

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-41886-8 - St Bartholomew's Hospital in Peace and War:
The Rede Lecture: 1915
Norman Moore
Excerpt
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ST BARTHOLOMEW'S HOSPITAL IN PEACE AND WAR

MORE than forty years ago, after kneeling at the feet of a venerable man who occupied the seat in which you, Mr Vice-Chancellor, are now enthroned and receiving from him my first degree, I left the precincts of the University and at once began the study of medicine in the hospital of St Bartholomew in London, with which I have ever since been connected, and for which as long as I live I shall retain a veneration scarcely less than that which every son of this University has for Alma Mater Cantabrigia.

My work caused me to live for twenty-one years in the hospital within the jurisdiction of the Lord Mayor and Aldermen and to traverse every part of the City of London. I became

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familiar with the outline of St Paul's against the sky illuminated by sunrise and often felt the morning breeze which plays across its west front as if in perpetual memory of Richard of Beames¹ who made an open space before the cathedral by purchasing and pulling down the houses which in his time stood close to it. I saw the streets crowded all day long with moving men and vehicles for the most part started on their way by the commerce of England,

By which remotest regions are allied:
Which makes one city of the universe,
Where some may gain and all may be supplied.

By day too many men are going to and fro for any study except that of the actual moment or for any meditation except perhaps some passing thoughts on the *Mare Liberum* of Grotius as the true explanation of the

¹ William of Malmesbury.

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scene or the Vision of Mirzah as the natural moralization upon it. I came also to know well the charm of the almost deserted streets in moonlight. In that time of stillness their vistas, their directions, their names and the titles of their buildings seem to set forth the history of past centuries. Now and then great bursts of flame with the crackling of combustion would alarm the night, and on a sudden the sky was filled with floating fragments of red-hot gold lace or a stream of blazing oil flowed into the river. The violence of the scene brought up at once the memory of the time when the whole city was destroyed by fire:

Now down the narrow streets it swiftly came,
And widely opening did on both sides prey:
This benefit we sadly owe the flame,
If only ruin must enlarge our way.

I had seen the bones of men who died of the plague of 1348–1357, exposed to view in the

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pits where they had been buried in land purchased from St Bartholomew's, and once walking along the line of streets which traverses the city from west to east, close to the site of the house of Sir Richard Blackmore, physician and epic writer, I heard from a man who had just visited a case the news of the appearance of plague after an interval of more than two hundred years.

The city was a scene of the utmost activity of peace. Martial display seemed no part of what it had to show. At that time the vessels of war which now sail round St Paul's were unknown. The loud whirr of the aeroplane was never heard. No foe had tried to traverse the sky and to find out

His uncouth way, or spread his airy flight,
Upborne with indefatigable wings
Over the vast abrupt, ere he arrive
The happy isle.

When any regiment appeared, except one

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raised in the city, it halted to unfix bayonets at the boundary of the liberties, but this was a rare occurrence, and the only soldiers often seen were a detachment of foot guards who marched every evening to the Bank of England and quickly entering a narrow door guarded many millions of treasure during the night. Yet the city was once surrounded by a wall which has been worn away by the advance of commerce and not by the assaults of war, and the course of which may still be followed. One bastion and a few fragments are still standing, and such names as London Wall and Old Bailey guide the eye to its alignment, while the names of its seven gates, Newgate, Ludgate, Aldersgate, Cripplegate, Moorgate, Aldgate, Bishopsgate, remain to testify to the ancient completeness of the enclosure. The ditch outside the wall is filled up and buried so deep that except in

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the name of one street it scarcely comes before the population of to-day, but once when some long-suppressed springs were allowed to burst forth in the course of building operations I saw the waters extended from the wall to nearly the ancient breadth of the ditch near Newgate.

The appearance of the greatest person of the present in the city, the Lord Mayor, soon became familiar to me. I saw him driving about in his gilt coach with mace and sword protruding from the windows, and on the day of his installation proceeding round the ward of which he was alderman or on some other day waiting at the edge of the liberties of the city where by Temple Bar he dismounted and humbly surrendered to his sovereign the sword of state, thus showing whence his authority was derived. In time it became my duty to call on this potentate and upon

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each of the aldermen and certain of the members of the council and thus I respectfully viewed the corporation. Ancient as the office of the Mayor was, it was yet by seventy years of less antiquity than the hospital into which I entered when I came from Cambridge by a path which had certainly been trodden by men who remembered St Anselm as Archbishop of Canterbury.

The citizen of the remote past held in greatest honour within the city I learned to be Thomas Beket, Archbishop of Canterbury, since his figure was for more than four centuries to be seen upon the common seal appended to deeds. In the oldest impressions he is represented in his pontifical vestments seated upon a throne in the arch of heaven, giving his benediction to the city beneath while a group of laymen kneel on his left and of clerks on his right. On the later seal he is

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seated beside St Paul each under an ornate canopy. That London had given birth to him was counted one of its greatest glories. When he was slain in his cathedral the hospital had been in existence for forty-six years and the year of his canonization was the fiftieth of its growth. A copy of a brief in which he mentions St Bartholomew's Hospital is preserved in its cartulary. He confirms in their privileges "that place in Smithfield in which the church of the canons is built and the hospital house of that church" exactly as they were granted by King Henry I. King Henry in his charter, of which more than one ancient copy exists, granted, with certain reservations, complete freedom to the Prior and canons of the church and to the poor of the hospital of the church and confirmed the grant in a further charter in 1133.

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The hospital occupies the whole of one side of Smithfield, an open space mentioned in the life of St Thomas of Canterbury and in the book of William, son of Stephen his secretary, and very often in English history since. How the hospital came to be there is related in the manuscript called “*Liber fundacionis*,” which belonged to the Priory of St Bartholomew, and later stood in the ninth place on the second shelf under the bust of Vespasian in Sir Robert Cotton’s library. It is a copy made in the reign of Richard II of a book composed in the time of Henry II. The pilgrimage to Rome of Rahere, the founder, his visit to St Paul’s outside the walls of Rome, his fever, his vision, his vow to found a hospital outside the wall of London, his further vow to found a priory of Augustinian canons and his success in the fulfilment of both vows with the aid of Henry I and of

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Richard of Beames, Bishop of London, are well known from this book.

The pathway through the Smithfield gate by which I entered the hospital for the first time in 1869 was the entrance in the time of Rahere, who died on September 20, 1145. Within the gate on the site of the present church of St Bartholomew the Less, stood a chapel dedicated with the hospital to the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. It is curious how difficult is the imposition of a name. The history of Rahere's vision and vow to St Bartholomew was so well known that in spite of formal dedication to the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the hospital was always called St Bartholomew's during the Middle Ages.

"Be it known to you all," says Andrew Buckerell when starting on a pilgrimage in the last quarter of the twelfth century, "that