LONDON BEFORE THE CONQUEST

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London before the conquest by W. R. Lethaby

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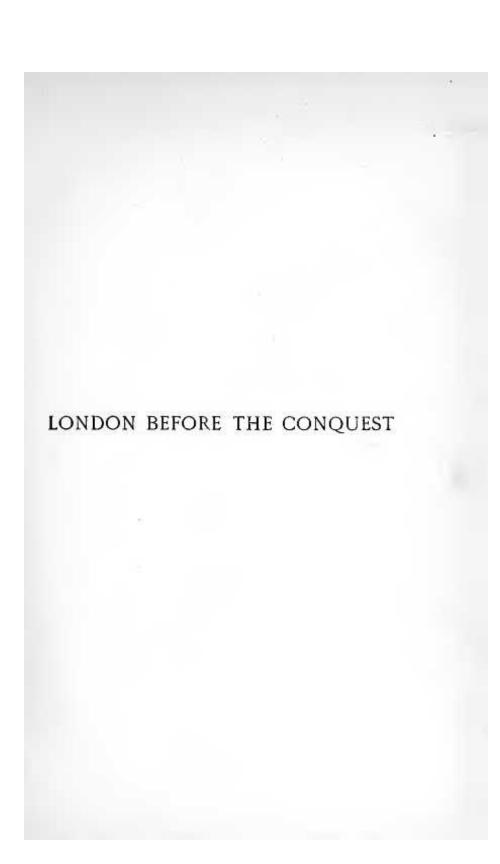
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W. R. LETHABY

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"Now would I fain
In words playn,
Some honoure sayen,
And bring to mynde
Of that auncient cytic
That so goodly is to se."
—Fabyan,



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DA680

CONZRAL

"Lundres est muit riche cite,
Meller n'ad en Cristiente'
Pur vasilance, ni melx assisé,
Melx gawnie, de grant prisce;
Al pe del mur li curt Tamise
Pur li vent la marchandise
Des tures les qui nun
U marchans Crestiens vieut."
Roman de Tristan.

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INTRODUCTION

A great burh, Lundunaborg, which is the greatest and most famous of all burhs in the northern lands.—Ragnar Lodbrok Saga.

Or the hundreds of books concerning London, there is not one which treats of its ancient topography as a whole. There are, it is true, a great number of studies dealing in an accurate way with details, and most of the general histories incidentally touch on questions of reconstruction. Of these, the former are, of course, the more valuable from the topographical point of view, yet even an exhaustive series of such would necessarily be inadequate for representing to us the ancient city in a comprehensive way.

In an inquiry as to the ancient state of a city, a general survey, besides bringing isolated details into due relation, may suggest new matter for consideration in regard to them, and offer fresh points of proof. For instance, the extra-mural roads were directed to the several gates, the gates governed the internal streets, while these streets ran through wards, and gave access to churches and other buildings.

The subject of London topography is such an enormous one, and the involutions of unfounded conjecture are so manifold, that an approximation to the facts can only be obtained by a critical resifting of the vast extant stores of evidence. In the present small essay I have, of course, not been able to do this in any exhaustive way; but I have for years been interested in the decipherment of the great palimpsest of London, and, in trying to realise for myself what the city was like a thousand years ago, I have in some part reconsidered the evidences. The conclusions thus reached cannot, I think, he without some general interest, although from the very nature of my plan they are presented in the form of notes on particular points, and discussions of opinions commonly held, with little attempt at unity, and none at a pictorial treatment of the subject.

Of mistaken views still largely or nearly uni-