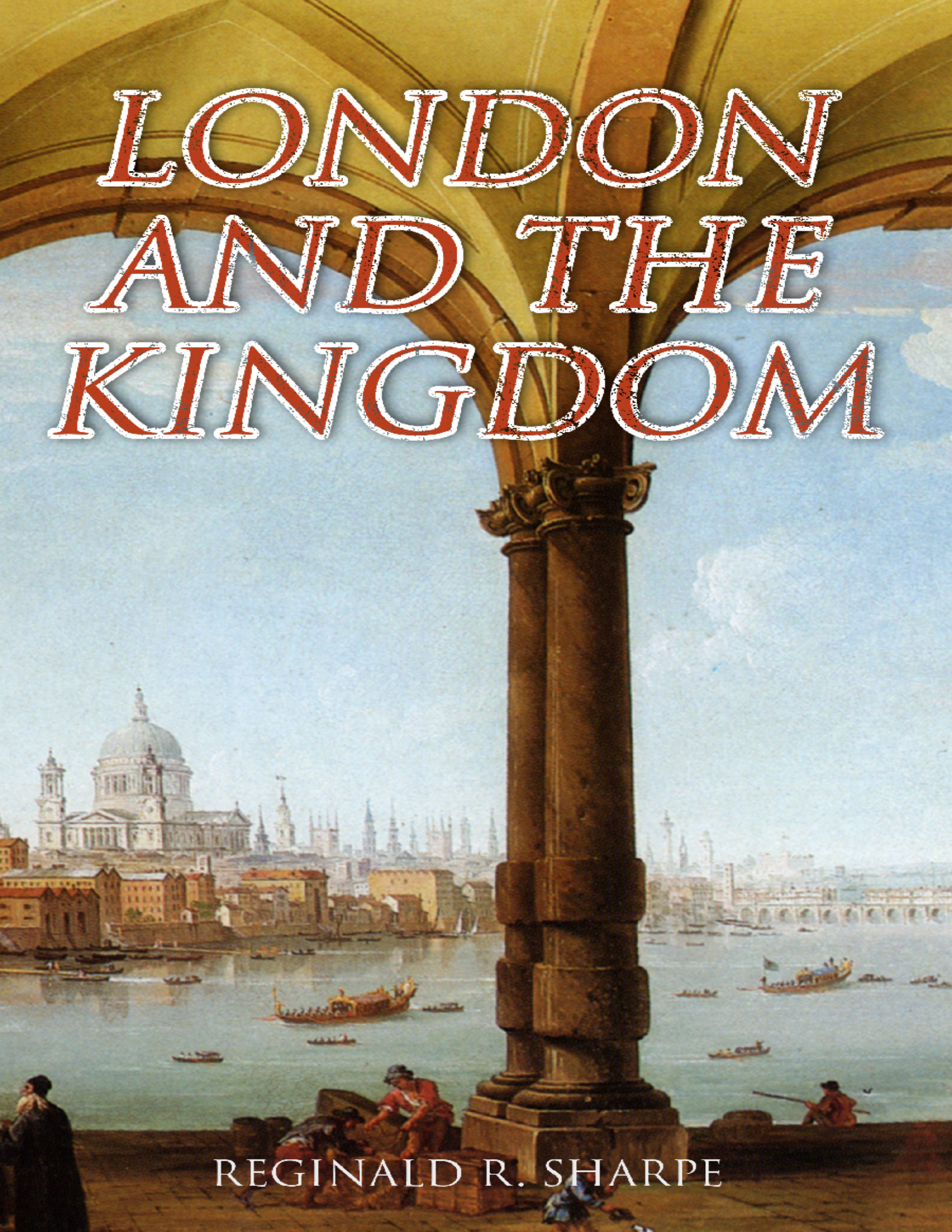
LONDON AND THE KINGDOM



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London and the Kingdom

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CHAPTER I.

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The greatness of London. How far due to its geographical position.

The wealth and importance of the City of London are due to a variety of causes, of which its geographical position must certainly be esteemed not the least. The value of such a noble river as the Thames was scarcely over-estimated by the citizens when, as the story goes, they expressed to King James their comparative indifference to his threatened removal of himself, his court and parliament, from London, if only their river remained to them. The mouth of the Thames is the most convenient port on the westernmost boundary of the European seaboard, and ships would often run in to replenish their tanks with the sweet water for which it was once famous.[1]

After the fall of the Western Empire (A.D. 476), commercial enterprise sprang up among the free towns of Italy. The carrying trade of the world's merchandise became centred for a time in Venice, and that town led the way in spreading the principles of commerce along the shores of the Mediterranean, being closely followed by Genoa, Florence, and Pisa. The tide, which then set westward, and continued its course beyond the Pillars of Hercules, was met in later years by another stream of commerce from the shores of the Baltic.[2] Small wonder, then, if the City of London was quick to profit by the continuous stream of traffic passing and repassing its very door, and vindicated

its title to be called—as the Venerable Bede had in very early days called it the Emporium of the World.[3]

But if London's prosperity were solely due to its geographical position, we should look for the same unrivalled pre-eminence in commerce in towns like Liverpool or Bristol, which possess similar local advantages; whilst, if royal favour or court gaieties could make cities great, we should have surely expected Winchester, Warwick, York, or Stafford to have outstripped London in political and commercial greatness, for these were the residences of the rulers of Mercia, Northumbria, and Wessex, and the scenes of witena-gemóts long before London could boast of similar favours. Yet none of these equals London in extent, population, wealth, or political importance.

The tenure of the City of London compared with other boroughs.

We must therefore look for other causes of London's pre-eminence, and among these, we may reckon the fact that the City has never been subject to any over-lord except the king. It never formed a portion of the king's demesne (*dominium*), but has ever been held by its burgesses as tenants *in capite* by burgage (free socage) tenure. Other towns like Bristol, Plymouth, Beverley, or Durham, were subject to over-lords, ecclesiastical or lay, in the person of archbishop, bishop, abbot, baron or peer of the realm, who kept in their own hands many of the privileges which in the more favoured City of London were enjoyed by the municipal authorities.

In the early part of the twelfth century, the town of Leicester, for instance, was divided into four parts, one of which was in the king's demesne, whilst the rest were held

by three distinct over-lords. In course of time, the whole of the shares fell into the hands of Count Robert of Meulan, who left the town in demesne to the Earls of Leicester and his descendants; and to this day the borough bears on its shield the arms of the Bellomonts.[4] The town of Birmingham is said, in like manner, to bear the arms of the barons of that name; the town of Cardiff, those of the De Clares; and Manchester, those of the Byrons. Instances might be multiplied. But the arms of the City of London and of free boroughs, like Winchester, Oxford, and Exeter, are referable to no over-lord, although the borough of Southwark still bears traces in its heraldic shield of its former ecclesiastical connection.

The powers of an over-lord.

The influence of an over-lord for good or evil, over those subject to his authority, was immense. Take for instance, Sheffield, which was subject, in the reign of Elizabeth, to the Earl of Shrewsbury. The cutlery trade, even in those days, was the main-stay of the town, and yet the earl could make and unmake the rules and ordinances which governed the Cutlers' Company, and could claim one half of the fines imposed on its members.[5]

When, during the reign of Charles II, nearly every municipal borough in the kingdom was forced to surrender its charter to the king, the citizens of Durham surrendered theirs to the Bishop, who, to the intense horror of a contemporary writer, reserved to himself and his successors in the See the power of approving and confirming the

mayor, aldermen, recorder, and common council of that city.[6]

London under the Roman Empire.

The commercial greatness of London can be traced back to the time of the Roman occupation of Britain. From being little more than a stockaded fort, situate at a point on the river's bank which admitted of an easy passage by ferry across to Southwark, London prospered under the protection afforded to its traders by the presence of the Roman legions, but it never in those days became the capital of the province. Although a flourishing centre of commerce in the middle of the first century of the Christian era, it was not deemed of sufficient importance by Suetonius, the Roman general, to run the risk of defending against Boadicea,[7] and although thought worthy of the title of Augusta—a name bestowed only on towns of exceptional standing—the Romans did not hesitate to leave both town and province to their fate as soon as danger threatened them nearer home.

Roman highways.

For military no less than for commercial purposes—and the Roman occupation of Britain was mainly a military one—good roads were essential, and these the Romans excelled in making. It is remarkable that in the Itinerary of Antoninus Pius, London figures either as the starting point or as the terminus to nearly one-half of the routes described in the portion relating to Britain.[8] The name of one and only one of these Roman highways survives in the city at the present day, and then only in its Teutonic and not Roman form—the Watling or "Wathelinga" Street, the street which led from

Kent through the city of London to Chester and York, and thence by two branches to Carlisle and the neighbourhood of Newcastle. The Ermin Street, another Roman road with a Teutonic name, led from London to Lincoln, with branches to Doncaster and York, but its name no longer survives in the city.

London bridge and the city wall.

The same reasons that led the Romans to establish good roads throughout the country led them also to erect a bridge across the river from London to Southwark, and in later years to enclose the city with a wall. To the building of the bridge, which probably took place in the early years of the Roman occupation, London owed much of its youthful prosperity; whenever any accident happened to the bridge the damage was always promptly repaired. Not so with the walls of the city. They were allowed to fall into decay until the prudence and military genius of the great Alfred caused them to be repaired as a bulwark against the onslaughts of the Danes.

The departure of the Roman legions, and its consequences.

"Britain had been occupied by the Romans, but had not become Roman,"[9] and the scanty and superficial civilization which the Britons had received from the Roman occupation was obliterated by the calamities which followed the northern invasions of the fifth and following centuries. A Christian city, as Augusta had probably been, not a vestige of a Christian church of the Roman period has come down to us.[10] It quickly lapsed into paganism. Its very name disappears, and with it the names of its streets, its traditions

and its customs. Its inhabitants forgot the Latin tongue, and the memories of 400 years were clean wiped out. There remains to us of the present day nothing to remind us of London under the Roman empire, save a fragment of a wall, a milestone, a few coins and statuettes, and some articles of personal ornament or domestic use—little more in fact, than what may be seen in the Museum attached to the Guildhall Library. The long subjection to Roman rule had one disastrous effect. It enervated the people and left them powerless to cope with those enemies who, as soon as the iron hand of the Roman legions was removed, came forth from their hiding places to harry the land.

Appeal to Rome for aid against the Picts and Scots. A. D. 446.

Thus it was that when the Picts and Scots again broke loose from their northern fastnesses and threatened London as they had done before (A.D. 368), they once more appealed for aid to the Roman emperor, by whose assistance the marauders had formerly been driven back. But times were different in 446 to what they had been in 368. The Roman empire was itself threatened with an invasion of the Goths, and the emperor had his hands too full to allow him to lend a favourable ear to the "groans of the Britons."[11]

Meeting with refusal, the Britons call in the Saxons.

Compelled to seek assistance elsewhere, the Britons invited a tribe of warriors, ever ready to let their services for hire, from the North Sea, to lend them their aid. The foreigners came in answer to the invitation, they saw, they conquered; and then they refused to leave an island the

fertility of which they appreciated no less than they despised the slothfulness of its inhabitants.[12] They turned their weapons against their employers, and utterly routed them at Crayford, driving them to take refuge within the walls of London.

The battle of the "Creegan Ford." A.D. 457.

"A.D. 457 (456). This year Hengist and Æsc [Eric or Ash] his son fought against the Britons at a place called Creegan-Ford [Crayford] and there slew four thousand men, and the Britons then forsook Kent, and in great terror fled to London."[13] So runs the Anglo-Saxon chronicle, and this is the sole piece of information concerning London it vouchsafes us for one hundred and fifty years following the departure of the Romans. The information, scant as it is, serves to show that London had not quite become a deserted city, nor had yet been devastated as others had been by the enemy. Its walls still served to afford shelter to the terrified refugees.

London, the metropolis of the East Saxons.

When next we read of her, she is in the possession of the East Saxons. How they came there is a matter for conjecture. It is possible that with the whole of the surrounding counties in the hands of the enemy, the Londoners were driven from their city to seek means of subsistence elsewhere, and that when the East Saxons took possession of it, they found houses and streets deserted. Little relishing a life within a town, they probably did not make a long stay, and, on their departure, the former inhabitants returned and the city slowly recovered its

wonted appearance, as the country around became more settled.

Mellitus, the first Bishop of London, A.D. 604.

Christianity in the country had revived, and London was now to receive its first bishop. It is the year 604. "This year," writes the chronicler, "Augustine hallowed two bishops, Mellitus and Justus; Mellitus he sent to preach baptism to the East Saxons, whose king was called Seberht, son of Ricula, the sister of Ethelbert whom Ethelbert had there set as king. And Ethelbert gave to Mellitus a bishop's see at London." This passage is remarkable for two reasons:—(1) as shewing us that London was at this time situate in Essex, the kingdom of the East Saxons, and (2) that Seberht was but a *roi fainéant*, enjoying no real independence in spite of his dignity as ruler of the East Saxons and nominal master of London, his uncle Ethelbert, king of the Cantii, exercising a hegemony over "all the nations of the English as far as the Humber." [14]

Hence it is that London is spoken of by some as being the *metropolis* of the East Saxons,[15] and by others as being the principal city of the Cantii;[16] the fact being that, though locally situate in Essex, it was deemed the political capital of that kingdom which for the time being happened to be paramount.

St. Paul's Cathedral founded by Ethelbert.

After the death of Seberht, the Londoners became dissatisfied with their bishop and drove him out. Mellitus became in course of time Archbishop of Canterbury, whilst

the Londoners again relapsed into paganism.[17] Not only was the erection of a cathedral in the city due to Ethelbert, but it was also at his instigation, if not with his treasure, that Seberht, the "wealthy sub-king of London," was, as is believed, induced to found the Abbey of Westminster.[18]

The rival Cities of London and Winchester.

When the Saxon kingdoms became united under Egbert and he became *rex totius Britanniæ* (A.D. 827), London began to take a more prominent place among the cities of the kingdom, notwithstanding its having been three times destroyed by fire between 674 and 801.[19] It became more often the seat of the royal residence, and the scene of witena-gemóts; nevertheless it was not the seat of government, much less the capital. Then and for a long time to come it had a formidable rival in Winchester, the chief town of Egbert's own kingdom of Wessex. To Winchester that king proceeded in triumph after completing the union of the Saxon kingdoms, and thither he summoned his vassals to hear himself proclaimed their overlord. From Winchester, Alfred, too, promulgated his new code of Wessex law—a part of the famous *Domboc*, a copy of which is said to have been at one time preserved among the archives of the City of London[20]—and the Easter gemót, no matter where the other gemóts of the year were held, was nearly always held at Winchester. When it came to a question of trade regulation, then London took precedence of Winchester. "Let one measure and one weight pass, such as is observed at London and at Winchester,"[21] enacted King Edgar, whose system of legislation was marked with so

much success that "Edgar's Law" was referred to by posterity as to the old constitution of the realm.

London in the hands of the Danes.

In the meantime, the country had been invaded by a fresh enemy, and the same atrocities which the Briton had suffered at the hands of the Saxon, the Saxon was made to suffer at the hands of the Dane. London suffered with the rest of the kingdom. In 839 we read of a "great slaughter" there;[22] in 851 the city was in the hands of the enemy, and continued to remain at the mercy of the Danes, so much so, in fact, that in 872 we find the Danish army taking up winter quarters within its walls, as in a city that was their own.[23]

The Treaty of Wedmore, A.D. 878.

It was now, when the clouds were darkest, that Alfred, brother of King Ethelred, appeared on the scene, and after more than one signal success by land and sea, concluded the treaty of Wedmore (A.D. 878)[24] by which a vast tract of land bounded by an imaginary line drawn from the Thames along the river Lea to Bedford, and thence along the Roman Watling Street to the Welsh border, was ceded to the enemy under the name of *Danelagh*. The treaty, although it curtailed the Kingdom of Wessex, and left London itself at the mercy of the Danes, was followed by a period of comparative tranquillity, which allowed Alfred time to make preparations for a fresh struggle that was to wrest from the enemy the land they had won.

The Danes expelled from London.

The Danes, like the Angles and the Jutes before them, set little store by fortifications and walled towns, preferring always to defend themselves by combat in open field, and the Roman wall of the City was allowed to fall still further into decay. In the eyes of Alfred on the other hand, London, with its surrounding wall, was a place of the first importance, and one to be acquired and kept at all hazards. At length he achieved the object of his ambition and succeeded in driving out the Danes, (A.D. 883 or 884).[25]

Alfred "restores" London, 886–887.

Whilst the enemy directed their attention to further conquests in France and Belgium, Alfred bent his energies towards repairing the City walls and building a citadel for his defence—"the germ of that tower which was to be first the dwelling place of Kings, and then the scene of the martyrdom of their victims."[26] To his foresight in this respect was it due that the city of London was never again taken by open assault, but successfully repelled all attacks whilst the surrounding country was often devastated.

Nor did Alfred confine his attention solely to strengthening the city against attacks of enemies without or to making it more habitable. He also laid the foundation of an internal Government analagous to that established in the Shires. Under the year A.D. 886, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle[27] records that "King Ælfred restored London; and all the Anglo race turned to him that were not in bondage of the Danish men; and he then committed the burgh to "the keeping of the aldorman Æthelred." In course of time the analogy between shire and city organization became more close.

Where the former had its Shiremote, the latter had its Folkmote, meeting in St. Paul's Churchyard by summons of the great bell. The County Court found its co-relative in the Husting Court of the City; the Hundred Court in the City Wardmote.[28]

An attack of the Danes in the absence of Alfred gallantly repelled by the Citizens, A.D. 894.

For the next ten years Alfred busied himself founding a navy and establishing order in different parts of the country, but in 896 he was compelled to hasten to London from the west of England to assist in the repulse of another attack of the Danes. Two years before (894) the Danes had threatened London, having established a fortification at Beamfleate or South Benfleet, in Essex, whence they harried the surrounding country. The Londoners on that occasion joined that part of the army which Alfred had left behind in an attack upon the fort, which they not only succeeded in taking, but they "took all that there was within, as well money as women and children, and brought all to London; and all the ships they either broke in pieces or burned, or brought to London or to Rochester."[29] Nor was this all: Hasting's wife and his two sons had been made prisoners, but were chivalrously restored by Alfred.

Successful strategy of Alfred against the Danes, A.D. 896.

The Danes, however, were not to be daunted by defeat nor moved from their purpose by the generous conduct of Alfred. In 896 they again appeared. This time they erected a work on the sea, twenty miles above London. Alfred made a reconnaissance and closed up the river so that they found it

impossible to bring out their ships.[30] They therefore abandoned their vessels and escaped across country, and "the men of London" writes the chronicler, "brought away the ships, and all those which they could not bring off they broke up, and those that were *stalworth* they brought into London."[31]

The London "frith-gild" under Athelstan, 925–940.

The principle of each man becoming responsible to the Government for the good behaviour of the neighbour, involved in the system of frankpledge which Alfred established throughout the whole of his kingdom, subject to his rule, was carried a step further by the citizens of London at a later date. Under Athelstan (A.D. 925–940) we find them banding together and forming an association for mutual defence of life and property, and thus assisting the executive in the maintenance of law and order. A complete code of ordinances, regulating this "frith" or peace gild, as it was called, drawn up by the bishops and reeves of the burgh, and confirmed by the members on oath, is still preserved to us.[32]

First mention of a Guildhall in London.

The enactments are chiefly directed against thieves, the measures to be taken to bring them to justice, and the penalties to be imposed on them, the formation of a common fund for the pursuit of thieves, and for making good to members any loss they may have sustained. So far, the gild undertook duties of a public character, such as are found incorporated among other laws of the kingdom, but it had, incidentally, also its social and religious side. When the

ruling members met in their gild-hall,[33] which they did once a month, "if they could and had leisure," they enjoyed a refection with ale-drinking or "byt-filling."

The "frith-guild," something more than a mere friendly society.

Some writers see in the "frith-gild" of Athelstan's day, nothing more than a mere "friendly society," meeting together once a month, to drink their beer and consult about matters of mutual insurance and other topics of more or less social and religious character.[34] But there is evidence to show that the tie which united members of a "frith-gild" was stronger and more solemn than any which binds the members of a friendly society or voluntary association. The punishment of one who was guilty of breaking his "frith" was practically banishment or death. Such a one, in Athelstan's time, was ordered to abjure the country, which probably meant no more than that he was to leave his burgh or perhaps the shire in which he dwelt, but if ever he returned, he might be treated as a thief taken "hand-habbende" or one taken with stolen goods upon him, in other words, "with the mainour."[35] A thief so taken might lawfully be killed by the first man who met him, and the slayer was, according to the code of the "frith-gild," "to be twelve pence the better for the deed."[36] Under these circumstances, it is more reasonable to suppose, that the "frith-gild" was not so much a voluntary association as one imposed upon members of the community by some public authority.[37]

Encouragement given to London merchants.

The commercial supremacy of London, not only over Winchester but over every other town in the kingdom, now becomes more distinct, for when Athelstan appointed moneyers or minters throughout the country, he assigned eight (the largest number of all) to London, whilst for Winchester he appointed only six, other towns being provided with but one or at most two.[38] The king, moreover, showed his predilection for London by erecting a mansion house for himself within the city's walls.

The encouragement which Athelstan gave to commercial enterprise by enacting, that any merchant who undertook successfully three voyages across the high seas at his own cost (if not in his own vessel) should rank as a thane,[39] must have affected the London burgess more than those of any other town.

Return of the Danes temp. Ethelred the Unready, 991–994.

Under Ethelred II, surnamed the "Unready" or "redeless" from his indifference to the "rede" or council of his advisers, the city would again have fallen into the hands of the Danes, but for the personal courage displayed by its inhabitants and the protection which, by Alfred's foresight, the walls were able to afford them. In 994, Olaf and Sweyn sailed up the Thames with a large fleet and threatened to burn London. Obstinate fighting took place, but the enemy, we are told, "sustained more harm and evil than they ever deemed that any townsman could do to them, for the Holy Mother of God, on that day, manifested her mercy to the townsmen and delivered them from their foes."[40]

The first payment of Danegelt, 991.

Matters might not have been so bad had not the king already committed the fatal error of attempting to secure peace by buying off the enemy. In 991, he had, with the consent of his witan, raised the sum of £10,000 with which he had bribed the Danish host. This was the origin of the tax known as Danegelt, which in after years became one of the chief financial resources of the Crown and continued almost uninterruptedly down to the reign of Henry II. The effect of the bribe was naturally enough to induce the enemy to make further depredations whenever in want of money; and accordingly, a Danish fleet threatened London the very next year (992) and again in 994. On this last occasion, the same wretched expedient was resorted to, and the Danes were again bought off.

The massacre of Danes 13th Nov., 1002.

Nor was cowardice the only charge of which Ethelred was guilty. To this must be added treachery and murder. In the year 1002, when he married the daughter of the Duke of Normandy, hoping thereby to win the Duke's friendship and to close the harbours on the French coast against Sweyn, Ethelred issued secret orders for a massacre of all Danes found in England. In this massacre, which took place on the Festival of St. Brice (13th Nov.), perished Gunhild, sister of Sweyn. Under these circumstances, it can scarcely be wondered at, that thenceforth the Danish invasions became more frequent, more systematic, and more extensive than ever.

For four years they continued their depredations "cruelly marking every shire in Wessex with burning and with harrying." Then they were again bought off with a sum of

£36,000, and two years' respite (1007–8) was gained.[41] It was a respite and no more. As soon as they had spent their money, they came again, and in 1009 made several assaults on London—"They often fought against the town of London, but to God be praise that it yet stands sound, and they have ever fared ill."[42] Every year they struck deeper into the heart of the country, and carried their plundering expeditions from Wessex into Mercia and East Anglia.

The murder of Abp. Alphage, 1012.

In 1011 Canterbury was taken and sacked, Alphage, the Archbishop, being made prisoner, and carried away by the Danish fleet to Greenwich. Finding it impossible to extort a ransom, they brutally murdered him (19th May, 1012), in one of their drunken moods, pelting him in their open court or "husting" with bones and skulls of oxen.[43] The worthy prelate's corpse was allowed to be removed to London where it was reverently interred in St. Paul's. A few years later, Cnut caused it to be transferred with due solemnity to the Archbishop's own metropolitan church of Canterbury.

Sweyn again attacks London, A.D. 1013.

In the following year, Sweyn was so successful in reducing the Northumbrians and the inhabitants of the five boroughs,[44] as well as the towns of Winchester and Oxford, taking hostages from each as he went, that he thought he might venture once more to attack London itself; hoping for better success than had attended him on previous occasions. He was the more anxious to capture London, because Ethelred himself was there, but he again met with

such determined resistance, and so many of his followers were drowned in the Thames that for the fourth time he had to beat a retreat.[45]

London submits.

Leaving London for a while, Sweyn proceeded to conquer that part of England which still held out against him, and having accomplished his purpose, was again preparing to attack the one city which had baffled all his attempts to capture, when the Londoners themselves, finding further opposition hopeless, offered their submission and left Ethelred to take care of himself.[46] This he did by betaking himself to Normandy, where he remained until Sweyn's death in the following year (3rd Feb., 1014).

Election of Cnut, 1014.

Upon this event taking place, the crews of the Danish fleet assumed the right of disposing of the English crown, and elected Sweyn's son, Cnut, to be king. The English, however, compelled as they had been by superior strength to submit to the father, were in no mood to accept without a struggle the sovereignty of his son. The whole of the Witan at once declared in favour of sending for Ethelred, with the assurance "that no lord was dearer than their natural lord," if only he would promise to govern them more justly than before.[47] Ethelred sent word by Edmund his son that "he would be to them a kind lord, and amend all the things which they eschewed, and all the things should be forgiven which had been done or said to him, on condition that they all, unanimously and without treachery, would turn to him." Pledges were given and taken on either side, and

thenceforth a Danish king was to be looked upon as an outlaw.[48]

Ethelred returns to London.

When Ethelred arrived in England, he was accompanied according to an Icelandic Saga,[49] by King Olaf, of Norway, who assisted him in expelling the Danes from Southwark, and gaining an entrance into the city. The manner in which this was carried out, is thus described. A small knot of Danes occupied a stronghold in the City, whilst others were in possession of Southwark. Between the two lay London Bridge—a wooden bridge, "so broad that two waggons could pass each other upon it"—fortified by barricades, towers, and parapets, and manned by Danes. Ethelred was naturally very anxious to get possession of the bridge, and a meeting of chiefs was summoned to consult how it could be done. Olaf promised to lay his fleet alongside the bridge if the English would do the same. This was agreed upon. Having covered in the decks of the vessels with a wooden roof to protect the crew and fighting men, Olaf succeeded in rowing light up to the bridge and laying cables round its piers. This done, he caused his ships to head down stream and the crews to row their hardest. The result was that the piles were loosened and the bridge, heavily weighted by the Danes who were fighting upon it, gave way. Many were thrown into the river, whilst others made good their retreat to Southwark, which was soon afterwards stormed and taken. This incident in connection with Ethelred's return formed the subject of more than one Scandinavian poem, of which the following may serve as a specimen:—

"London Bridge is broken down—
Gold is won and bright renown.
Shields resounding,
War-horns sounding,
Hildur shouting in the din!
Arrows singing,
Mail-coats ringing—
Odin makes our Olaf win!"

Drives Cnut out of England.

For a short while after his return Ethelred displayed a spirit of patriotism and courage beyond any he had hitherto shown. He succeeded in surprising and defeating the Danes in that district of Lincolnshire known as Lindsey, and drove Cnut to take refuge in his ships, and eventually to sail away to Denmark.[50]

Return of Cnut, A.D. 1015.

It was not long before he again appeared; he was then, however, to meet in the field Ethelred's son, Edmund, whose valour had gained for him the name of Ironside. This spirited youth, forming a striking contrast to the weak and pusillanimous character of his father, had collected a force to withstand the enemy, but the men refused to fight unless Ethelred came with them, and unless they had "the support of the citizens of London."[51] A message was therefore sent to him at London to take the field with such a force as he could gather. Father and son thereupon joined forces; but the king was in ill-health, and it wanted but a whisper of treachery to send him back to the security of London's walls. Thither, too, marched Cnut, but before he arrived

Ethelred had died (23rd April, 1016).[52] The late king was buried in St. Paul's.[53]

The laws of Ethelred regulating foreign trade.

The city of London had by this time attained a position higher than it had ever reached before. "We cannot as yet call it the capital of the kingdom, but its geographical position made one of the chief bulwarks of the land, and in no part of the realm do we find the inhabitants outdoing the patriotism and courage of its valiant citizens."[54] Under Edgar the foreign trade with the city had increased to such an extent that Ethelred, his son, deemed it time to draw up a code of laws to regulate the customs to be paid by the merchants of France and Flanders as well as by the "emperor's men," the fore-runners of those "easterling" merchants, who, from their headquarters in the Steel-yard at Dowgate, subsequently became known as merchants of the Steel-yard.[55]

Among the multitude of foreigners that in after-years thronged the streets of the city bartering pepper and spices from the far east, gloves and cloth, vinegar and wine, in exchange for the rural products of the country, might be seen the now much hated but afterwards much favoured Dane.[56] The Dane was again master of all England, except London, and Ethelred's kingdom, before the close of his reign, was confined within the narrow limits of the city's walls; "that true-hearted city was once more the bulwark of England, the centre of every patriotic hope, the special object of every hostile attack."[57]

Election of Edmund Ironside by the Londoners, 1016.

At Ethelred's death the Witan who were in London united with the inhabitants of the city in choosing Edmund as his successor. This is the first recorded instance of the Londoners having taken a direct part in the election of a king. Cnut disputed Edmund's right to the crown, and proceeded to attack the city. He sailed up the Thames with his fleet, but being unable to pass the bridge, he dug a canal on the south side of the river, whereby he was enabled to carry his ships above bridge, and so invest the city along the whole length of the riverside. To complete the investment, and so prevent any of the inhabitants escaping either by land or water, he ditched the city round, so that none could pass in or out.[58]

Cnut's attempts on London frustrated.

This, as well as two other attempts made by Cnut within a few weeks of each other to capture London by siege, were frustrated by the determined opposition of the citizens.[59] "Almighty God saved it," as the chronicler piously remarks.[60]

Victory of the Danes at Assandun, 1016.

Nor was Cnut more successful in the field, being worsted in no less than five pitched battles against Edmund, until by the treachery of Edmund's brother-in-law, Eadric, alderman of Mercia, he succeeded at last in vanquishing the English army on the memorable field of Assandun.[61]

Agreement between Edmund and Cnut for partition of the kingdom.

After this Edmund reluctantly consented to a conference and a division of the kingdom. The meeting took place at Olney, and there it was agreed that Edmund should retain

his crown, and rule over all England south of the Thames, together with East Anglia, Essex and London, whilst Cnut should enjoy the rest of the kingdom. "The citizens, beneath whose walls the power of Cnut and his father had been so often shattered, now made peace with the Danish host. As usual, money was paid to them, and they were allowed to winter as friends within the unconquered city."[62]

Cnut king of all England, 1016–1035.

The partition of the kingdom between Edmund and Cnut had scarcely been agreed upon before the former unexpectedly died (30th Nov., 1016) and Cnut became master of London and king of all England. His rule was mild, beneficent and just, recognising no distinction between Dane and Englishman, and throughout his long reign of nearly twenty years the citizens of London enjoyed that perfect peace so necessary for the successful exercise of their commercial pursuits.

Election of Cnut's Successors. 1183.

At the election of Cnut's successor which took place at Oxford in 1035, the Londoners again played an important part. This time, however, it was not the "burhwaru or burgesses" of the City who attended the gemót which had been summoned for the purpose of election, but "lithsmen" of London.

The lithsmen of London attend gemót at Oxford.

As to who these "lithsmen" were, and how they came to represent the City (if indeed they represented the City at all) on this important occasion much controversy has arisen. To

some they appear as nothing more than the "nautic multitude" or "sea-faring men" of London.[63] On the other hand, there are those who hold that they were merchants who had achieved thane right under the provisions of Athelstan's day already mentioned;[64] whilst there are still others who are inclined to look upon them as so many commercial travellers who had made their way to Oxford by river in the ordinary course of business, and who happened by good fortune to have been in that city at the time of a great political crisis.[65] The truth probably lies somewhere between these extremes. The "lithsmen" may not themselves have been thanes, although they are recorded as having been at Oxford with almost all the thanes north of the Thames;[66] but that they were something more than mere watermen, such as we shall see joining with the apprentices of London at important political crises, and that they were acting more or less as representatives of the Londoners who had already acquired a predominant voice in such matters, seems beyond doubt.

Londoners desire for peace above all things.

During the next thirty years London took no prominent part in the affairs of the country, content if only allowed to have leisure to mind its own business. The desire for peace is the key-note to the action of the citizens of London at every important crisis. Without peace, commerce became paralyzed. Peace could be best secured by a strong government, and such a government, whether in the person of a king or protector could count upon their support. "For it they were ready to devote their money and their lives, for

commerce, the child of opportunity, brought wealth; wealth power; and power led independence in its train." The quarrels of the half-brothers, Harold and Harthacnut, the attempt by one or both of the sons of Ethelred and Emma to recover their father's kingdom, and the question of the innocence or guilt of Earl Godwine in connection with the murder of one of them, affected the citizens of London only so far as such disturbances were likely to impede the traffic of the Thames or to make it dangerous for them to convey their merchandise along the highways of the country.

Revival of Danegelt, A.D., 1040.

The payment of Danegelt at the accession of Harthacnut (A.D. 1040),[67] probably touched the feelings, as it certainly did the pockets, of the Londoners, more than any other event which happened during this period.

London the recognised capital, temp. Edward, Confessor.

Upon the sudden death of Harthacnut (A.D. 1042), who died in a fit "as he stood at his drink,"[68] the choice of the whole nation fell on Edward, his half-brother—"before the king buried were, all folk chose Edward to king at London."[69] The share that the Londoners took in this particular election is not so clear as in other cases. Nevertheless, the importance of the citizens was daily growing, and by the time of the accession of Edward the Confessor, the City was recognised as the capital of the kingdom, the chief seat for the administration of the law, and the place where the king usually resided.[70]

Gemóts held in London.

In early Saxon times the witan had met in any town where the king happened at the time to be; and although theoretically every freeman had a right to attend its meetings, practically the citizens of the town wherein the gemót happened at the time to be held, enjoyed an advantage over freemen coming from a distance. Alfred ordained that the witan should meet in London for purposes of legislation twice a year.[71] Athelstan, Edmund and Edgar had held gemóts in London, the last mentioned king holding a great gemót (*mycel gemót*) in St. Paul's Church in 973.

London declares for Godwine, 1052.

During the reign of Edward the Confessor, at least six meetings of the witan took place in London; the more important of these being held in 1051 and the following year. By the gemót of 1051, which partook of the nature of a court-martial, Earl Godwine was condemned to banishment; but before a twelve-month had elapsed, he was welcomed back at a great assembly or *mycel gemót* held in the open air without the walls of London.[72] The nation had become disatisfied owing to the king's increasing favour to Norman strangers, but the earl desired to learn how stood the City of London towards him, and for this purpose made a stay at Southwark. He was soon satisfied on this point. "The townsfolk of the great city were not a whit behind their brethren of Kent and Sussex in their zeal for the national cause. The spirit which had beaten back Swend and Cnut, the spirit which was in after times to make London ever the stronghold of English freedom, the spirit which made its citizens foremost in the patriot armies alike of the thirteenth