

## CHAPTER I.

*THE FOUNDATION OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY.*

The devout King destined to God that place, both for that it was near unto the famous and wealthy city of London, and also had a pleasant situation amongst fruitful fields lying round about it, with the principal river running hard by, bringing in from all parts of the world great variety of wares and merchandise of all sorts to the city adjoining; but chiefly for the love of the Chief Apostle, whom he revered with a special and singular affection. (*Contemporary Life of Edward the Confessor, in Harleian MSS.*, pp. 980–985.)

## SPECIAL AUTHORITIES.

The special authorities for the physical peculiarities of Westminster are:—

1. Smith's *Antiquities of Westminster*. London. 1807.
2. Saunders's *Situation and Extent of Westminster*, in *Archæologia*, vol. xxvi. pp. 223–241.
3. Dean Buckland's Sermon (1847) on the reopening of Westminster Abbey, with a Geological Appendix.
4. *History of St. Margaret's, Westminster*, by the Rev. Mackenzie E. C. Walcott.

For Edward the Confessor:—

1. Life by Ailred, Abbot of Rievaulx, A.D. 1163, derived chiefly from an earlier Life by Osbert, or Osbern of Clare, Prior of Westminster, A.D. 1158.
2. The Four Lives published by Mr. Luard, in the Collection of the Master of the Rolls:
  - (a) *Cambridge MS.* French Poem, dedicated to Eleanor, Queen of Henry III., probably about A.D. 1245.
  - (b) *Oxford MS.* Latin Poem, dedicated to Henry VI., probably between A.D. 1440—1450.
  - (c) *Vatican and Caius Coll. MSS.*, probably in the thirteenth century.
 All these are founded on Ailred.
  - (d) *Harleian MS.*, A.D. 1066—1074 (almost contemporary).

## CHAPTER I.

### THE FOUNDATION OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

IT IS SAID that the line in ‘Heber’s Palestine’ which describes the rise of Solomon’s temple originally ran—

Like the green grass, the noiseless fabric grew;

and that, at Sir Walter Scott’s suggestion, it was altered to its present form—

Like some tall palm, the noiseless fabric sprung.

Whether we adopt the humbler or the grander image, the comparison of the growth of a fine building to that of a natural product is full of instruction. But the growth of an historical edifice like Westminster Abbey needs a more complex figure to do justice to its formation: a venerable oak, with gnarled and hollow trunk, and spreading roots, and decaying bark, and twisted branches, and green shoots; or a coral reef extending itself with constantly new accretions, creek after creek, and islet after islet. One after another, a fresh nucleus of life is formed, a new combination produced, a larger ramification thrown out. In this respect Westminster Abbey stands alone amongst the buildings of the world. There are, it may be, some which surpass it in beauty or grandeur; there are others, certainly, which surpass it in depth and sublimity of association; but there is none which has been entwined by so many continuous threads with the history of a whole nation.

4 FOUNDATION OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY. CH. I.

Physical  
 features of  
 London.

I. The first origin of Westminster is to be sought in the natural features of its position, which include the origin of London no less. Foremost of these is what to Londoners and Englishmen is, in a deeper and truer sense than was intended by Gray when he used the phrase, our ‘*Father Thames* :’ the River Thames, the largest river in England, here widening to an almost majestic size, yet not too wide for thoroughfare—the direct communication between London and the sea on the one hand, between London and the interior on the other. When roads were bad, when robbers were many, when the forests were still thick, then, far more than now, the Thames was the chief highway of English life, the chief inlet and outlet of English commerce. Here, from the earliest times, the coracles of the British tribes, the galleys of the Roman armies, were moored, and gave to the place the most probable origin of its name—the ‘City of Ships.’

The  
 Thames.

The Thames is the parent of London. The chief river of England has, by a natural consequence, secured for its chief city that supremacy over all the other towns which have at various times claimed to be the seats of sovereignty in England—York, Canterbury, and Winchester. The old historic stream, which gathered on the banks of its upper course Oxford, Eton, Windsor, and Richmond, had already, before the first beginning of those ancient seats of learning and of regal luxury, become, on these its lower banks, the home<sup>1</sup> of England’s commerce and of England’s power.

The hills  
 and  
 streams.

Above the river rose a long range of hills, covered with a vast forest, full of wild deer, wild bulls, and wild boars,<sup>2</sup> of which the highest points were Hampstead and Highgate. A desolate moor or fen, marked still by the names of *Finsbury*, *Fenchurch*, and *Moorfields*, which in winter was covered with water and often frozen, occupied the plateau imme-

<sup>1</sup> Londinium . . . copiâ negotiatorum et commeatum maxime celebre. (Tac. *Ann.* xiv. 33.)

<sup>2</sup> Fitzstephen. Vita S. Thomæ. Descriptio nobilissimæ civitatis Londoniæ.

CH. I. THE PHYSICAL FEATURES OF LONDON. 5

diately north of the city. As the slope of the hills descended steeply on the *strand* of the river, slight eminences, of stiff clay, broke the ground still more perceptibly. Tower Hill, Corn Hill, and Ludgate Hill remind us that the old London, like all capitals, took advantage of whatever strength was afforded by natural situation: and therefore as we go up to Cornhill, the traditional seat of British chiefs and Roman governors, as we feel the ground swelling under our feet when we begin the ascent from Fleet Street to St. Paul's, or as we see the eminence on which stands the Tower of London, the oldest fortress of our Norman kings, we have before us the reasons which have fixed what is properly called the 'City' of London on its present site.

And yet again, whilst the first dwellers of the land were thus entrenched on their heights by the riverside, they were at once protected and refreshed by the clear swift rivulets descending from the higher hills through the winding valleys that intersected the earthen bulwarks on which the old fastnesses stood. These streams still survive in the depths of the sewers into which they are absorbed, and in the streets to which they give their names. On the eastern<sup>1</sup> side the Long stream (*Langborne*) of 'sweet water' flowed from the fens (of Fenchurch), and then broke into the 'shares or small 'rills' of *Shareborne* and *Southborne*, by which it reached the Thames. By St. Stephen's, *Walbrook*, probably forming the western boundary of the Roman fortress of London,<sup>2</sup> there flows the Brook of London Wall—the Wall Brook, which, when swelled by winter floods, rushed with such violence down its gully that, even in the time of Stow, a young man was swept away by it.<sup>3</sup> Holborn Hill takes its name from the *Old Bourne*,<sup>4</sup> or Holebourne, which, rising in

<sup>1</sup> *Arch.* xxxiii. 110.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* xxxiii. 104.

<sup>3</sup> *Arch.* xxxiii. 104. Stow's *Survey*.  
 Account of Downe Gate.

<sup>4</sup> If 'Old Bourne,' as it appears in Stow, the aspirate has been added as a London vulgarism. If 'Holebourne,' as it appears in earlier documents, it

High Holborn, ran down that steep declivity, and turned the mills at Turnmill (or Turnbull) Street, at the bottom: the River of Wells, as it was sometimes called, from those once consecrated springs which now lie choked and buried in Clerken Well, and Holy Well, and St. Clement's Well—the scene in the Middle Ages of many a sacred and festive pageant which gathered round their green margins. Fleet Ditch and Fleet Street mark the shallow bed of the 'Fleet'<sup>1</sup> as it creeps down from the breezy slopes of Hampstead. The rivulet of Ulebrig crossed the Strand under the 'Ivy Bridge,'<sup>2</sup> on its way to the Thames.

Such are the main natural features of London. In recalling them from the graves in which they are now entombed, there is something affecting in the thought that, after all, we are not so far removed from our mother earth as we might have supposed. There is a quaint humour in the fact that the great arteries of our crowded streets, the vast sewers which cleanse our habitations, are fed by the lifeblood of those old and living streams; that underneath our tread the Tyburn, and the Holborn, and the Fleet, and the Wall Brook, are still pursuing their ceaseless course, still ministering to the good of man, though in a far different fashion than when Druids drank of their sacred springs, and Saxons were baptized in their rushing waters, ages ago.

Thus much has been necessary to state respecting the origin of London, because without a general view of so near and great a neighbour it is impossible to understand the position of our own home of Westminster.

is probably derived from flowing in a hollow. See Letter in the *Times*, Aug. 17, 1868.

<sup>1</sup> In a petition to the Parliament at Carlisle, in 35 Edward I. (*Rot. Parl.* i. p. 200, No. 59), the Earl of Lincoln stated that in old times ten or twelve ships used often to come up to Fleet Bridge with merchandise, and some even to Holborn Bridge to scour the

watercourse. It has been suggested to me that the word 'Fleet,' as a local designation, does not mean 'swift,' but 'shallow,' or 'flat.' In East Anglia it is always so used by the common people, as a 'fleet plate,' and so of meadows and fords in the fen country where a rapid stream is unknown.

<sup>2</sup> *Arch.* xxvi. 227.

Here too the mighty river plays an important part, but with an auxiliary which was wanting in the eastern sweep which has cradled the hills of London. Those steep stiff banks of London clay forbade any intrusion of the Thames beyond his natural shores; but both above and below that point the level ground enabled the river to divide his stream, and embrace within his course numerous islands and islets. Below, we still find the Isle of Dogs and the Isle of Sheep. Above, in like manner, the waters spread irregularly over a long low flat, and enclosed a mass of gravel deposit forming a small island or peninsula. The influx and reflux of the tide, which lower down was said even to have undermined the river-walls of the fortress of London,<sup>1</sup> rushed, it was believed, through what once was Flood Street; and some of our chroniclers fix the scene of Canute's rebuke to his courtiers 'on the banks of the Thames as it ran by the ' Palace of Westminster at flowing tide, and the waves cast ' forth some part of their water towards him, and came up ' to his thighs.'<sup>2</sup> On the north-east a stream came up by the street thence called Channel (afterwards corrupted into Canon<sup>3</sup>) Row, through Gardiner's Lane, which was crossed by a bridge as late as the seventeenth century.<sup>4</sup> On the

The Island  
of Thorns.

<sup>1</sup> Fitzstephen (ut supra). See *Arch.* xxxiii. 116. In the memory of man the vaults of the Treasury buildings were flooded.

<sup>2</sup> Fabian, p. 229. Knyghton, c. 2325.

<sup>3</sup> From its being the residence of the canons of St. Stephen's Chapel.

<sup>4</sup> The statement of Maitland (*History of London*, p. 730) and Dart (ii. 28), that the first bridge over this stream was built by Matilda, the good queen of Henry I., is probably a mistake founded on the statement of Weever, who says (p. 454) that Matilda 'buildd the bridges over the River ' of Lea at Stratford Bow, and over ' the little brooke called Chanelse- ' bridge.' The situation of the second

bridge not being definitely given in this passage, Maitland may have assumed, as Dart actually does assume, that it was identical with the bridge near Channel Row, Westminster. On referring to Stow, however (*Annals*, A.D. 1118), we find that the Queen built two stone bridges—one over the Lea at Stratford, and one not far from it, over a little brook called 'Chanelsebridge.' And it is evident, from other facts which he mentions, that Stow had seen the record of proceedings in the King's Bench in 6 Edward II., in which is recited an inquisition of 32 Edward I., assigning the foundation of these two bridges, the Stratford bridge and the 'Chanelse- ' brigg;' near it, to Queen Matilda.

north this channel spread out into a low marshy creek, now the lake in St. James's Park; and the steepness of the sides of the islet is indicated by the stairs descending into the Park from Duke-street Chapel. At the point where Great George Street enters Birdcage Walk by Storey's Gate, there was a narrow isthmus which connected the island with a similar bed of gravel, reaching under Buckingham Palace to Hyde Park.<sup>1</sup> Then through Prince's Street (formerly, from this stream, called Long Ditch),<sup>2</sup> another channel began, and continued through Dean Street and College Street, till it fell again into the Thames by Millbank Street, where, in later days, the Abbot's Mill stood on the banks of the stream. The watery waste, which on the south spread over Lambeth and Southwark, on the north was fed by one of those streams which have been already noticed. There descended from Hampstead in a torrent, which has scattered its name right and left along its course, the brook of the Aye or Eye,<sup>3</sup> so called probably from the Eye (or Island) of which it formed the eastern boundary, and afterwards familiarly corrupted into the *Aye Bourn*, *T' Aye Bourn*, *Tybourne*.<sup>4</sup> It is recognised first by the Chapel of St. Mary on its banks, *Mary-le-bourne* (now corrupted into Marylebone)—then by 'Brook' Street. Next, winding under the curve of 'Aye Hill,'<sup>5</sup> it ran out through the Green Park; and, whilst a thin stream found its way through what is now called the King's

Stow evidently knew nothing about the founder of the bridge near Channel Row, Westminster; for in his *Survey* he merely mentions it as before quoted. And in his notice of Matilda's place of sepulture he makes no allusion to it. I owe this correction to Mr. F. S. Haydon.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix to Dean Buckland's Sermon on Westminster Abbey.

<sup>2</sup> The word 'ditch' is used for a brook, as in Kenditch, near Hampstead. The ditch was remembered in 1799. (*Gent. Mag.* lxi. partii. p. 577.)

<sup>3</sup> For the whole plan of the manor or plain of *Eye* or *Eia*, containing the course of the brook, see *Arch.* xxvi. 224, 226, 234.

<sup>4</sup> Stratford Place marks the site of the banqueting house attached to the conduits of Tybourne. (*Arch.* xxvi. 226.)

<sup>5</sup> In the case of *Hdy Hill*, the London vulgarism has permanently prefixed the aspirate. The original 'Aye Hill' appears in a charter of Henry VI. in the archives of Eton College.



Scholars' Pond Sewer into the Thames, its waters also spread through the morass (which was afterwards called from it the manor of *Eyebury*, or *Ebury*) into the vast Bulinga Fen.<sup>1</sup>

The island (or peninsula) thus enclosed, in common with more than one similar spot, derived its name from its thickets of thorn—Thorn Ey,<sup>2</sup> the Isle of Thorns—which formed in their jungle a refuge for the wild ox<sup>3</sup> or huge red deer with towering antlers, that strayed into it from the neighbouring hills. This spot, thus entrenched, marsh within marsh and forest within forest, was indeed *locus terribilis*,<sup>4</sup> ‘the terrible place,’ as it was called in the first notices of its existence; yet even thus early it presented several points of attraction to the founder of whatever was the original building which was to redeem it from the wilderness. It had the advantages of a Thebaid, as contrasted with the stir and tumult of the neighbouring fortress of London. And, on the other hand, the river, then swarming with fish,<sup>5</sup> was close by to feed the colony; the gravel soil and the close fine sand, still dug up under the floor of the Abbey and in St. Margaret’s Churchyard, was necessarily healthy; and in the centre of the thickets, there bubbled up at least one spring, perhaps two, which gave them water clear and pure, supplied by the percolation of the rain-water from the gravel beds of Hyde Park

The  
spring.

<sup>1</sup> Tothill Fields (Vincent Square). (*Arch.* xxvi. 224.)

<sup>2</sup> Or Dorney. (Burton’s *London and Westminster*, p. 285.) There was a Thorney Abbey in Cambridgeshire and in Somersetshire. The description of one of these in *Ordericus Vitalis* (book xi.) exactly describes what Westminster Abbey must have been. ‘It is called in English the Isle of Thorns, because its woods, thick with all manner of trees, are surrounded by vast pools of water.’

<sup>3</sup> The bones of such an ox (*Bos primicerius*) were discovered under the

foundations of the Victoria Tower, and red deer, with very fine antlers, below the River Terrace. I derive this from Professor Owen. Bones and antlers of the elk and red deer were also found in 1868 in Broad Sanctuary in making the Metropolitan Railway.

<sup>4</sup> ‘In loco terribili’ is the phrase used by Offa in the first authentic charter, and repeated in Edgar’s (Widmore’s *Inquiry*, pp. 14, 15; Kemble, *Codex Anglo-Saxonicus*, § 149).

<sup>5</sup> *Fluvius maximus, piscosus.* (Fitzstephen. *Vita Sancti Thomæ.* Desc. civ. Lond.)

and the Palace Gardens through the isthmus, when the river was too turbid to drink.<sup>1</sup> It has been said, with a happy paradox, that no local traditions are so durable as those which are 'writ in water.'<sup>2</sup> So it is here. In the green of Dean's Yard there stands a well-worn pump. The spring,<sup>3</sup> which, till quite recently, supplied it, was the vivifying centre of all that has grown up around.

Legendary  
origin.

II. These were the original elements of the greatness of Westminster, and such was the Isle of Thorns. On like islands arose the cathedral and town of Ely, the Abbey of Croyland, the Abbey of Glastonbury, and the Castle-Cathedral of Limerick. On such another grew up a still more exact parallel—Notre Dame at Paris, with the palace of the kings close by. What was the first settlement in those thorny shades, amidst those watery wastes, beside that bubbling spring, it is impossible to decypher. The monastic traditions maintained that the earliest building had been a Temple of Apollo, shaken down by an earthquake in the year A.D. 154. But this is probably no more than the attempt to outshine the rival cathedral of St. Paul's, by endeavouring to counter-balance the dubious claims of the Temple of Diana<sup>4</sup> by a still more dubious assertion of the claims of the temple of her brother the Sun God.<sup>5</sup> Next comes King Lucius, the legendary founder of the originals of St. Peter's Cornhill, Gloucester, Canterbury, Dover, Bangor, Glastonbury, Cambridge, Winchester. He it was who was said to have con-

Temple of  
Apollo.

Church of  
Lucius.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix to Dean Buckland's Sermon.

<sup>2</sup> Clark's *Peloponnesus*, p. 286.

<sup>3</sup> There is also another in St. Margaret's Churchyard.

<sup>4</sup> For the story of the Temple of Diana, as well as for all other illustrations rendered to the Abbey, partly by parallel, partly by contrast, from its great rival, the Cathedral of London, I have a melancholy pleasure in re-

ferring to the 'Annals of St. Paul's,' the last work of its illustrious and venerable chief, Dean Milman.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of Sir Christopher Wren. (*Life*, App. xxix. p. 105.) The two main British divinities were so called by the Romans, and Apollo is said to have been *Belin*,—according to one version the origin of *Billingsgate*. (See Fuller's *Church Hist.* i. § 2.)