

GENERAL HISTORIES, GUIDEBOOKS, AND HANDBOOKS

By DONALD J. GRAY

MOST OF THE books in what I will call the London collection in the Lilly Library are about parts of the nineteenth-century city—descriptions or histories of one or another of its districts, collections of sketches of some of its picturesque or appalling places and modes of life, miscellanies of antiquarian lore. The London collection includes only about a dozen histories of the entire city written in the nineteenth century. It includes more than twice as many guidebooks, handbooks and street directories. The general histories, especially those published in the first half of the century, were organized on a plan and within conventions that had been well-established by the beginning of the eighteenth century; with a few exceptions, these books were old-fashioned even in the years of their publication. The guidebooks and handbooks, on the other hand, seem to have been a kind of book almost peculiar to the nineteenth century, a response to the increased possibilities during the century for “strangers,” as some of the early-nineteenth-century guidebooks called them, to travel to London to see its sights. All these general descriptions of London suggest what its contemporary citizens thought was interesting in the city. These books also contain information that is useful to anyone studying the life of nineteenth-century London; the guidebooks, for example, often specify the prices of hotels, meals, cabs, clothing, theatre admissions, and other necessities and recreations in a visitor’s London. Finally, these books are interesting because their

authors or compilers often admire and enjoy the city. Its historians admire the city because they take a view of history in which institutions, even cities, improve in time, and the compilers of the guidebooks are writing to readers for whom the city will be a place of holiday.

General Histories. The Lilly holds copies of most of the standard accounts of London on which its nineteenth-century historians drew: John Stow's *The Survey of London* (begun 1598; the Lilly has the fourth edition of 1633, an edition of its continuation by John Strype published in 1720, and a sixth edition, "brought down to the present time," published in 1754-55); *Londinopolis* (1657) by James Howel (or Howell); *Historical Remarques and Observations of the Ancient and Present State of London and Westminster* (1681) by "Robert Burton" (Nathaniel Crouch), which was continued "by an Able Hand" and published as *A New View, and Observations, etc.* (1730); Thomas DeLaune's *The Present State of London* (1681); John Entwick's *A New and Accurate History and Survey of London* (1766); John Noorthouck's *A New History of London* (1773); Thomas Pennant's antiquarian study, *Of London* (1790); and Daniel Lyson's four-volume history of *The Environs of London* (1792-96). These books usually contain chapters on pre-Roman, Roman, and medieval London, and then embark on extensive descriptions when the plan, fabric, and social and political organization of the city their authors recognize began to take shape in the sixteenth century. They typically organize their histories of post-medieval London around descriptions of the public buildings, bridges, gates, and wards of the city, interspersing essays on such topics as sports and pastimes, civic disorders, the Fire and the Plague, and statistics of trade and population. Often they

conclude with a perambulation through the city and, in the eighteenth century, sometimes through its environs as well.

The attitude that typically presides over this miscellany of anecdote and information is exultant wonder. The preface to Stow's *Survey* states themes that persist. People in cities have increased opportunities for trade that enriches and conversation that civilizes. Since they are banded together, they can be better governed, the word of God flows more efficiently through their congregated numbers, and they can effectively stand together against the tyranny of kings (the history of the relationship between the City and the Crown is an important part of most of these accounts). Thus, science, art, religion, justice, freedom, comfort—all the signs and prizes of civilization flourish in cities; to revert from the practice of living in cities, Stow observes, “were nothing else but to Metamorphose the world, and to make wilde beasts of reasonable men.” After the resurrection of London from the Fire, its historians frequently added to their admiration of cities in general their opinion that London was the first of cities, present and past. Nathaniel Crouch in 1681 wrote that London was the largest and finest and “best inhabited” city in Europe certainly, and probably in the universe. John Noorthouck, who thought that commerce had been the agent that civilized “the natives of a rude and barbarous island,” argued that eighteenth-century London was a more powerful city than Rome, for the civilizing influence of trade extends farther than that of the sword, and its effect is to make other peoples rich, and not to impoverish them.

Nineteenth-century writers of general histories of London, especially early in the century, often took over

the schemes of organization and the opinions as well as the anecdotes and data of their predecessors. Typically, most of the general histories written between 1800 and the beginning of the First World War were compounds of chronological and topographical schemes. The chronological accounts often break down into little more than annals or scrapbooks of extracts from documents and previous histories. The topographical histories are usually in effect collections of sketches on the historical associations of places arranged, as the preface of one history puts it, "in the itinerary form" (W.W. Hutchings, *London Town Past and Present* [1909]: with a preface on the future by Ford Madox Hueffer). Sometimes the interest of these histories is largely antiquarian, as it is, for example, in Edward Wedlake Brayley's four-volume *London and Middlesex: or, An Historical, Commercial, and Descriptive Survey of the Metropolis of Great Britain* (1810-16), Thomas Allen's *The History and Antiquities of London, Westminster, Southwark, and Parts Adjacent* (1827-28), and J. Henage Jesse's well-known books, *Literary and Historical Memorials of London* (1847) and *Memoirs of the City of London and Its Celebrities* (1850), republished in 1870 in three volumes under the title *London: Its Celebrated Characters and Remarkable Places*. The impulse of these books, like that of collections of antiquarian sketches to be described in the section on "Picturesque London," is to use the contemporary city as a ground from which to launch an escape from it. The author of the preface to *Old and New London* (1875), a topographically organized series of histories, in six volumes, of the principal districts and boroughs of London (a companion history of London environs, Edward Walford's *Greater London: A Narrative of Its History, Its People, and Its Places*, was published in two volumes in 1898), laments that "Old London is passing

away even as we dip our pen in ink." He therefore invites his readers to walk with him "through a dreamland that will be now Goldsmith's, now Gower's, now Shakespeare's, now Pope's London."

Other historians, even when they concentrated on the relics of London's past surviving in the nineteenth-century city, claimed to do so in order to show that the present was better than the past. "Sholto and Reuben Percy" (J.C. Robertson and T. Byarly) in *London, or Interesting Memorials of Its Rise, Progress, and Present State* (1823) accompany handsome engravings of buildings and sites famous in London's history with accounts which "point out the means by which an industrious people have preserved their liberties against foreign and domestic invasion, and raised their city to a rank which is unparalleled among civilized nations." Henry Hunter's *The History of London and Its Environs* (1811) is mostly a compilation of curious anecdotes from Stow and others. But Hunter opens his history with admiring descriptions of recent improvements in docks, canals, roads, and the like, even though many of these constructions destroyed buildings, streets, and entire localities that were links to the past. George Rose Emerson in *London: How the City Grew* (1862), a collection of sketches first published in the *Weekly Despatch* on the growth of each of London's principal districts, is full of wondering statistics of the growth of population, the increase in gas and water consumption, the spread of railways and new roads, and similar testaments to progress. G. Lawrence Gomme in *London in the Reign of Victoria* (1827-1897), published in 1898, the year after the Diamond Jubilee, is puzzled by the admiration its citizens expressed for the London of 1837, with its "miserable Georgian architecture," gin palaces, and squalid slums. And he saw no limit to the improve-

ments wrought during Victoria's reign. "Bad as things were in 1837—and I think I have shown this sufficiently—bright and delightful as much of London life is, beautiful as London is, there is nothing yet which can be said to be in any way complete." (Gomme gives much of the credit for the improvement of London to the growth during the century of central local government, a topic he enlarges upon in *The Governance of London* [1907]. For that reason, an interesting companion to Gomme's history is *The History of London Street Improvements, 1855-97*, prepared by Percy J. Edwards for the London County Council and also published in 1898.)

In short, the authors of these general histories do not share the warnings and doubts about the city expressed by the writers of the sketches and books that will be described in the section on "Dark London." Their attitude toward the city, perhaps stated more moderately at the end of the century than at its beginning, remains that which "David Hughson" (Edward Pugh) took over from previous historians and stated in *London: Being an Accurate History and Description of the British Metropolis and Its Neighborhood, To Thirty Miles Extent, From an Actual Perambulation* (1805). London, he writes, "is the first metropolis in the world—a city without parallel."

This felicity . . . is not the upstart mushroom of the day; it is the gradual product of ages, which has been bravely obtained, carefully preserved, and wisely managed, so that like the sun, its influence has irradiated every quarter of the empire, and caused the surrounding nations to pay homage to British freedom, fixed as it is, on a basis never to be shaken.

Except for Gomme's books, these general histories of London are probably more useful for their expression of ideas about the nineteenth-century city than they are

as sources of information about it. Their compilations of statistics about the city tend to be miscellanies, and the figures are in any event more conveniently available in twentieth-century histories like Frances Sheppard's *London 1808-1870: The Infernal Wen* (1971: a copy is in the Lilly). Two late-century histories do deliberately try to fix for future historians the contemporary look and life of the city, even though both are limited to the boundaries of the old City of London. Charles Welch's *Modern History of the City of London: A Record of Municipal and Social Progress from 1760 to the Present Day* (1896) is an annals of the "all but total transformation of London within the walls" since 1760. Walter Besant in *London City* (two parts: 1910) planned his narrative to provide "instantaneous photographs of the day-to-day life of the citizens of the city in the present as well as in the past." It is in their pictures rather than in their prose, however, that these two books, and other general histories of the city as well, most effectively deliver nineteenth-century London to our imaginations. The books of Welch and Besant are profusely illustrated, the latter containing many photographs and an excellent map of the late-century city. W.W. Hutchings' more general *London Town Past and Present* (1909) also contains many photographs as well as reproductions of paintings and drawings of buildings and streets. Earlier books, especially the six volumes of *Old and New London* (1875) and the histories of Pugh ("David Hughson") also include engravings and maps depicting nineteenth-century London among their many illustrations.

Guidebooks and Handbooks. Almost all the guidebooks in the London collection were published after 1800. They necessarily emphasize the plan and places of the

contemporary city, although they also include some historical information. Two of the most popular early-century guidebooks were Richard Phillips' *The Picture of London* (later *The Original Picture of London*), first published in 1802 and in its twenty-sixth edition in 1827 (the Lilly holds the edition of 1808, and the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh editions); and Samuel Leigh's *The New Picture of London* (the Lilly holds the second edition of 1818, and editions of 1819, 1827, 1830 and 1834). The books are very similar. Both open with admiring accounts of London's history, salubrious situation, handsome architecture, and industrious and upright citizens; for example, Phillips states, "every class in London is superior in its moral character to every similar class in other countries." Then follow chapters on public buildings, hospitals, prisons, banks, docks, commercial houses, learned societies, newspapers and literary journals, hotels and coffee houses, art collections, public amusements, and similar topics. Each chapter is usually illustrated by six or seven small engravings, and each is full of brief descriptions, statistics (the lengths of streets, the circulation of newspapers, the salaries of judges), and the prices of hotels, theatre admissions and other diversions. In another (and very expensive: 63s.) version of his guidebook titled *Modern London: Being the History and Present State of the British Metropolis* (1805), Phillips included William Marshall Craig's "Plates representing Itinerant Traders," a collection of illustrated street cries (also cited in the section on "Picturesque London"). Leigh's book also sometimes included a collection of colored engravings by Thomas Lord Busby of "Costumes of the Lower Orders of the Metropolis," and Thomas Rowlandson's *Characteristic Sketches of the Lower Orders* was

published as a companion to Leigh's guidebook around 1820. Both guidebooks included a map.

Leigh advertised the currency of information in his guidebook, and he seems to have made his claim good. In 1834, for example, he included such new amusements as dioramas and cigar divans in his guide; he also added an alphabetical street guide to accompany the map, and an eight-day plan for visiting London, which mostly took the visitor to see buildings. His praise of the city in 1834 is also, interestingly, tempered by worry about the ostentatious display of new wealth and "a startling degree of corruption—the bane of all overgrowing cities" apparent in the life of London, with its distressing contrasts between happiness and misery, "riches and penury, virtue and vice, wisdom and folly, benevolence and cupidity." This qualifying note about London, and cities in general, is not dominant. Leigh's guide still pays tribute to "Mighty Imperial London" as the center of the world, "a mighty shrine of greatness and goodness." But it is a note that was sounded increasingly during the century, not in guidebooks (except in the guides to "fast" London life, which were excited by some of the corruptions of the metropolis), but in other accounts of the dark precincts of London to which the guidebooks rarely directed visitors.

The books that succeeded to the purposes and audiences of Leigh's and Phillips' guides may be divided into guidebooks and handbooks. The guidebooks published in the 1830's and after are more spare, less discursive, and probably more practical than those of Phillips and Leigh. They are typically organized not as essays on topics like "Commerce" and "Literature and the Book-selling Trade", but rather as a series of short paragraphs on the hotels, theatres, and other principal buildings and

places of the visitor's London. The handbooks are also usually collections of brief descriptions of particular places, arranged alphabetically or topographically. But their authors seem concerned not so much to guide their readers around London as to satisfy, or indulge, a general curiosity about its history and diversity, the curiosity of a resident who continually explores the city, rather than that of a short-time visitor to it.

The guidebooks published after 1830 are also usually cheaper than those of Leigh or Phillips. In the 1820's the latter sold for 5 or 6s., and the former for 9s. One of their competitors, *Kidd's New Guide to the "Lions" of London* (1835), announced itself as more useful than these elaborate "Pictures of London", and made a point of the fact that it sold for half the price of Leigh's guide. By mid-century guidebooks such as *Adams' Pocket Guide Book*, written by the journalist E.L. Blanchard (1850); *Cruchley's Picture of London* (first published in 1831; the Lilly holds the sixteenth edition, 1851); *London As It Is Today: Where to Go, And What To See, During the Great Exhibition* (1851); and *London, What To See, And How To See It* (1857) usually cost between two and four shillings (the guides that sold at 2s. or 2s.6d. sometimes cost a shilling more with a map). The ideal toward which these utilitarian guidebooks may be said to be moving was realized in Baedeker's *London and Its Environs*, first published in German in 1862. (The Lilly holds the first English edition for 1878, and succeeding English editions in 1885, 1889 and 1911.) Baedeker's guide opens with paragraphs on money, hotels, restaurants, baths, shops, theatres, divine services, concerts, and similar topics, including a very brief (four page) historical sketch of the city. Then it lays out a "Preliminary Ramble," and goes on to identify the sights to be visited in the City, the

West End, the Surrey Side, and in the environs of London. It contains a railway map of the city, and smaller maps of parts of the city which are keyed to a large map of the whole. It cites the prices of hotels and other expenses (in 1889 Baedeker estimated the cost of a day's stay in a first-class hotel, including theatre and cabs, to be 30-40s.; a more moderately expensive stay cost 15-20s. a day), ranks the quality of restaurants, organizes a section on shops by their commodities, and warns about pickpockets, hotels in Leicester Square, and the length of evenings at the theatre ("the latter part of the representation is apt to be more of a fatigue than a pleasure"). Baedeker's guides were relatively expensive, selling at 5 or 6s. British publishers competed with cheaper guidebooks of the same kind. *Routledge's Guide to London and Its Suburbs* (1880), for example, sold for a shilling, contained only one map but many illustrations, and told its readers how to take in the sight of "Rags, Poverty, and Wretchedness" on their tours of the city. The London collection also includes similar guidebooks published by Black (1870), Collins (1871), Murray (1879), and *A Popular, Pictorial, and Practical Guide to London*, in its seventeenth edition (and 76th thousand) in 1898.

Two of the handbooks in the London collection exemplify the mixture of purposes in these publications. Peter Cunningham's *A Handbook for London, Past and Present*, was first published in 1849, in two volumes, without a map, and at 24s. It clearly is not a practical guidebook (although later editions, which the Lilly does not possess, were published at 3s.6d., presumably in one volume). Neither is it a history, although it contains a great deal of historical information that Cunningham is proud to have extracted and verified. It is, as much as anything, a reference book to be used by anyone coming

to, living in, or curious about London. Cunningham tells his readers the best way to enter London (by river), where to buy the best beer, the best coffee, the best map (that of the Post Office Directory, available separately for 6d.), the annual volume of London's sewerage, the number of its houses ward by ward, the London a painter, a sculptor, and an architect ought to see, and similar information. The bulk of his book is a dictionary of London's streets, squares, and buildings, each entry including a brief description and short history of its subject, frequently decorated with quotations from the standard histories of London and from the journals, poems, and biographies of eminent personages associated with the places he describes.

Dickens' Dictionary of London, a series published by Dickens' son Charles from 1879 until nearly the end of the century (the Lilly holds the first edition and that for 1896-97), is arranged on the plan of Cunningham's *Handbook*. The subtitle of *Dickens' Dictionary*, however, is "An Unconventional Handbook," and its entries are directed toward needs and curiosities more diverse, more contemporary, and sometimes more raffish than those of Cunningham's readers. Dickens' readers, like Cunningham's, will learn something about the past and present of, say, Cannon Street, or the Strand. They will also learn the kind of bill currently being presented at each of London's theatres (and the railway and omnibus stations nearest each one), where to go to watch football, play tennis, roller-skate, or fish, where to rent evening dress or invalid chairs, the cost of lodgings and house-rent in each of the districts of London (house-rent is £150-200 a year in Bayswater, £500-600 in Belgravia), what to beware of ("Greenhorns, Tricks on"), and how to arrange to be awakened in the morning by the policeman on the beat.

There are a few other guides in the London collection that are more like handbooks than guidebooks. *Knight's Cyclopedia of London* (1851) is a one-volume abridgment for visitors to the Great Exhibition of Knight's six-volume *London* (1841-44), a collection of descriptions and brief histories of the sights and conveniences of the city. The sub-title of *London Illustrated* (1874) is "A Complete Guide to the Places of Amusement, Objects of Interest, Parks, Clubs, Markets, Docks, Principal Railway Routes, Leading Hotels." But the book is too large to be a practical guidebook; it is really a picture book of the contemporary city, and an advertisement for "First Class Reliable Houses—The Various Branches of Trade," and it is interesting—then, presumably, as now—for that reason. Similarly, Henry B. Wheatley's *London Past and Present* (1891), a three-volume revision of Cunningham's *Handbook*, is an unwieldy guidebook, but an interesting summary of the changes in the fabric of London since 1849.

The London collection also contains some guidebooks that are little more than street directories to the city at various decades in the century: James Lockie's *Topography of London, or Street Directory* (second edition, 1816); James Elmes' *A Topographical Dictionary of London and Its Environs* (1831); *Boyle's Fashionable Court and Country Guide and Town Visiting Directory. . . Containing Street and Alphabetical Arrangements of the Names and Places of Abode in Town and Country of All the Ladies and Gentlemen of Fashion* (1843); *Large's Way About London, Giving a Direct Route to Thousands and Thousands of Roads, Streets, Courts, Alleys, Etc., Etc.* (1869); and *Philips' Handy-Volume Atlas of London* (fourth edition, 1904), which seems to have been transformed into *The ABC Guide to London* (1911), whose format is like that of the present-day *London A to Z*. The

collection also includes a publication by the London County Council of a *List of the Streets and Places Within the Administrative County of London* (1901) in which the streets renamed in the last decades of the century are listed.

The uses of these books, from “pictures of London” to street guides, from utilitarian guidebooks to handbooks, for the study of the nineteenth-century city and its life are certain but hard to predict. Unlike the general histories, these books do not offer explicitly stated attitudes toward the city, although their existence testifies that for many literate nineteenth-century British men and women London was, among other identities, a fascinating recreation. They contain a great deal of information about the city. But much of it, like the information of the general histories, is more conveniently available in other sources. Even when it is not, casting about in these books for references to, say, opium dens (*Dickens’ Dictionary* contains an entry) is an inefficient and chancy mode of research. The uses of these books will rather proceed from the sense they provide of the most public realms of London in the year or decade of their publication. They tell us what its contemporaries thought then to be the most interesting of its districts, buildings, shops, and amusements, what they thought to be interesting about them, what people did when they enjoyed London in the conventional ways available to anyone with enough money, and how much these pleasures cost. These books are useful, then, simply because they do place us in the London of 1805, or 1851, or 1878, or 1898. To one degree or another, from one perspective or another, they help us to find our way around in the complex,

changing nineteenth-century city that is the object of our study, but in which we too are necessarily strangers.

DONALD J. GRAY *is professor of English, Indiana University, Bloomington.*