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1. County and Shire. The County of London. The word *London*: its Origin and Meaning.

The main divisions of our country are known as counties, and, in some instances, as shires. When the word shire is used, it is added to the county name. For instance, we speak of the county of Kent, or of the county of Bedford; but while the word shire is not added to the name of Kent, it may be to that of Bedford. Thus we write the county of Bedford, or Bedfordshire, but not the county of Bedfordshire. Such an expression would be wrong and superfluous, for the word shire is now practically equivalent to the later word county.

Although, however, we now call all the divisions of England and Wales counties, that title is not historically accurate. Some counties, such as Kent, Essex, and Sussex, are really survivals of various old English kingdoms, and for more than a thousand years there has been but little alteration either in their boundaries or their names.

The divisions now known as Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, and Wiltshire are so called because they were *shares*

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More information

or portions cut off from larger kingdoms. Thus Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire were shares or portions of a very large kingdom known as Mercia, while Wiltshire was a share or portion of Wessex. It is not necessary to enlarge further on this distinction, but it is well to have a correct idea of the origin of our counties. For many years it was wrongly stated that Alfred divided England into counties. The statement is incorrect, for we know that some of the counties were in existence before his time, while others were formed after his death.

It may be stated here that the object of thus dividing our country into counties was partly military and partly financial. Every shire had to provide a certain number of armed men to fight the king's battles, and also to pay a certain proportion of the king's income. In each case a "shire-reeve," or sheriff as we now call him, was appointed by the king to see that the shire did its duty in both respects. After the Norman Conquest, the government of each shire was handed over to a count, and from that time these divisions have been called counties.

In England the divisions or ancient counties numbered forty until the year 1888. Then it was decided to form the Administrative County of London, under the provisions of the Local Government Act of that year. It is to be noted that, although London is the latest of the forty-one counties, it is not known as an "ancient" county, for it was constituted an administrative area from parts of the ancient counties of Middlesex, Surrey, and Kent. Thus it comes about that London, the capital of the British Empire, the greatest city in the world, and

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once the capital of the county of Middlesex, is now an Administrative county.

There is another London, which is often called "Greater London," but with that we do not propose to deal, as that enlarged area takes in many parishes and districts that are outside the boundaries of the administrative county, and extend into Hertfordshire and Essex.

Now with regard to the name *London*, there is great diversity of opinion as to its origin and meaning. We shall not, however, be wrong if, in giving some of the opinions on this subject, we state that the earliest historic monument of London is its name. The word *Londinium* first appears in Tacitus under the year A.D. 61 as that of an *oppidum* not dignified with the name of a colony, but celebrated for the gathering of dealers and commodities.

It follows from this early notice that *Londinium* must have been founded long before A.D. 61, and historians have come to the conclusion that the Roman *oppidum* was built on the site of an earlier Celtic village, and that the name *Londinium* is the Latinised form of *Llyn-Din*, i.e. the lake-fort.

Some writers have endeavoured to explain the name from other Welsh roots, but nothing is so uncertain as the origin of some place-names. Geoffrey of Monmouth thinks that London was called *Caer-Lud* after a King Lud of Celtic history, and even some recent writers have come round to this view and say that London means Lud's-town. This last derivation may be mere conjecture, although it is in harmony with tradition.

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It may be mentioned that Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote early in the twelfth century, and gives a legend of the founding of London. This describes how Brutus came over from Troy and formed the plan of building a city. When he came to the Thames he found a site on its banks suitable for his purpose. There he built a city, calling it *Troia Nova*, i.e. New Troy, which was afterwards corrupted into *Trinovantum*. As time passed on, King Lud built walls and towers round the city; and when he died, his body was buried by the gate which is called in the Celtic speech "Porthlud," but in the Saxon "Ludesgata"—our Ludgate.

Here then we have the legend of the origin of London in pre-Roman days, and it may be founded on some genuine folk-stories of Celtic origin. At any rate, it explains the fact that the Roman attempt to change the name to *Augusta* completely failed, for the early name Llyn-din, or Caer-Lud, held its own in the affections of the Britons. Whatever conclusion we reach with regard to the origin of the name London, we feel sure that it was a village of some importance before the Roman occupation, as prehistoric and early relics are often found on the site.

Thus it comes about that London has almost an unbroken record extending over 2000 years, and whether as Llyn-din, or Augusta, or Londinium, or London, occupies a commanding place in our country's history.

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2. General Characteristics. Position and Natural Conditions. Why London is our Capital.

There may be doubts as to the origin of London and the exact meaning of its name, but there can be no doubt as to its two thousand years of unbroken history and that it exerts a great fascination over the imagination of Englishmen. It has been well remarked that "London has a charm all her own; it is that of a history as romantic and as interesting to Englishmen as that of Ancient Rome was to the Romans. As Ancient Rome once was, so is London now the centre of civilisation."

In this chapter we shall first glance at some of the general characteristics of London, and then pass on to consider its position, and why it came to be chosen as our capital. There are people who would argue that London is a most unsuitable site for a capital, but we have to remember that it has stood the great practical test of centuries and has won its way to the foremost place against the competition of other cities that were officially favoured. Thus York was the chief Roman centre of administration, and Winchester was the chief town of Wessex and became the capital when the kings of Wessex were supreme over all England.

It is sometimes easy to give the characteristics of a city or of some place of historic interest. But in dealing with London we have to think of at least two cities, round which have grown numerous towns that would

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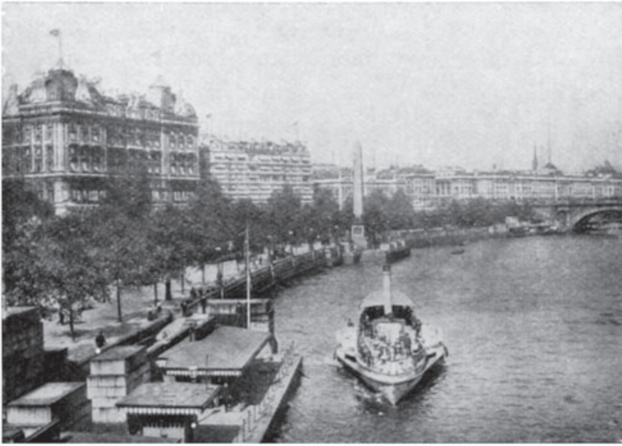
each be considered large in the provinces. The immensity of London is so overwhelming, and its variety is so amazing, that we are not surprised to find how differently London is characterised by poets and historians.

Wordsworth was charmed with the sight of London



The Embankment looking Citywards from Charing Cross

from Westminster Bridge, and in one of his sonnets exclaims:—

> "Earth has not anything to show more fair;
> Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
> A sight so touching in its majesty";

Byron looked upon it as "A mighty mass of brick, and smoke, and shipping." A French writer calls it "a province in brick"; and one of our own literary men

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characterises it as "a squalid village." Heine, the great German writer, gives his idea of London as "a forest of houses, between which ebbs and flows a stream of human faces, with all their varied passions—an awful rush of love, hunger, and hate."

There is some truth in each of these various attempts to give an idea of London, but of course they are all short of leaving the correct impression. Probably no one man is capable of giving a true picture of London, for there are so many aspects of the modern city. Its immense population and the strange variety of races are sure to have their effect on one class of observers. Others will be struck by the contrasts between the princely palaces of the rich and the filthy hovels of the poor, or between the magnificent squares and the squalid slums. In no other city in the world is there such a striking difference between historic buildings which date from the Conquest and the modern structures of stone and marble which have supplanted the wooden houses of the Stuart period.

Such, then, are a few of the most remarkable characteristics of London as it is to-day. It is not possible to deal further with this subject in the present book, so we will proceed to consider the position of London and what effect the choice of the site of the City by the early founders has had on its subsequent prosperity.

It will be well to look at an early map of the capital showing the marshes on either side of the Thames. We shall then get some idea of what the Thames was like in British days. Then, the river must have looked like a broad lake with here and there a small island rising out

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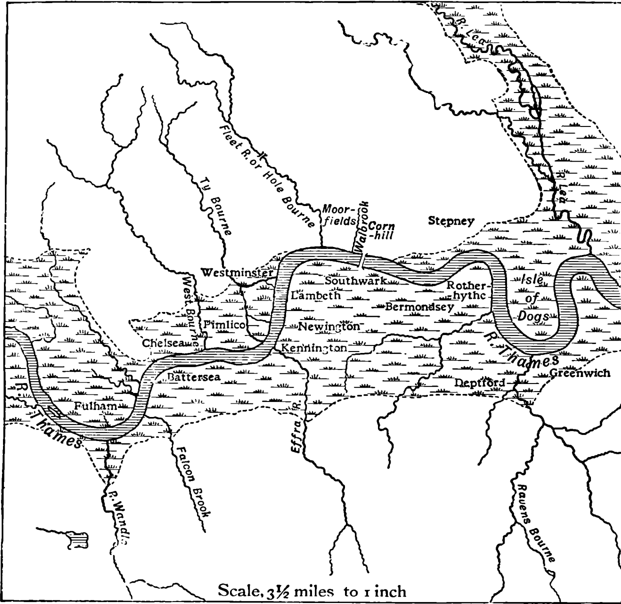
of the water. When the tide was high, the river was converted into an arm of the sea, while at low water it was a vast marsh through which the stream wound its way in irregular fashion. It has been estimated that at



Ancient London and its Surrounding Marshes

least half of modern London is built on this marsh, which extended from Fulham on the west to Greenwich on the east.

In those far-off days the marsh was the resort of wild duck, wild geese, herons, and other water birds flying

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over it in myriads. Altogether we can picture the site of London two thousand years ago as a dreary and desolate place, and one of the first questions that arises from this knowledge is, How came London to be founded on a marsh?

There are many reasons why London was founded on the present site, and if we consider a few of them it will help us to understand its growth and development. Of course we are referring to the site of London as it was in the time of the British founders, and at the period of the Roman Conquest. The evidence goes to show that the earliest centre of the City was on the east side of the Walbrook at the head of London Bridge. Now taking that district as the nucleus of the early city, we find that London was built on the first place going up the river where any tract of dry land touched the stream. We also find that it is a tract of good gravel soil, well supplied with water, and not liable to flooding. These were most important considerations in selecting the site of a city in those early days, just as they are at the present time.

It will be seen that this area of good land was chosen on the river Thames, so that the waterway was a means of defence, and a highway which could be traversed both up and down by means of the British boats. The site was not very near the sea, and that fact was also an advantage, for the small boats of the Britons could not venture on the waves of the Lower Thames. There is no doubt that the place was founded on a site about 60 miles from the coast, because it was not open to attack from the enemies who came over the sea. It is here

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