

Saturday Magazine.

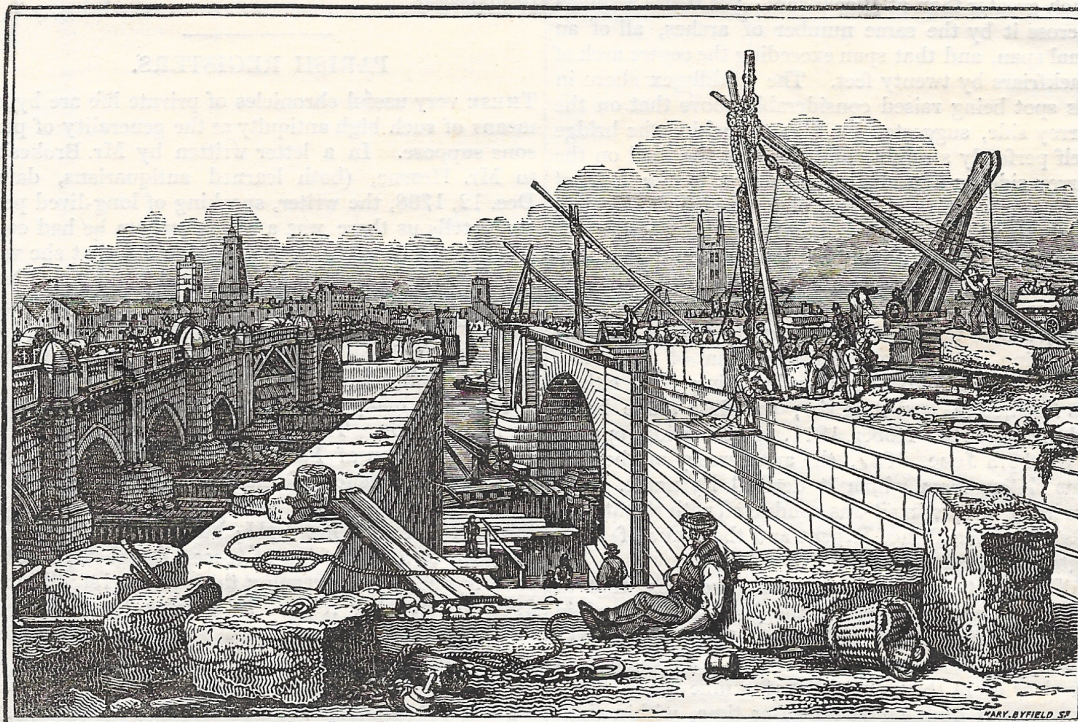
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UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE COMMITTEE OF GENERAL LITERATURE AND EDUCATION,
APPOINTED BY THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

THE BRIDGES OF LONDON.



View taken during the Erection of the New London Bridge.

THERE is no feature in the architecture of this immense metropolis calculated to excite so enlarged an idea of the wealth and enterprise of its population, as the five magnificent Bridges, which within a space of little more than two miles are thrown across the Thames. This admiration is almost increased to wonder, when we consider that they have all been erected within ninety years, and three of them within twenty years.

Until the middle of the last century, the long narrow defile of old London Bridge formed the sole land communication between the City of London and the suburbs on the Surrey side of the river. A Londoner of the present day, who, according as business directs, or his fancy leads him, can select at pleasure Westminster, Waterloo, Blackfriars, the Southwark, or London Bridge, for his passage across the Thames, must feel some surprise that his forefathers contented themselves for so long a period with such seemingly insufficient accommodation; but inconveniences to which we are "in a manner born," are habitually endured, though, when we summon resolution to remove them, we wonder the effort has been so long delayed.

The Act of Parliament for the erection of Westminster Bridge was applied for in 1735, and the first stone laid 29th January, 1739. This bridge was nearly twelve years in building, and was opened as a public thoroughfare at midnight of the 17th November, 1750, amidst the sounding of trumpets and the discharges of cannon. A writer of that day says

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of it, "now this bridge is finished, there is not perhaps another in the world that can be compared to it;" and the praise was then just, although its subject has since been so immeasurably surpassed. Company came from far and near to admire the beauties of its architecture—and assembled in boats with French horns and other wind instruments, under its semicircular arches, to enjoy the novel effect of the strong echo produced by them.

Its glories however were not of long duration. The citizens of London soon followed the example of their brethren of Westminster, and determined to build another new bridge at Blackfriars. The first pile was driven on the 7th of June, 1760, the first stone laid on the 31st Oct. following; a footpath was opened across it in 1765, one for horses in 1768, and the bridge was finally opened for carriages, 19th November, 1769. The light airy design of this new bridge formed a strong contrast with the unpretending plainness of its predecessor, and the superior width of its arches, the smallest of which were only five feet narrower in span than the centre arch of Westminster Bridge, gave it an appearance of grandeur far superior to anything which had been yet seen in England or elsewhere. Unfortunately the work was much better than the materials, which have turned out to be of so perishable a nature, that it was at one time expected that the architect, Mr. Milne, who lived to a very advanced age, would have survived his work.

An interval of more than forty years now passed over, during which, although new bridges were repeatedly talked of, and many places for their erection suggested, nothing was actually undertaken; but in 1811, two were commenced—the Waterloo Bridge, and that at Vauxhall. If Blackfriars Bridge surpassed in boldness of design its predecessor at Westminster, it was determined that Waterloo should throw both of them far into the background. Westminster Bridge consisted of fourteen arches, the widest seventy-five feet in span; Blackfriars of nine arches, the widest one hundred feet span. The width of the river where the new bridge was to be erected, was much greater than at Blackfriars; yet it was resolved to cross it by the same number of arches, all of an equal span, and that span exceeding the centre arch of Blackfriars by twenty feet. The Middlesex shore in this spot being raised considerably above that on the Surrey side, suggested the idea of making the bridge itself perfectly straight, and carrying the road on the Surrey side by a gradual slope down to the level of St. George's Fields. On this plan a bridge was erected, which, by the common consent of all, whether foreigners or natives, is allowed to be without a rival in the world. The rapidity with which it was built was no less wonderful. Westminster and Blackfriars Bridges had taken—the one nearly twelve, and the other nine, years in constructing; that of Waterloo, a much more stupendous undertaking than either, was finished in less than six; the first stone being laid on the 11th October, 1811, and the bridge opened on the 18th June, 1817, the anniversary of the glorious victory from which it derived its name. The ceremony of opening it was conducted with the utmost splendour, the Prince Regent and the Duke of Wellington being present.

While Waterloo Bridge was in progress, that at Southwark was undertaken, the first stone being laid on the 23rd of May, 1819; and thus the remarkable spectacle was afforded of two bridges, over a tide river more than one third of a mile broad, being in process of building at the same time, within sight of each other. The substitution of iron for stone in the construction of the arches, admitted of their having a much wider span, so that there were sufficient to embrace the whole breadth. The work was completed in less than four years, and opened without any procession or ceremony at midnight of the 24th March, 1819.

In the mean time the veteran London Bridge, which had endured the wear and tear of more than six centuries, was sharing the fate of other old establishments,—its former services were forgotten—its inconveniences, which had been quietly submitted to for ages, were industriously magnified, and its destruction loudly called for. There were many, however, and important interests to reconcile, and numerous difficulties to overcome, before such a plan could be carried into effect; and it was not until the year 1824, that the present bridge was commenced. The first pile was driven on the 15th March, in that year; the first stone laid on the 27th April, 1825; and the first arch keyed in, on the 4th August, 1827. We have seen Blackfriars Bridge surpassing that of Westminster in the span of its arches, and the arches of Blackfriars again considerably exceeded by those of Waterloo Bridge: yet those of the new London Bridge go far beyond either of them, the centre arch being 152 feet span, the next on each side of the centre are 140, and the two shore arches 130: the narrowest arches thus exceeding those of Waterloo Bridge five feet, the centre arch of Blackfriars thirty, and the centre arch of Westminster Bridge fifty-five feet; indeed,

the smallest arches of this bridge exceed the largest of any other stone bridge in the world. London Bridge took about seven years and a half in building, and was opened to the public on the 1st of August, 1831, the King himself assisting at the ceremony.

We are indebted for the cut with which this article is adorned to Mr. E. W. COOKE, who has permitted us to copy it from one of his plates. It is published in the first number of his beautiful *Views of the Old and New London Bridges*, a work equally valuable to the antiquarian and the lover of the fine arts, and which must long perpetuate the remembrance of the old structure, which has now almost entirely disappeared.

PARISH REGISTERS.

THESE very useful chronicles of private life are by no means of such high antiquity as the generality of persons suppose. In a letter written by Mr. Brookesby to Mr. Hearne, (both learned antiquarians, dated Dec. 12, 1708, the writer, speaking of long-lived persons, tells us there was a woman whom he had conversed with in Yorkshire, who gave out that she was six score, and afterwards seven score, and hence had many visitants, from whom she got money. He then adds, "She was born before Registers were kept in country parishes. Hence I could have no light for the time of her baptism."

Probably many of our readers would be surprised on reading this. The fact, however, seems to be that the introduction of Parochial Registers in England was in consequence of the injunctions of Thomas, Lord Cromwell, which were set forth in 1538, the thirtieth year of Henry VIII; but they were not much attended to till the reign of Queen Elizabeth, who issued injunctions concerning them in the 1st, 7th, and 39th years of her reign. It appears that in Spain they had been in use several years before, and are said to have been instituted by Cardinal Ximenes, in the year 1497, in order to remedy the disorders arising from the frequency of divorces in that country. Till late years, they were kept very negligently in many parts of England; and being in the custody of Churchwardens who changed from year to year, old registers were frequently lost or destroyed. In Northamptonshire, a piece of an old parish register, on parchment, was found on the pillow of a lace-maker, with the pattern of her work pricked upon it.

It was formerly the practice in many places to record in the registers any extraordinary event which took place in the neighbourhood. This might still be done on the cover or the margin, and be the means of preserving much interesting matter, which would otherwise be forgotten. Since the year 1813, the registers are uniform throughout the kingdom, and are kept, with perhaps few exceptions, with very great care.

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THE following words were written by Sir William Jones on the blank leaf of his Bible:—"I have carefully and regularly perused the Holy Scriptures, and am of opinion, that the volume, *independently of its divine origin*, contains more sublimity, purer morality, more important history, and finer strains of eloquence, than can be collected from all other books, in whatever language they may have been written."

THE taxes are indeed heavy; and if those laid on by government, were the only ones we had to pay, we might more easily discharge them;—but we have many others, and much more grievous to some of us. We are taxed twice as much by our idleness, three times as much by our pride, and four times as much by our folly; and from these taxes the commissioners cannot ease or deliver us by allowing any abatement.—FRANKLIN.