

# ANCIENT LONDON

BY  
G. B. GORDON



PRIOR BOLTON'S WINDOW  
IN ST. BARTHOLOMEW THE GREAT

I like London. The flow of life in the streets, sublimer than the tides of the sea, gives me a stimulus. The climate suits me better than any I ever lived in and I have never seen civilization at so high a level.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

## FOREWORD

A city teeming with life, however ancient, does not rouse the interest of archæologists like the mounds of Memphis or the sand-buried cities of the Gobi Desert. In the most populous city of the world, which is also one of the most ancient, life is too absorbing for the detached frame of mind that attends the pursuit of archæology in depopulated districts. Who can remember, in the midst of so much life, the records of past ages that lie in layers beneath his feet, or project his mind into the Age of Bronze? Only, once in a while, a group of buildings are removed and the contractor may burrow thirty five feet through those compact layers before he reaches his levels, to lay the foundations of a bank. London has monuments in the light of day, not unknown and not inconspicuous in history, but what sort of man will dwell long on them when he may contemplate history in the making? On the Nile banks or even in Rome, life does not intrude itself between us and antiquity and in either place it is easy to detach ourselves from the present. But in the City of more than seven million souls life is too vivid, too insistent; its claim is too strong. Its movements, moreover, are adjusted to the quickened pulse of an age impelled by thoughts and reflexes impatient of the past. It is as hard to think of the beginning of London as it is to think of the beginning of Time; but it had a beginning and to lay bare that beginning is as much a task of archæology as to lay bare the beginnings of Babylon, though the task may take a different form. It may take a different form because the clues may be found imbedded in life itself. The threads of history are not cut; they are continuously woven into patterns that are always changing with life's movements. Amid these movements the ancient monuments stand unchampioned or yield to pressure and dissolve into the rising ground on which the life of London recreates itself in the image of its gods. But Life itself, ceaselessly remoulded in accordance with a fixed tradition that outlasts all monuments and discounts all change is as compact of antiquarian lore as the strata on which the pavements rest. Life itself and not so much the ancient monuments or the unexplored fathoms below, invites exploration and rewards research. Wall and moat, keep and castle, crypt and tower and aisle, treasure trove and relics in Museums—all these serve only to accentuate and symbolize

the living pageant of history. The life of London goes on apparently oblivious of its past and heedless of its history, but it goes on secreting tradition as an organ secretes a product peculiar to itself. And the secretion crystallizes into custom, and custom regulates life and the subconscious cycle is complete. And it all looks very simple and it is less expensive and less afflicting than amateur legislation and perhaps we will all possess the secret when we get to be as old as London is—but I doubt it for it is compounded of something more than antiquity.

These chapters are the substance of some lectures given to the Public in the University Museum last winter and spring. There is no pretense at anything like completeness in the picture. There could be none, for one might go on forever. The localities selected for crystallizing some of the thoughts that crowd around them are among many easily visited or known to everyone. They are, like every spot in London, crammed full of human interest. The names of places supply the key even when no trace of the past remains between the pavement and the sky.

Students who have made long and careful study of London may find errors or points of disagreement in these pages but where it is a question of historical fact I have been careful to keep in the company of recognized authorities. I would like to acknowledge all the sources of information to which I am indebted, but I can only give a partial list of the books in which my reading has been done. They are for the most part standard works.

I hope the interest of my friendly audiences in the University Museum, for whom these lectures were first prepared, will be equal to this additional test. Their kind reception of these lectures has led me to offer them in their present form and to include in them some additional matter that I had to omit or merely suggest on the occasions to which I refer.

G. B. G.