of the folk fell into the river, but all the rest thereof fled from the bridge, some into the city, some into Southwark. And after this they made an onset on Southwark and won it. And when the towns-folk saw that the River Thames was won, so that they might not hinder

the ships from faring up into the land, they were afeard, and gave up the town and took King Ethelred in.' [10]
The later life of Olaf was one of adventure. He was driven by Cnut from his kingdom of Norway, and took shelter in Sweden. Here he obtained help, and in the end regained his throne. At the Battle of Sticklestead he was defeated and slain (1030). His body was hastily buried, but was afterwards taken up, and, being found incorrupt, was buried in great state in a shrine at Drontheim. He was canonized, and several English churches are dedicated to him. There are four parishes bearing the name of St. Olave in London, one of the churches is in Tooley Street which also preserves the name of St. Olave in a curiously corrupted form.
After this Ethelred succeeded in driving Cnut out of England back to Denmark. Of this success Freeman enthusiastically wrote: 'That true-hearted city was once more the bulwark of England, the centre of every patriotic hope, the special object of every hostile attack.' [11]
There was, however, little breathing space, for Cnut returned to England in 1015, and Ethelred's brilliant son, Edmund Ironside, prepared to meet him. Edmund's army refused to fight unless Ethelred came with them, and unless they had 'the support of the citizens of London.' Before, however, Cnut arrived Ethelred died, England was in the hand of the Dane, and London only remained free. Edmund was elected King by the Witan, united with the inhabitants of the city, and thus the Londoners first asserted the position which they held to for many centuries —of their right to a voice in the election of the King.
Cnut was determined now to succeed, and he at once sailed up the Thames. He was, however, unable to pass the bridge, which had been rebuilt. He therefore dug a trench on the south side of the river, by which means he was enabled to draw some of his ships above the bridge. He also cut another trench entirely round the wall of the city.

In spite of his clever scheme, the determined resistance of our stubborn forefathers caused it to fail. [12]

Edmund Ironside was successful in his battles with Cnut till his brother-in-law, Eadric, Alderman of Mercia, turned traitor, and helped the Danish King to vanquish the English army at Assandun (now Assenton in Kent). Edmund was now forced to agree to Cnut's terms, and it was therefore settled that Edmund should retain his crown, and take all England south of the Thames, together with East Anglia, Essex and London, Cnut taking the rest of the kingdom. On the 30th November 1016 Edmund died, and Cnut became King of the whole of England. His reign was prosperous, and he succeeded in gaining the esteem of his subjects, who appreciated the long-continued peace which he brought them. Dr. Stubbs describes him as one of the 'conscious creators of England's greatness.' He died in November 1035 at the early age of forty.

We may now pass over some troubled times, caused by the worthless successors of Cnut, and come to the period when the West Saxon line was restored in the person of Edward the Confessor, who, being educated at the Norman Court, became more a Norman than an Englishman, and prepared the way for the Conqueror's success. The Confessor was but an indifferent King, although he holds a more distinguished place in history than many a more heroic figure as the practical founder of Westminster Abbey, where his shrine is still one of its most sacred treasures. When Edward died, the Witan which had attended his funeral elected to succeed him, Harold, the foremost man in England, and the leader who had attempted to check the spread of the far too wide Norman influence.

After conquering his outlawed brother, Tostig, and Harold Hardrada, King of Norway, at Stamford Bridge, he had to hurry back to meet William Duke of Normandy, which he did on a hill on the Sussex Downs, afterwards called Senlac. He closed his life on the field of battle, after a reign

of forty weeks and one day. Then the Conqueror had the country at his mercy, but he recognised the importance of London’s position, and moved forward with the greatest caution and tact.

The citizens of London were possibly a divided body, and William, knowing that he had many friends in the city, felt that a waiting game was the best for his cause in the end. His enemies, led by Ansgar the Staller, under whom as sheriff the citizens of London had marched to fight for Harold at Senlac, managed to get their way at first. They elected Edgar Atheling, the grandson of Edmund Ironside, as King, but this action was of little avail.

When William arrived at Southwark the citizens sallied forth to meet him, but they were beaten back, and had to save themselves within the city walls. William retired to Berkhamsted, [13] and is said to have sent a private message to Ansgar asking for his support. [14] In the end the citizens, probably led by William the Bishop, who was a Norman, came over to the Conqueror’s side, and the best men repaired to Berkhamsted. Here they accepted the sovereignty of William, who received their oath of fealty.

Thus ends the Saxon period of our history, and the Norman period in London commences with the Conqueror’s charter to William the Bishop and Gosfrith the Portreeve, supposed to be the elder Geoffrey de Mandeville.

In the foregoing pages the main incidents of the history of Saxon London are recited. These are, I fear, rather disconnected and uninteresting, but it is necessary to set down the facts in chronological order, because from them we can draw certain conclusions as to the condition of London before the Norman Conquest. Unfortunately our authorities for the Saxon period do not tell us much that we want to know, and, in consequence, many of the suggestions made by one authority are disputed by another. Still we can draw certain very definite conclusions, which cannot well be the subjects of contention.

The first fact is the constant onward march of London towards the fulfilment of its great destiny. Trouble surrounded it on all sides, but, in spite of them all, the citizens gained strength in adversity, so that at the Conquest the city was in possession of those special privileges which were cherished for centuries, never given up, but increased when opportunity occurred. Patient waiting was therefore rewarded by success, and London by the endeavours of her men grew in importance and stood before all other cities in her unique position.

The Governor who possessed the confidence of Londoners, although all the rest of the country was against him, needed not to despair, while he who had the support of the rest of the country, but was opposed by London, could not be considered as triumphant.

The so-called Heptarchy was constantly changing the relative positions of its several parts, until Egbert, the King of Wessex, became ‘Rex totius Britanniæ’ (A.D. 827). The seven kingdoms were at some hypothetical period

1. Kent, 2. Sussex, 3. Wessex,	—South of the Thames.
4. Essex, 5. East Anglia, 6. Mercia,	—North of the Thames.
7. Northumbria (including Deira and Bernicia),	—North of the Humber, and as far north as the Forth.

The walled city of London was a distinct political unit, although it owed a certain allegiance to one of the kingdoms, which was the most powerful for the time being. This allegiance therefore frequently changed, and London retained its identity and individuality all through.

Essex seems seldom to have held an independent position, for when London first appears as connected with the East Saxons the real power was in the hands of the King of Kent. According to Bede, Wini, being expelled from his bishopric of Wessex in 635, took refuge with Wulfhere, King of the Mercians, of whom he purchased the See of London. Hence the Mercian King must then have been the overlord of London. Not many years afterwards the King of Kent again seems to have held some jurisdiction here. From the laws of the Kentish Kings, Lhothhere and Eadric, 673-685, we learn that the Wic-reeve was an officer of the King of Kent, who exercised a jurisdiction over the Kentish men trading with or at London, or who was appointed to watch over their interests. [15]

There is a very interesting question connected with the position of the two counties in which London is situated. It is necessary to remember that London is older than these counties, whose names, viz., Middlesex and Surrey, indicate their relative position to the city and the surrounding country. We have neither record of their settlement nor of the origin of their names. Both must have been peopled from the river. The name Middle Saxons clearly proves that Middlesex must have been settled after the East and West Saxons had given their names to their respective districts. There has been much discussion as to the etymology of Surrey, more particularly of the second syllable. A once favourite explanation was that Surrey stood for South Kingdom (A.S. *rice*), but there is no evidence that Surrey

ever was a kingdom, and this etymology must surely be put aside.

In Elton's *Origins of English History* there is the following note, p. 387: 'Three Underkings concur in a grant by the King of Surrey.—Cod. Diplom. 987.' This is a serious misstatement, for the document cited says: 'Ego Frithuualdus prouinciae Surrianorum subregulus regis Wlfarii Mercianorum ... dono concedo,' etc.

Frithwald is here described as 'subregulus' (under-king), subject to the King of the Mercians; and in the attestation clause it is added: 'Et isti sunt subreguli qui omnes sub signo suo subscripserunt.' Their names are Fritheuuold, Osric, Wigherd and Ætheluuold. Each is described as 'testis' merely. This does not seem to imply concurrence; but, even if it does, the title 'subregulus' does not mean an independent sovereign. In the description of the boundaries of the granted land, which is in Anglo-Saxon, the grantor is certainly described as 'Fritheuuold King,' but this cannot mean king in the full sense, and the Anglo-Saxon clause in the charter could not have been intended to contradict the Latin, which designates Frithwald as 'subregulus' throughout.

Dr. Stubbs (*Constitutional History* , vol. i. p. 189), after describing the gradual disappearance of the smaller sovereignties, and pointing out that 'the heptarchic King was as much stronger than the tribal King as the King of United England was stronger than the heptarchic King,' wrote: 'In Wessex, besides the Kings of Sussex, which has a claim to be numbered among the seven great States, were Kings of Surrey also.' The note to this, however, only refers to Frithewold, 'subregulus or ealdorman of Surrey,' and no mention is made of any ruler who was capable of making Surrey into a kingdom.

The form of the name used by Bede, 'in regione Sudergeona' (*Hist. Eccles.* , iv. 6), may suggest a derivation quite different from any yet suggested.

Surrey was originally an integral part of Kent, and when it was severed from that county it became apparently an independent district, a sort of republic under its own alderman. In later times it became subject to the neighbouring kingdoms. At the date of this charter it was under Mercia. It was never reckoned as a separate member of the heptarchy.

London fought an uphill fight with Winchester for the position of chief city of Southern England. Under Egbert London grew in importance, but Winchester, the chief town of Wessex, was still the more important place politically. In the trade regulations enacted by Edgar in the tenth century London took precedence of Winchester: ‘Let one measure and one weight pass such as is observed at London and at Winchester.’ In the reign of Edward the Confessor London had become the recognised capital of England.

Some dispute has arisen respecting the position of the lithsmen, who appear at the election in Oxford of Cnut’s successor, and subsequently. Freeman (*Norman Conquest* , vol. i. p. 538) describes them as ‘seafaring’ men of London, while Gross (*The Gild Merchant* , vol. i. p. 186) writes: ‘The lithsmen (shipowners) of London, who, with others, raised Harold to the throne, were doubtless such “burg-thegns.” ’

Another important point to be noted is the prominent political position of the bishop. As early as A.D. 900 ‘the bishop and the reeves who belong to London’ are recorded as making in the name of the citizens laws which were confirmed by the King, because they had reference to the whole kingdom. Edward the Confessor greeted William Bishop, Harold Earl, and Esgar Staller. So that William the Conqueror followed precedent when he addressed his charter to Bishop and Portreeve.

Foreigners in early times occupied an important position in London, but there were serious complaints when Edward the Confessor enlarged the numbers of the Normans. The Englishman always had a hatred of the foreigner, and this

dislike grew as time went on, and the English tried to obtain the first place and succeeded in the attempt. Other points, such as government by folkmoots and gilds, which will be discussed in the following chapters, find their origin in the Saxon period. The government of London under the Saxons was of a simple character, approximating to that of the shire, and so it continued until some years after the Conquest. When the Commune was extorted from the Crown a fuller system of government was inaugurated, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

Map of London 1593

CHAPTER II The Walled Town and its Streets

IN the mediæval city the proper protection of the municipality and the citizens largely depended upon the condition of the walls and gates. The government of town life was specially congenial to the Norman, and the laws he made for the purpose were stringent; while the Saxon, who never appreciated town life, preferred the county organisation. Thus it will be found that, as the laws of the latter were too lax, those of the former were too rigorous. Riley, referring to the superfluity of Norman laws, describes them as ‘laws which, while unfortunately they created or protected few real valuable rights, gave birth to many and grievous wrongs.’ He proceeds to amplify this opinion, and gives good reason for the condemnation he felt bound to pronounce: ‘That the favoured and so-called *free* citizen of London, even—despite the extensive privileges in reference to trade which he enjoyed—was in possession of more than the faintest shadow of liberty, can hardly be allowed, if we only call to mind the substance of the … enactments and ordinances, arbitrary, illiberal and oppressive: laws, for example, which compelled each citizen, whether he would or no, to be bail and surety for a neighbour’s good behaviour, over whom it was perhaps impossible for him to exercise the slightest control; laws which forbade him to make his market for the day until the purveyors for the King, and the “great lords of the land,” had stripped the stalls of all that was choicest and best; laws which forbade him to pass the city walls for the purpose of meeting his own purchased goods; laws which bound him to deal with certain persons and communities only, or within the precincts only of certain localities; laws

which dictated, under severe penalties, what sums and no more he was to pay to his servants and artisans; laws which drove his dog out of the streets, while they permitted “genteel dogs” to roam at large: nay, even more than this, laws which subjected him to domiciliary visits from the city officials on various pleas and pretexts; which compelled him to carry on a trade under heavy penalties, irrespective of the question whether or not it was at his loss; and which occasionally went so far as to lay down rules at what hours he was to walk in the streets, and incidentally, what he was to eat and what to drink.’ [16]

We see from this quotation that the position of the inhabitant of a walled town was not a happy one. Still he was more favoured than his neighbour who lived in the country. A few examples will show us what the city life was, and these specific instances are necessary, for so many centuries have passed since Englishmen lived in a walled town that without them it is barely possible for us to conceive what this life of suspicion and fear of danger was really like.

The one thing which we do see distinctly is the gradual emancipation of the Englishman from the wearing thraldom of his position. He went on gradually in his course, always bearing towards the light, and he gained freedom long before the citizens of other countries. In the fifteenth century we find that galling laws here in England were allowed to fall into desuetude in favour of freedom, while the same rules were retained in foreign countries. Some of our countrymen objected to this, and English merchants were irritated to find that while the regulation enjoining every alien merchant during his residence in London to abide in the house of a citizen assigned to him as a host by the magistrates had fallen into abeyance, the restriction was rigidly enforced abroad. The writer of the remarkable *Libelle of Englyshe Polycye* (1437) alludes to this feeling:—

‘What reason is’t that we should go to host in these

countries and in this English coast they should not so, but have more liberty than we ourselves?' [17]

The citizens had to put up with constant surveillance. The gates were closed early in the evening, and at curfew all lights, as well as fires, had to be put out. Night-walkers, male and female, and roysterers generally had a bad time of it, but probably they were very ill-behaved, and in many cases they doubtless deserved the punishment they received. In the year 1100 Henry I. relaxed these stringent regulations, and restored to his subjects the use of lights at night. The streets were first lighted by lanterns in 1415.

London within the walls was a considerable city in the Middle Ages, although it only contained the same area that was walled in during the later Roman period. The relics of this wall, continually renewed with the old materials, are so few, and the old area is so completely lost sight of in the larger London, that it is necessary to point out the line of the walls before dealing further with the habits of the Londoners. It was long supposed that the Ludgate was the chief entrance to the city from the west, but, in spite of its name, there can be little doubt that for some centuries the great western approach was made through Newgate. We will therefore commence our walk round the walls with that gate.

Although there can be no doubt that here was a gate in the Roman period, we have little or no record of its early history. One of its earlier names was Chamberlain's Gate. The 'new' gate was erected in the reign of Henry I., and in a Pipe Roll of 1188 it is mentioned as a prison. In 1414 the prison was in such a loathsome condition that the keeper and sixty-four of the prisoners died of the prison plague. In consequence of this it was decided to rebuild the gate. Richard Whittington was the moving spirit in this rebuilding, and it is supposed that he paid the expenses. In the course of excavations made in 1874-1875 for the improvement of the western end of Newgate Street, the

massive foundations of Whittington's gate were discovered several feet below the present roadway.
The wall passed north through the precincts of Christ Church (Christ's Hospital), formerly occupied by the Grey Friars (or Franciscans). The town ditch, which was outside the walls, and arched over about the year 1553, ran through the Hospital grounds. The wall then turned round to the north of Newgate Street, and passed into St. Martin's-le-Grand, where, in 1889, the foundations of several houses on the west side were exposed while the excavations for the latest addition to the General Post-Office were being proceeded with.
The great bell of the Collegiate Church of St. Martin's tolled the curfew hour when all the gates of the city were to be shut. The great gates were shut at the first stroke of the bell at St. Martin's and the wickets opened; at the last stroke the wickets were to be closed, and not to be opened afterward that night unless by special precept of the Mayor. The ringing of the curfew of St. Martin's was to be the signal for the ringing 'at every parish church, so that they begin together and end together.' [18] In an Ordinance (37 Edward III., 1363) the bell at the Church of our Lady at Bow was substituted for that at St. Martin's.
Outside the walls were Smithfield, where the tournaments were held, and Giltspur Street, where the knights bought their spears, and armour might be repaired when tournaments were going on.
Within the gate were the Grey Friars, Stinking Lane (now King Edward Street), and the Butchers' Shambles in Newgate Street.
St. Paul's had its enclosed churchyard, so that the main thoroughfare for centuries passed round it from Newgate Street to Cheapside. The name of Cheap tells of the general market held there, and the names of several of the streets out of Cheapside tell of the particular merchandise appropriated to them, as Friday Street (Friday's market for

fish), Milk Street and Bread Street. At the west end of Cheapside was the Church of St. Michael le Querne (or at the Corn), which marked the site of the Corn Market. It was destroyed in the Great Fire. At the east end of this church stood the Old Cross, which was taken down in the year 1390, and replaced by the Little Conduit, which is described as standing by Paul's gate. There is an engraving of this church and the conduit, with the water-pots of the water-carriers dotted about.

The wall passed north along the side of St. Martin's-le-Grand till it came to Aldersgate, close by the Church of St. Botolph. The exact spot is marked by No. 62 on the east side of the street. Stow's etymologies of London names are seldom very satisfactory, but he never blundered worse than when he explained Aldgate as old gate and Aldersgate as the older gate; but his explanation has been followed by many successive writers, who do not seem to have seen the impossibility of the suggestion. One of the earliest forms of the name is Aldredesgate, showing pretty conclusively that it was a proper name.

The wall proceeds east to Cripplegate, with an outpost—the Watch-Tower or Barbican. The Rev. W. Denton has explained the name of Cripplegate as due to the covered way between the postern and the Barbican or Burgh-kenning (A.S., *crepel* , *cryfle* or *crypele* , a burrow or passage under ground). The name occurs also in the Domesday of Wiltshire, where we read: 'To Wansdyke, thence forth by the dyke to Crypelgeat.' [19] If this etymology be accepted, we have here the use of the word gate as a way. In the north this distinction is kept up, and the road is the gate, while what we in the south call the gate is the bar. For instance, at York, Micklegate is the road, and the entrance to the wall is Micklegate bar.

It may be noted that St. Giles was the patron saint of Cripples, but the first church was not built until about 1090 by Alfune, the first Hospitaller of St. Bartholomew's, so that

the dedication may have been owing to a mistaken etymology at that early date. In the churchyard is an interesting piece of the old wall still in position. The course of the wall to the east is marked by the street named London Wall, from Cripplegate to Bishopsgate Street. Here it bore south to Camomile and Wormwood Streets, where stood till 1731 the gate.

The distance between Cripplegate and Bishopsgate is not great, and much of the space outside the walls was occupied by Moorditch. Still, in 1415, Thomas Falconer, then Mayor, opened a postern in the wall, where Moorgate Street now is, for the benefit of the hay and wood carts coming to the markets of London. He must also have made a road across the morass of Moorfields, for that place was not drained until more than a century afterwards. The site of Bishopsgate is marked by two tablets on the houses at the corners of Camomile and Wormwood Streets respectively (Nos. 1 and 64 Bishopsgate Street Without), inscribed with a mitre, and these words, 'Adjoining to this spot Bishopsgate formerly stood.' [20]

Bishopsgate was named after Erkenwald, Bishop of London (d. 685), son of Offa, King of Mercia, by whom it was erected. At first the maintenance of the gate was considered to devolve upon the Bishop of London, but after an arrangement with the Hanse Merchants it was ruled that the bishop 'is bound to make the hinges of Bysoppsgate; seeing that from every cart laden with wood he has one stick as it enters the said gate.' The liability was limited to the hinges, for after some dispute it was (1305) 'awarded and agreed that Almaines belonging to the House of the Merchants of Almaine shall be free from paying two shillings on going in or out of the gate of Bishopesgate with their goods, seeing that they are charged with the safe keeping and repair of the gate.' The line of the wall bears southward to Aldgate, and is marked by the street named Houndsditch.