

**LONDON BEFORE THE FIRE OF 1666:
WITH AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE
PARISH, THE WARD AND THE CHURCH OF
ST. GILES WITHOUT CRIPPLEGATE,
BROUGHT DOWN TO THE PRESENT TIME**

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London Before the Fire of 1666: With an Historical Account of the Parish, the Ward and the Church of St. Giles Without Cripplegate, Brought Down to the Present Time by William Miller

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BY

WILLIAM MILLER

OF H. M. INDIA OFFICE.

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ANCIENT LONDON.

THE CITY OF LONDON was the capital of the TRINOBANTES, a numerous people inhabiting those parts of Britain now called Middlesex and Essex, before the Christian era. Even in those remote times it was governed by laws, and an important centre of British commerce. Cæsar, in his Commentaries, denominated it the 'chief city of the TRINOBANTES ;' one of the early writers describes it as ' admirably accommodated from the elements, standing in a fruitful soil, abounding with everything, and seated upon a gentle ascent, and upon the River Thames, which, without trouble or difficulty, brings it in the riches of the world; for by the convenience of the tide coming in at set hours, with the safety and depth of the river, which brings up the largest vessels, it daily heaps in so much wealth, both from east and west, that it may dispute pre-eminence with all others.'

Antiquity has told us nothing of the founder—indeed, cities seldom know their original ; but tradition gives it to a Trojan in the person of Brute, son of Sylvanus, who invaded and conquered Britain 1116 years before Christ; that, however, is too utopian to be accepted in the nineteenth century. It cannot be doubted that during the 476 years of Roman rule, stupendous works were accomplished by a people of advanced mechanical skill, whose soldiers were superior artisans and excellent workmen, capable of building fortresses, cities, and towns; and as the Romans made London their grand emporium, the city would have had full advantage of their architectural ability. We further learn that the Emperor CLAUDIUS (who built Gloucester, *Glevum* ; and Colchester, *Colonia*) remodelled London and called it Augusta.

In the reign of Nero it was deemed the largest and most opulent city in the British islands. Tacitus, in his *Annals* (lib. xiv. c. 33), writes: 'London, so called from its situation, and Augusta from its magnificence, was now illustrious from the vast number of merchants who resorted to it for widely extended commerce, and the abundance of every species of commodity which it could supply.' As early as A.D. 359, eight hundred vessels were employed in the exportation of corn only.

Cæsar and Strabo have both told us that London, being the residence of British kings and the seat of commerce, was altogether superior to other towns. Strabo adds: 'As the cypress is to the simple twig;' for the lesser towns were mostly built in the centre of woods, defended by felled trees forming barriers behind a rampart and moat, from being used more as places of refuge during war to secure their families and cattle rather than a general residence.

The Romans were remarkable for the construction of grand military roads in straight lines, having garrisoned stations at certain intervals, with branches to towns as they rose upon them. One of these great highways was called Watling Street; it commenced at Dover (*Dubris*) and continued direct to London (*Londinum*), with stations at Canterbury, Rochester, and Southfleet, traversing the central parts of Kent and commanding leading provinces of trade and commerce. Many grand relics of their architecture still remain to us, amongst which are the mighty ruins of Richborough Castle, and of the *Vindonum* at Silchester, enduring monuments of Roman grandeur after the wear of fifteen centuries, whilst most of our castles of the middle ages have crumbled into ruin.

The Romans built a military road, or Watling Street, in a direct line from the site of the present Tower of London to Ludgate, the Watling Street of our time running parallel with the original; at the eastern and western extremities were fortresses of great strength, said to have been 'fit for the reception of a king.' Distinct of these were others, called barbicans or watch towers, generally remarkable for their solidity; the walls, which still stand, of that at Dover are ten feet thick. There was a similar barbican in the city near to Aldersgate, which we shall describe hereafter.

The City of London was first walled by the Romans, but

the date is uncertain, although historians assert that the British Princess Helena, widow of the Emperor **CONSTANTIUS**, who died at York, A.D. 396, was the founder, which seems probable, she being a Briton, the mother of **CONSTANTINE THE GREAT**, and he the first Christian emperor. The city wall, strengthened and fortified by the Emperor **THEODOSIUS**, curved by Aldgate and Houndsditch, taking a westerly direction from Moorgate to Cripplegate, and thence southerly, abutting on the Thames above Ludgate; along this line of wall were bastions, but originally only three gates, called Old or Aldgate, leading to the east; Alderagate to the north; and Led, afterwards Ludgate, opening on to the western roads of the kingdom. Subsequently, other gates were constructed; these were called Bishop-gate, Moor-gate, Cripple-gate, New-gate, and Bridge-gate.

It is quite certain that the Romans successfully practised land drainage, for we find that in valleys subject to be flooded, banks were cast up which they fenced and paved with stone; indeed, all the early noted causeways throughout the kingdom, according to Camden, were made by them. Pliny further tells us they were famous in agriculture and gardening, having introduced the vine into Britain, and planted vineyards in the neighbourhood of all their towns, of which there were extensive plantations in Hatton Garden, St. Giles's-in-the-Fields, and East Smithfield.

It is a somewhat curious fact that we of the nineteenth century ignore metropolitan sepulture after the millions of dead that have festered in our churches and churchyards, through plague and pestilence, from before the Conquest, and now return to Roman custom in Britain, which rendered it imperative that the dead should be carried without the city by the military highways to appointed places for burning and burying them. One of these cemeteries was disclosed during the last century whilst excavating for brick-earth, in certain fields east of the city wall, then called Spittle, now Spitalfields, when an extensive Roman cemetery was discovered containing numerous urns and sepulchral vessels, seals, coins of Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, and other Roman emperors, as well as glass and earthen vessels, the supposed receptacles of oblations of wine, milk, and odorous liquids used at the burning of the dead, thus described by Statius:—

And precious odours sprinkled on his hair
Prepared it for the flames.

a portion of which was generally deposited with the ashes in a small glass or crystal vessel. Within a short distance of this field, other Roman antiquities were found, consisting of coins of **TRAJAN** and **ANTONINUS PIUS**, lachrymatories, vessels of white earth, phials of curious and elegant workmanship, images, and a figure of Pallas about a foot in length. Amongst the most interesting was a large glass vase, capable of holding six quarts, ornamented with fine parallel circles; it had a handle and a short neck with a wide mouth of white metal. This vase was presented to Sir Christopher Wren, who deposited it in the Museum of the Royal Society. Spitalfields, however, must have been a place of sepulture after the Romans, as in the same field many stone coffins were dug up containing human bones, probably the remains of Saxons, as well as skulls and bones without coffins; but from the number of large nails found near them it is supposed that they were buried in coffins made of the trunks of trees, covered with a thick plank fastened by nails, a reasonable conclusion, from the fragments of wood adhering to the broad heads of the nails.

Indisputably, the most ancient mode of burial was sepulchral; this is established by Biblical history, and the usages of the Egyptians from the earliest period; still, burning of the dead was practised as early as the Trojan war, proved by Homer's description of the funeral rites of Patroclus, from which may be inferred that the Romans derived the custom from the Greeks, although with this difference, that the Romans inhumed the ashes in cemeteries near the great highways, to remind the living of their own mortality; and, according to Varro, the spot was marked by a monumental inscription,—‘*SISTE, VIATOR;*’ pause, traveller.

Various remains of Roman art and grandeur have been found in London, and form interesting links in the chain of our early history. When **ALDGATE** was rebuilt in 1607, large quantities of Roman coins were discovered in the foundations. Subsequent to the fire of 1666, large numbers were turned up whilst excavating for the present cathedral and the old Fleet ditch. Digging in 1716 for the foundation of the Church of St. Mary Woolnoth, Lombard Street, a Roman aqueduct and several vessels for sacred and domestic purposes were discovered, as well as vast quantities of broken pottery, of which many cartloads were removed with the rubbish, leading Dr. Harwood, a distinguished

antiquarian, to suppose this to have been the site of a considerable pottery. In 1718, the workmen, while pulling down a wall of Old Bridewell, discovered a gold enamelled ring, bearing a representation of the Crucifixion, and an inscription in Arabic; this ring was supposed to have been made in the second century. When excavating the old foundations of the Ordnance Office in the Tower in 1777, many gold coins opened up, and a silver ingot, inscribed *Ex Officio Honorii*; the coins were also of that emperor and Arcadius, from which may be inferred that the Tower was not only a Roman fort, but also a mint and treasury, thus favouring the opinions of many antiquaries, that our famous London Stone in Cannon Street was a Roman military or standard, from whence London distances were measured, similar to that in the Forum at Rome. We will not attempt to enumerate the large amount of Roman remains surfaced in the present century (many of which form features in the museum attached to the Guildhall Library), nor consider those of recent discovery during the mighty railway operations and extraordinary clearances for stupendous structures everywhere rising in the city; but simply glance at some of the tessellated pavements found at various depths as proofs that the City of London has been raised many feet. Most of the mosaic pavements discovered in London have been at depths ranging from nine to eleven feet. That dug up in 1786, when making a sewer in Lombard Street, was ten feet below the surface; another in Cheapside was eleven feet beneath the carriage-way. When the French or Walloon Church in Threadneedle Street was taken down and the foundation cleared away for the present building, a portion of diamond pattern mosaic, with border, was there at a depth of from nine to ten feet. In December, 1803, the most beautiful mosaic pavement yet found in London was dug up in Leadenhall Street, opposite to the late East India House, nine feet six inches below the flag-paving. This superb specimen of Roman workmanship, having an ornamental centre eleven feet square, formed the floor of a room not less than twenty-four feet diameter; the whole was not perfect, the eastern side having been previously cut away for a sewer; but the remaining portions, to the extent of nearly three parts, were in excellent preservation. A carefully tinted drawing was made at the time by Mr. Fisher, of the India House, which may be thus

described:—In the centre is a figure of the god Bacchus reclining on the back of a tiger, in cubes of half an inch, the tesselæ forming the ornamental borders being somewhat larger; the colouring and shading exhibited considerable skill and ingenuity, the material being of baked earths; the more brilliant colours of green and purple, forming the drapery, are of glass. This grand specimen of Roman art was firmly embedded in lime and brick dust, based on a deep layer of hard loam, which rendered the whole as firm to the foot as solid stone; the disjointed fragments were deposited in the East India Company's Library, and afterwards, in part, remounted on a slab of slate according to the drawing, and placed in the Indian Museum.

After the departure of the Romans the Britons suffered severely from the ravages of the Scots and Picts, which induced VORTIGERN, the British king, to invite Hengist, a distinguished Saxon general, to assist the Britons in return for the Isle of Thanet. Hengist readily accepted the invitation, and with his brother Horsa landed on the Isle of Thanet, with 1,500 men, A.D. 448. Having united with the British, the joint forces gave the enemy battle in Lincolnshire, when the Scots and Picts were entirely routed. In the year 450 a further force of 5,000 Saxons, exclusive of their families, were landed from fifteen ships; and again in 452 a still larger reinforcement arrived in forty ships and successfully descended on the countries of the Scots. Hengist, emboldened by these successes, invited over more of his countrymen, secretly made peace with the Scots and Picts, and then turned their arrows against Vortigern the British king, ending in the great battle of Aylesford, in Kent, fought A.D. 455, when Horsa and Catigern, brother of the king, were both killed, from which time the Saxons spread rapidly over the face of Britain.

In the year 597, Pope Gregory the Great sent Augustine and forty monks to preach the Gospel in Britain. Milletus, one of the most distinguished of them, had the ecclesiastical government of London; his wisdom, eloquence and moderation rendered his mission eminently propitious; he succeeded in erecting a church on the ruins of a heathen temple, which he dedicated to St. Paul. Westminster, then called Thorney, was surrounded by a morass; a Roman temple dedicated to Apollo had stood here, but the preaching and teaching of Milletus had so rapidly advanced the doctrines of Chris-