

## THE LONDON OF THE ROMANS.

Fifteen feet below the surface of modern London, where now the vast warehouses and commercial buildings of England's merchants engross the trade of every clime, lie the remains of a magnificent city, whose splendour and beauty have been but faintly indicated by modern explorations. No serious efforts have been made to reveal the wonders of the Roman metropolis of England. Larger, faster, and more populous than Herculaneum or Pompeii, it has been suffered to rest unnoticed and almost forgotten, except where a few casual excavations have brought to view the rich pavements of its temples and temples, and the various works of art or of common use that prove the cultivation and refinement of its people. One important trait of the greatness of the buried city, however, may still be readily traced. Its tall and massive walls, carefully faced with smooth stone and defended by frequent towers, witnessed all the revolutions of the Saxon and the Norman period, defended the city of Alfred and the Plantagenets, gave names to the various gateways and streets that marked its circuit, and may still be seen in huge masses of stone work that rise above the surface of the earth in St. Giles' Churchyard and in the neighborhood of the Tower. A street called London Wall probably followed a part of its inner line. The length of the Roman rampart was more than a mile, from the Tower to Ludgate Hill, and its breadth about half a mile, including within an irregular square sufficient room to contain a population of several hundred thousand persons, and covered with a dense array of splendid or comfortable buildings that seem to have imitated the magnificence of the Eternal City.

The Thames, the parent of London in every age, was already in the Roman period the centre of commerce, and British fleets were renowned in the age of Constantine and Diocletian. That broad alluvial basin in which the city lies surrounded by a range of moderate elevations seems early to have attracted the settler and the trader. Its convenient and level surface has formed from the opening of history the stage on which some of the chief scenes in the drama of man's existence have been exhibited. Looking down from the hills of Highgate over the dim and misty evening landscape, one may see Briton, Roman, Saxon, Norman, kings and knights, Puritans and Cavaliers, enter the narrow circuit of the Roman Wall, perform their brief and too often tragic parts, and glide spectre-like away. But of the Roman occupation of London there seems even less of reality than of that of any other race. They came from the distant South to the misty river, built on its banks one of their fairest capitals, flourished for a few centuries, and then abandoned their fine houses, their temples, and their altars to the barbarian and the stranger. They seem to have fled with the departing legions or perished in the fierce inroads of the Saxons. The Roman city sank into an utter decay. Within the limits of the walls not even a temple nor a circus has survived the flow of years. The earth has gathered thickly over the scene of ruin, and it is only when some deep excavation is made in the pebbly soil that the rare traces of the lost city appear.

Yet enough has been unfolded of its early magnificence to enable the careful antiquarian to reconstruct its fallen habitations and revive the transitory vision of the Roman capital of Britain. From its central mile stone the great roads of the province, built of massive stone work, and lasting until late

in the Norman period, ran northward to Scotland and westward to the borders of Wales. Watling street formed a part of the western line, traces of the others may be found almost to the base of the Crampion Hills. They were covered no doubt in the period of Roman prosperity with throngs of travellers on foot, with chariots and waggon, with bands of soldiers marching to the defence of the wall of Hadrian, with swift messengers bearing the commands of the Emperors from post to post. An extensive commerce found its centre on Cornhill or in Broadgate street, where now the Bank of England rules over modern trade. The houses of the city were built of stone or brick, and the fragments that have been casually discovered indicate their great size and their fair and costly decorations. Mosaic pavements of the richest workmanship, bright with varied colours, with flowers, fruit, and graceful figures, have been reached wherever the modern builders have penetrated the ancient site. The walls of the houses were of plaster, coloured often with a delicate pink or blue, and painted by accomplished artists with a skill not surpassed in the Italian cities. The broken fragments still retain the rich colouring and the delicate designs that satisfied the taste of the Roman owners. Grouped along the narrow streets that ran from the Thames to the various gateways, the homes of the Latin race probably surpassed in elegance and grace the ruder though more extensive palaces that were built for Tudors and Plantagenets. They were provided with baths and heating rooms, were covered with tiled roofs, and were evidently furnished with all the luxurious comforts of a Pompeian dwelling. Great numbers of vases of red Samian ware have been discovered that must have been imported from the factories of Etruria, and glass jars of graceful form, enamelled and coloured with the richest hues. The ruder kinds of earthenware were manufactured in large quantities in Britain. The houses were decorated with costly bronzes and countless statues. A profusion of domestic utensils, of knives, spoons, and scissors, weights and measures—the common conveniences of the kitchen and the laundry—indicate the usual habits of civilization. And it is not difficult to conceive that the homes of the Roman provincial nobility, from the age of Hadrian to the victorious rule of Theodosius, grew in splendour along the narrow streets within the Roman wall, that London had its Forum lined with Corinthian or Doric columns, its fair temples to Juno and to Jupiter, to Vesta and Minerva, and that it presented to the Briton and the Saxon an example of Southern civilization whose image could never have been wholly lost.

The Roman city evidently extended on both sides of the river. Beyond the walls remains of villas and country houses have been found that show an extensive suburb. Long lines of tombs radiated on all sides, and have covered portions of the environs with the solemn traces of an Appian Way. It is evident that the capital was constantly enlarging; that trade and manufactures gave it at last a sure supremacy over York or Colchester, its early rivals; that it became the seat of the mint and the place of government; that it probably shared in the liberality of Hadrian and the favours of Constantine the Great. Large numbers of coins and money of different ages have been found in its sandy basin, armour and implements of war, and a huge bronze head of Hadrian that may have crowned a votive statue to the popular decorator of the provincial cities.

Of the graceful people who trod the well

paved streets and filled the London Forum some suggestive traces yet remain. One of the most touching is that of the bones of a woman's arm encircled by seven rich bracelets. Another, a woman's skeleton laden with ornaments of gold and gems, both may have perished unnoticed when the fierce Saxons burst into the city, or in some mad scene of sack and carnage. A great variety of rings and bracelets, of turquoise and garnets, of ear rings and brooches, clasps and amulets, wrought with great taste, and proving the skill of the London jewellers, are found in the collections, and countless works of art that mark the extravagance of a high civilization. Several sandals for women, of small size and delicate form, show that small feet were prized by the Roman fair; ports it likely that the beauty of the provincial ladies was surpassed by the modern through that drive over their ashes through Rotting Row. In Britain, too, the Romans had displaced their schools and colleges, their libraries as well as their more perishable arts. Large numbers of *slabs for writing* have been discovered, and fragments of inkstands. The shops of the London Saxon may have been found not far from St. Paul's churchyard, and the new poems of Horace and Virgil, Martial and Tibullus were, perhaps, transcribed and read by an eager public where now the soft lyrics of Tennyson and the graceful strains of Longfellow delight their countless readers. Livy probably taught the intelligent citizens the conception of republican virtue with more than Macaulay's vivid pictorial skill, or Tacitus startled their luxurious indolence with a stern historical satire upon the decay of Roman purity.

A striking religious reformation, too, must have passed over London. The missionaries from the East seem to have arrived early at the British capital. The voice of Christian prayer and praise resounded through all the splendid cities of Britain. The idols were torn down, the temples were converted into churches. Jupiter and Juno were forgotten in a religious revival. England became Christian, and Briton and Roman knelt at the simple services of the early Church. In its latest splendour, when it ruled over the British province, London must have abounded in Christian churches. And on the site of St. Mary le Bow, or where the graceful dome of St. Paul's rises over the immense metropolis, in some modest basilica, the faithful disciples of Paul and John probably preached the same living truths that are sometimes almost overwhelmed and lost in the dramatic ritual of Gregory and Augustine.

But almost mysteriously the splendid and cultivated city disappears from the eye of history. The Saxons entered the island, the Romans vanished away. A sudden desolation fell upon the fair streets of London, and from the fifth to the ninth century the work of destruction must have gone on incessantly. The fine houses of brick and stone crumbled away by some slow process of decay. Possibly in that dark and mysterious period London lay depopulated and deserted, the home of wild beasts, like Babylon and Tyre, or tenanted by a few fierce barbarians, who chanted the songs of Odin over the fallen basilicas, and aided in completing the ruin their ancestors had begun. For had the city been constantly inhabited, it is difficult to see how the buildings left by the Romans should have been wholly destroyed, or how the earth to the depth of fifteen feet could have been permitted to gather over the well paved streets, and cover up the treasures that still lie buried beneath them. Some traces of a general conflagration are found