

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

AN exhaustive history of London would be that of the kingdom of which it is the capital ; and it is, of course, impossible to find room for anything of the kind here. But there are points in the annals of the city which must be noticed in any Guide to London.

The name is probably derived from the Celtic *Llyn* (pronounced *lun*), a pool or lake (the river at an earlier period expanded into a considerable lake—the part immediately below London Bridge is still “the Pool”), and *din* or *dun*, a hill, fort, or place of strength. The “hill” may have been that on which St. Paul’s now stands, or Cornhill.

When the Romans conquered Llyndyn they Latinized the name as Londinium. It grew to be a splendid city, one of the nine *coloniæ* of Britain, but inferior in importance at first to Eboracum (York) and Verulamium (St. Albans). Great military roads radiated from the city to various parts of Britain, and distances were measured from the *lapis miliaris* in the Forum of Agricola, in the heart of the Roman town. The stone, now known as the “London Stone,” may still be seen in the wall of St. Swithin’s Church, Cannon Street.

The direction taken by the old London Wall is well known, and can be traced by the modern names of streets. Indeed, considerable sections, composed chiefly of Kentish ragstone, and large Roman bricks, may be seen in London Wall, between Wood Street and Aldermanbury ; in the churchyard of St. Giles’, Cripplegate ; at the General Post Office, Newgate Street ; at the foot of Jewry Street, Aldgate ; in America Square, off the Minories ; in Trinity Square, and at the Tower itself. That the wall is a reality, and not a figment of the topographer’s imagination, may be judged by the fact that contractors for sewers and other underground works find it necessary to stipulate that they shall be allowed to charge extra if they have to cut through or remove any portion of it. Outside the wall, a wide ditch, portions of which can still be traced, provided a further defence. At the eastern end of the wall, by the river side, was a strong fort, succeeded later by the White Tower. Thence, the wall followed a line slightly westward of the Minories to Aldgate ; then it curved to the north-west, between Bevis

Marks and Houndsditch ("a ditch beyond the wall") to Bishops-gate, whence it followed the line still known as "London Wall" to Cripplegate. It next took a southern course to Aldersgate, and behind St. Botolph's Church, to Newgate; thence to Ludgate and along Pilgrim Street to the Fleet river (which then flowed in the valley now known as Farringdon Street). It skirted this stream to its junction with the Thames, where another strong fort was erected.¹ There were three Gates, Aldgate (Ale-gate or All-gate, i.e., open to all), Aldersgate and Ludgate (*Lydgate*, a postern); and afterwards a postern (Postern Row marks the spot) on Tower Hill. On the northern side was an outwork or barbican (the modern street, Barbican, preserves its memory). Later, other gates were added, the names of which are still preserved in Billings-gate, Bishops-gate, Moor-gate, Cripple-gate (from the Anglo-Saxon *crepel-gate*, a covered way), New-gate and Dow-gate (Celtic *dwr*, water).

Under the Saxons London became the metropolis of the kingdom of Essex. Bede, writing in the early part of the eighth century, refers to London as the "mart of many nations resorting to it by sea and land." The city was constituted the capital of England by Alfred the Great, York and Winchester having previously enjoyed that dignity in succession—the former under the Romans, the latter under the Saxons. In 994, the first bridge across the Thames was built.

The White Tower, in the Tower of London, was erected by William I. in 1078, on the site of the Roman fort already noticed. The same king granted a charter to the city (see p. 6) confirming the burghers in the rights enjoyed by them under Edward the Confessor. William Rufus, in 1097, founded Westminster Hall. King John granted the citizens several charters, and in Magna Charta it was expressly stipulated that London should have all its ancient privileges and customs as well by land as by water.

Wat Tyler's Rebellion took place in 1381, and every schoolboy is familiar with the picturesque part played by the Lord Mayor of that time. Reference must also be made to Jack Cade's Rebellion (1450), immortalized in Shakespeare's *Henry VI.*: "Now is Mortimer lord of this city!" cried the insurgent leader, when he struck his sword on the London Stone.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, so rapid had become the increase of London, that both Elizabeth and James I.

¹ This line corresponds almost exactly with the present boundaries of the City of London, with the exception of the "liberties," or wards, still known as "without," added at a later time.

issued proclamations against any further extension of the city. In the Strand, between London and Westminster, were many splendid residences of the nobility, with fine gardens reaching to the Thames. The names of most of the streets in the Strand—such as Essex, Norfolk, Burleigh, Buckingham and Northumberland—still preserve these aristocratic associations.

The reign of Mary witnessed the burning of heretics at Smithfield and that of Elizabeth the patriotic rally of the citizens in defence of the country against the Armada. During the Civil War, London sided with the Parliament, and the fateful January 30th, 1649, saw the execution of Charles I. at Whitehall. In 1665 London was desolated by the **Great Plague**, which carried off nearly a fifth of the inhabitants; and in the following year the **Great Fire** occurred, destroying more than 13,000 houses, St. Paul's Cathedral, the Royal Exchange, 86 churches and most of the guild halls. The damage was estimated at £10,730,500. Pepys forlornly wrote, "it has been computed that the rents of the houses lost this Fire in the City comes to £600,000 per annum." According to popular legend the fire began at Pudding Lane and ended at Pye Corner. The lofty Monument, near London Bridge, marks the spot where the fire broke out. The Tower, Westminster Abbey and Hall, the Temple Church, and about a score of city churches, were the only buildings of importance spared by the conflagration. Sir Walter Besant well said:—

"If, as some hold, the cause of the long-continued plague, which lasted, with intervals of rest, from the middle of the sixteenth century to 1665, was nothing but the accumulated filth of London, so that the ground on which it stood was saturated many feet in depth with poisonous filtrations, the fire of 1666 must be regarded in the light of a surgical operation, absolutely essential if life were to be preserved, and as an operation highly successful in its results. For it burned, more or less, every house and every building over an area of 436 acres out of those which made up London within the walls."

In rebuilding the city many improvements were effected. Streets were widened and houses of more substantial materials constructed, but London has never ceased to regret that the masterly designs of Sir Christopher Wren and John Evelyn were not carried out in their entirety. St. Paul's Cathedral and fifty-three parish churches were rebuilt by Wren in such a way that, when viewed from such a standpoint as Waterloo Bridge, the lesser fanes, though differing from each other, all harmonize and serve to heighten the general effect of the stately Cathedral dome.

In 1716 it was ordained that every householder should hang

a light before his door from six in the evening till eleven. Gas was first used as an illuminant in 1807. In 1767 numbers began to replace the old signs as distinguishing marks for houses. The year 1780 witnessed the **Gordon Riots**, when Newgate and other prisons were fired and many prisoners released, stirring events that supply a background to Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge*.

Most of the city gates and barriers were removed before the end of the eighteenth century, but the most famous of them, Temple Bar, stood in its place until 1878, when, owing to the inconvenience caused to traffic, it was replaced by the present monument. The old "bar" now stands at the entrance to the park at Theobalds, about fourteen miles from London.

To the latter part of the eighteenth century belong some of the finest buildings in London, such as Somerset House, the Bank, the Mansion House and the Horse Guards. But the Metropolis, as we know it, is very largely a creation of the **Victorian Age**, most of the leading thoroughfares having been widened and improved—many of them actually constructed—and the bulk of the chief public edifices remodelled, if not built, during that period. The formation of wide arteries—such as New Oxford Street and Regent Street, in the early years of the nineteenth century; of Farringdon Street and Queen Victoria Street, later on, and of the broad avenue connecting Oxford Street with Old Street; of the Shaftesbury and Rosebery Avenues, and of Charing Cross Road, in more recent times; and during the present century the construction of Kingsway and the widening of the Strand and Fleet Street cleared away many notoriously unsavoury localities. On all the principal thoroughfares have risen, during the present century, stately and imposing shops and blocks of offices that will vie with any in Europe or America. Since the War Regent Street and parts of Oxford Street have been largely rebuilt and Kingsway completed. The new County Hall, the offices of the Port of London Authority, and a number of fine buildings for insurance companies and banks have given the metropolis further dignity. London is, indeed, in spite of many incongruities and a climate by no means favourable, fast becoming a "city beautiful." Healthful and outlying districts are now made available by cheap trains, "tubes," electric trams and motor-buses; while in the central areas are many large piles of "flats" for those who prefer town life to the suburbs.

Street improvements, together with the stringent sanitary precautions adopted by the various local authorities, have brought about the satisfactory result that London is both

one of the finest and one of the healthiest cities in the world. In spite of its huge size, the metropolis has almost the lowest death-rate among towns in England with a population of over 200,000, while it is incontestably far healthier than Paris, New York or Rome. Only the smaller capitals, such as Brussels and Amsterdam, can compare with it as regards the rate of mortality. Indeed, in recent years its death-rate has been lower than that of any capital in Europe.

London in War Time.

No historical sketch would be complete without reference to the important part played by London in the great world-drama of the War (1914-18). Immediately on the outbreak of hostilities its young men poured from offices and factories to the recruiting depôts, and proved on many a blood-stained field the valour and endurance of "the Cockney breed." Their places were to a large extent taken by women, who also did the major share of the work in the many Government departments called into being or largely augmented by the necessities of the War.

On the financial side, too, London's contribution to the War was of outstanding importance, and successive appeals by harassed Chancellors of the Exchequer invariably met with an immediate and full-weighted response. The Port of London became of transcendent value in the great task of feeding the nation under the difficult circumstances arising from the enemy's ruthless submarine activity. From the outset our foes paid London the compliment of recognizing it as the very heart of the resistance to their ambitious schemes of spoliation and aggression, and the metropolis was bombed from Zeppelins and aeroplanes whenever occasion favoured.¹ Damage was done and lives were lost. The latter can never be replaced, but it was wonderful with what celerity the former was repaired. London simply pushed out the dents in her helmet and went on working—and her work for the most part was a form of fighting.

Nor must it be forgotten that the metropolis was called upon to play the part of grateful host to many thousands of gallant heroes from all parts of the Dominions and from the countries of our Allies, to say nothing of the migratory swarms from our own armies to whom the precious words "leave" and "London" became almost synonymous terms.

¹ According to official statements since the War, over 7,800 bombs were dropped in all, 522 persons being killed and thrice as many wounded. In most of the raids the damage to property was insignificant, but on a few occasions it was very heavy, in one case amounting to a million and a half pounds.