

**THE FASCINATION OF  
LONDON. CLERKENWELL AND  
ST. LUKE'S, COMPRISING  
THE BOROUGH OF FINSBURY**

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The Fascination of London. Clerkenwell and St. Luke's, Comprising the Borough of Finsbury by  
G. E. Mitton & Sir Walter Besant

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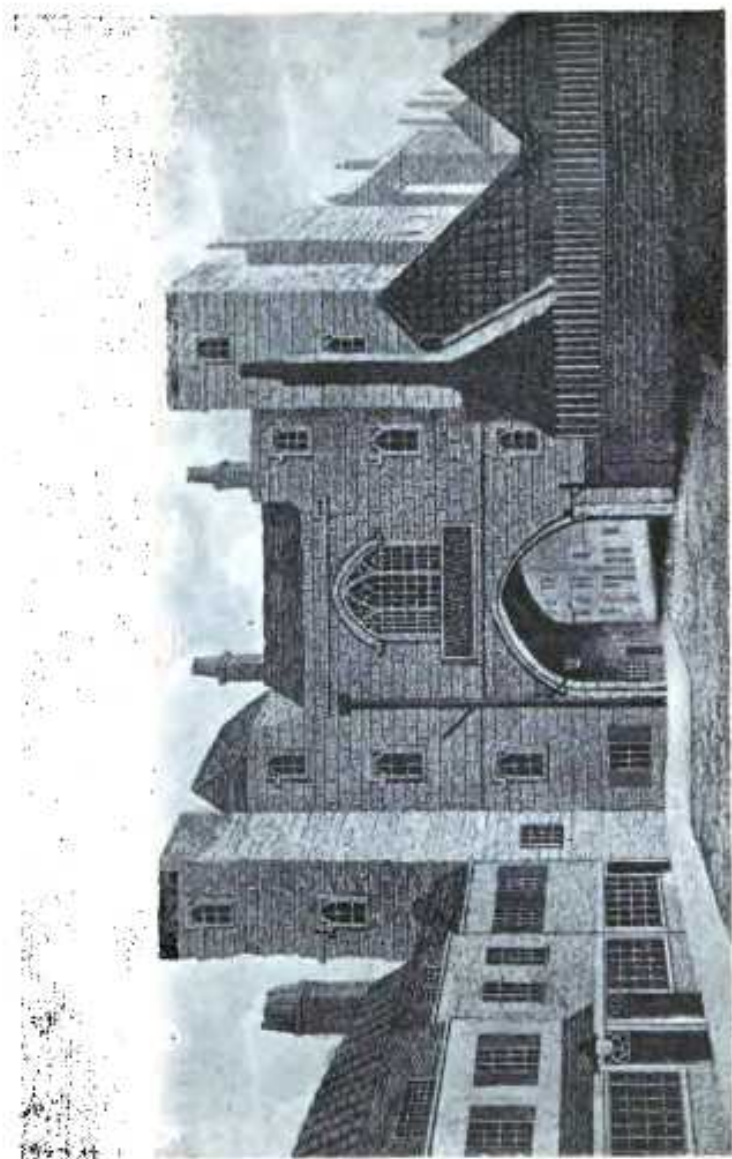
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ST. JOHN'S GATE, CLERKENWELL.  
From an Engraving published in 1818.



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BOROUGH OF FINSBURY

BY

G. E. MITTON

EDITED BY

SIR WALTER BESANT

LONDON

ADAM & CHARLES BLACK

1906

## PREFATORY NOTE

A SURVEY of London, a record of the greatest of all cities, that should preserve her history, her historical and literary associations, her mighty buildings, past and present, a book that should comprise all that Londoners love, all that they ought to know of their heritage from the past—this was the work on which Sir Walter Besant was engaged when he died.

As he himself said of it: "This work fascinates me more than anything else I've ever done. Nothing at all like it has ever been attempted before. I've been walking about London for the last thirty years, and I find something fresh in it every day."

Sir Walter's idea was that two of the volumes of his survey should contain a regular and systematic perambulation of London by different persons, so that the history of each parish should be complete in itself. This was a very original feature in the great scheme, and one in which he took the keenest interest. Enough has been done of this section to warrant its issue in the form originally intended, but in the meantime it

## PREFATORY NOTE

is proposed to select some of the most interesting of the districts and publish them as a series of booklets, attractive alike to the local inhabitant and the student of London, because much of the interest and the history of London lie in these street associations.

The difficulty of finding a general title for the series was very great, for the title desired was one that would express concisely the undying charm of London—that is to say, the continuity of her past history with the present times. In streets and stones, in names and palaces, her history is written for those who can read it, and the object of the series is to bring forward these associations, and to make them plain. The solution of the difficulty was found in the words of the man who loved London and planned the great scheme. The work "fascinated" him, and it was because of these associations that it did so. These links between past and present in themselves largely constitute The Fascination of London.

G. E. M.



## CLERKENWELL

CLERKENWELL now forms part of the borough of Finsbury (for derivation of which word, see p. 99). It is of an irregular oblong shape, and is bounded on the north by Islington; west by St. Pancras; St. Andrew, Holborn; and Hatton Garden, Saffron Hill. The last two parishes have already been described in the volume on Holborn. Clerkenwell is further bounded on the south by the City, and on the east by St. Luke and part of Islington. Its eastern boundary is easily defined, for it follows Goswell Road from the top to the bottom; the northern one follows Richard and Albert Streets and Wynford Road; the west is very irregular, having been originally determined by the course of the river Fleet (see p. 14). After zigzagging down several small streets, it reaches King's Cross Road, and follows it to the Parcels Post Office. It cuts behind this, following Phoenix Place, Warner Street, and Little Saffron Hill, to Clerkenwell Road. Thence it passes

eastward to Farringdon Road, and down it to the south corner of the Vegetable Market. The southern boundary is a series of zigzags, keeping roughly north of the Meat Market and south of Charterhouse Square to Goswell Road.

Several changes were made at the creation of the new London boroughs. A detached piece of the parish at Muswell Hill, which had been granted to the nuns (see p. 50) by the Bishop of London in 1112, was taken away, and the most southern ward—that of St. Sepulchre—was added.

#### DERIVATION

The name is literally "Clerks' Well," and signifies an actual well near which the company of parish clerks used to perform their miracle or mystery plays (see p. 10). Clerkenwell has for centuries past been celebrated for its mineral waters. In early times we have, as well as the Clerks', the Skinners' Well, and Strype has preserved for us the names of Fag's Well, Gode Well, Loder's Well, and Rede Well, the very sites of which are now utterly lost. In the eighteenth century a new group was discovered, which drew people from far and wide. We have the New Wells, St. Chad's Well, the Peerless Pool, besides the well-known Sadlers' Wells, Bagnigge Wells, and Islington Spa. Some of these may have been the old ones rediscovered and renamed. These

wells all became the centre for entertainment of the tea-garden or variety sort, and Clerkenwell was celebrated for its gaiety and amusements.

## HISTORY

Clerkenwell is not mentioned in Domesday Book, and is supposed at that date to have been partly included in Islington. In the time of King Henry II. it is described by FitzStephen as "fields for pasture, and a delightful plain of meadow land interspersed with flowing streams, on which stand mills, whose clack is very pleasing to the ear." In Aggas's plan, dated 1660 (see *London in the Time of the Tudors*), we can see the Nunnery and Priory; also a few houses about Cow Cross and Turnmill Streets, a small cluster at the south gate near the boundary wall of the nunnery, and a couple of houses in Goswell Road.

The settlement of this suburb was not due to any overflow of the City like Cripplegate, but was owing to the horse-market of Smithfield, and the many functions, executions, races, wrestling matches, fairs, etc., which took place there, and caused the erection of taverns and places of entertainment. It was also due to the erection of the religious houses of St. Bartholomew's, the Benedictine Nunnery, the Charterhouse, and St. John's. Every religious house had its servants