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CHAPTER SIX

The Aftermath

News of the murder was soon flashing across the Continent. Certainly it was known on the other side of the Channel by the last day or so of December, for a party of monks who set off on the night of the 29th would by then have been well on their way to the Pope. It was probably on Friday 1 January that, just as discussions about the crisis caused by Becket's excommunications were about to start at Argentan, the frightful rumour started to circulate. Some of those present plucked up enough courage to tell the king. Henry said nothing at all. He went aside and shut himself up alone until the evening, stunned with grief and shock.

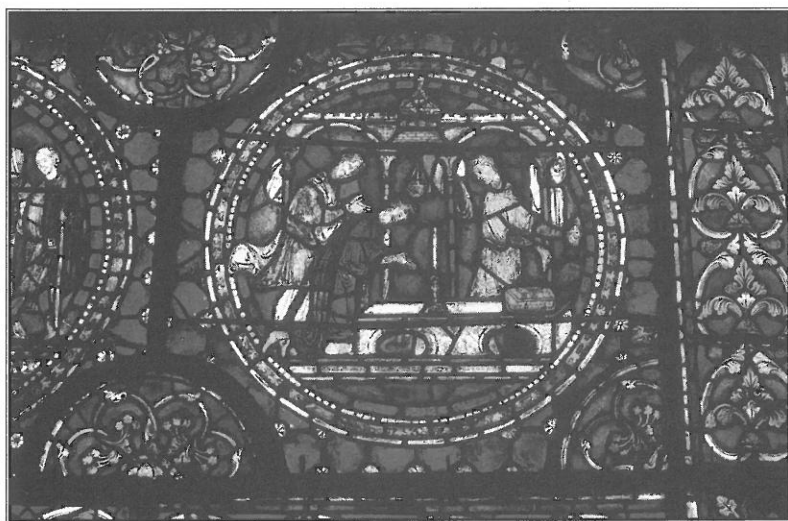
Travellers coming over from England quickly confirmed that the rumour was only too true. Henry was totally stricken. He remained three days in seclusion, taking no solid food but only some milk of almonds, a real penance for a man so used to French wines. It was not just an acquaintance that the king had lost, but an old friend, which made his despair all the deeper. There were tears at first for the archbishop, but before long all were in grave anxiety about the king himself, and started to wonder if the death of Thomas might also lead to the death of Henry.

Friends of the king, particularly the bishops, tried to calm him. Everyone would impute the crime to him, he said, and think he was a party to it. 'God Almighty is my witness,' he cried. 'This awful deed was not done by my will nor by my connivance.' David lamented at the deaths of Saul and Jonathan¹ but these were enemies, whereas King Henry wept for the death of an old friend. He said he would humbly submit to the Church and do what was required of him, and the bishops and others counselled him to seek guidance from the Holy See, with its great resources of spiritual experience and its accumulation of Christian wisdom.

One chronicler says that sorrow is usually most intense when first

encountered and wears off after a little while. So it was with King Henry. Shame and grief gave way to opposite feelings. Some of those about the king when the news first arrived actually congratulated him, as if some big victory had been won. As he started to recover his nerve he threw off or concealed his grief. He sent over orders that no monk, clerk or suspect individual should leave England to go off to the Pope and announce the death – all too late, for the party of Canterbury monks had slipped away en route to Rome the very night of the murder.

In the first few weeks neither the king nor his court comprehended the immense forces unleashed by the archbishop's death. But waves of emotion swept across the ordinary populace. Wondrous miracles were already happening and the faithful started to travel down the road to Canterbury. The king refused to believe in the marvels and gave orders that anyone on the way to visit St Thomas (as he was already being called) should be stopped. After a while there was not much that the king could do about it since too many people were involved. Yet, urged on by 'wily instigators' whispering in his ears, he became sufficiently worked up to threaten to go to Canterbury and avenge himself upon the martyr's corpse. Good sense prevailed and he quickly retreated from such an intention, although on hearing of offerings being made at the tomb, he said he was going to make the prior and monks pay the cash over to him. Praise God, says the chronicler, the king's heart was softened and as time went by he



Pilgrims praying at the tomb in the crypt, before the relics had been transferred to the much grander shrine in the Trinity Chapel. (Photograph: Dr Sebastian Strobl; the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury)

became more and more penitent and started to believe in the martyr. But this did not happen quickly.

At all events the king decided that the monks of Canterbury were entitled to an official explanation for the sudden and dramatic removal of their head, who was both their archbishop and their abbot, and for the violent deed done in their midst. He therefore had an exculpatory document drawn up and entrusted to two clerks who were shortly dispatched to Canterbury. There they called the convent together (most probably in the chapter house) and delivered the king's statement, a standard model of civil service composition designed to excuse and cover up on behalf of a principal. The king, it is very clear indeed, was still a long way from the abject penance he was to display at Avranches in 1172 and at Canterbury in 1174.

William de Mandeville, Earl of Essex, was among the first visitors to Canterbury after the murder. He had, no doubt, very early news, for he was one of the official arresting party and had established himself at Wissant across the Channel ready to intercept Becket if he had taken flight. The party of monks which had left Canterbury on the night of 29 December for Rome must have passed him at close quarters, for Wissant was the usual port of call for cross-Channel travellers from Canterbury. His attitude when he came to the cathedral was very hostile. He told the monks that if they had been daring enough to conceal Becket, a traitor to the king, then all their hiding places would have gone up in flames and they would have been obliged to produce the traitor and suffer accordingly for protecting him. There were others who told them not to mourn a seditious fellow who had disturbed the whole kingdom, otherwise they might find themselves in like distress.

Two more visitors arrived shortly after the death. These were Hugh de Gundeville and William FitzJohn, two barons who had come across country from the court of young King Henry at Winchester. They had been detailed to give aid by Richard du Hommet, the one member of the official arresting party who had crossed into England and had gone to Winchester. Gundeville and FitzJohn were lucky to have arrived at Canterbury just too late, to the great relief of the young king when he heard of the murder. 'Alas,' he cried, 'but God I give you thanks that this was done without my knowledge and that none of my people were involved.'

It was necessary to apprise the Pope of Henry's official story of the murder, and of his grief for it, so another deputation was sent off on

the tail of the first. The royal clerk John Cumin, who had been sent to the curia by Henry before the murder to try to effect release of the bishops from excommunication or suspension, was there when the fatal news arrived. He had almost succeeded in his mission (at an expenditure of 500 marks). On hearing of the murder, however, Pope Alexander shut himself up for more than a week, refusing to see even his own entourage, and ordering that no Englishman should be admitted to his presence. Letters came pouring in. Alexander Llewelyn and Gunter, Becket's clerks, had been sent by him to the Pope only just before the murder, bearing a list of bitter complaints. News of the murder caught up with them. They sent on dispatches to Alexander, to which were added fierce denunciations from the Archbishop of Sens against the bishops and against the king as the virtual murderer.

Certainly in the early months of 1171 King Henry failed to realize that, by his death, Becket had been elevated to the status of martyr throughout Europe. He wrote a letter to the Pope which was defensive in intent and offensive in tone. It spoke of the archbishop coming back to England not in happiness and peace, but with fire and sword, 'raising questions touching me and my kingdom,' as he said. Becket was an 'aggressor against his servants, excommunicating them without cause. . . . Such men were unable to put up with such insolence. Some of those who were excommunicated, with some others from England, attacked him, and,' said Henry, 'to my great sorrow in saying so, killed him.'

It was important for the emissaries sent by Henry to Alexander to contact and assuage the Pope before Maundy Thursday (25 March in that year) since it was on that day that the pontiff customarily pronounced major excommunications. The party reached the curia at Frascati (Tusculum) with less than a week to spare, on the eve of Palm Sunday. At first they could not gain entry to the consistory but at length two of the party, the Abbot of Valacé and the Archdeacon of Lisieux, were admitted as the least suspect. They caused uproar when they named King Henry as 'a devout son of the Church'. Later in the day they penetrated to the presence of the Pope himself, but Alexander Llewelyn and Gunter, Becket's clerks, had got there first, and the royal emissaries made little headway. There were some cardinals who were partial to King Henry, and it was perhaps through their influence that the dreaded excommunication of the monarch was not pronounced when the consistory came together at 3 p.m. on Maundy Thursday.

The royal messengers swore that Henry would abide by the decision of the Pope and would renew the oath in person. Emissaries of the Archbishop of York and of the Bishops of London and Salisbury were also there, and they gave satisfaction on behalf of their principals. Pope Alexander then pronounced as excommunicate the murderers of Archbishop Thomas. Meanwhile William, Archbishop of Sens, based safely in the domains of King Louis, launched a decree of interdict against all the continental domains of King Henry, notifying his action to the Pope. One anonymous chronicler asserts that King Henry showered gifts on the curia, while his skilled clerks and layfolk vigorously presented his case. However, it all had the effect of exasperating the Pope and his court. When the deputation returned, reporting ill success, Henry, apprehensive of what was to come, even dallied with the idea of going over to the then anti-Pope, Calixtus III. More remarkably still, he toyed with the idea of setting up a third Pope in his own domains, though he was dissuaded from this rash course by King Louis, who brought him back to his senses. In due course Henry gave intimation of submission, but without any intention of going to the curia to manifest it. The Pope was pleased, however, and named the Cardinals Albert and Theodwin as legates to deal with the matter.

At Canterbury anxiety and uncertainty marked the months following the murder. In east Kent Rannulph de Broc and his nephew Robert, both deeply implicated in the great crime, still ruled the roost. For a long time Henry himself was wavering between the ideas of Becket as traitor and Becket as virtuous martyr. No doubt the Brocs held the former view. Both Rannulph and Robert de Broc were close at hand, Rannulph with a vested interest in holding on to the castle at Saltwood, and Robert his wooden house at Canterbury, made of materials stolen from the archbishop's estates.

It appears that around Easter 1171 news was picked up that an assemblage of armed men was all ready to invade the cathedral and carry off the sacred remains. The organizers were some of those who had taken part in the murder. Clearly they were the Brocs, since the four principal knights were now far away. A warning dream was vouchsafed to a monk lying sick in the infirmary. He saw an angel on the pinnacle of the Temple, mystically surrounded by monks. A fiery rope with twitching ends appeared to try to encircle the precincts. In the event the would-be invaders were foiled by a mighty storm of rain and thunder which burst forth and dispersed them.

It was probably at about this time that the monks lifted the body (now surely in a state of putrefaction) from its resting place and concealed it in a hollow behind the altar of St Mary in the crypt. When it was replaced in its tomb, a solid low wall was erected about it, surmounted by a marble slab, the whole made secure with clamps of iron and lead. Two orifices were left in each side through which the devout might come into closer contact with the saint.² All the while the great church, one of the ancient shrines of Christendom, stood violated and defiled. The liturgy was suspended and services were conducted with maimed rites in the chapter house. In the silent cathedral, walls were divested of their hangings, crucifixes were shrouded and (according to a somewhat puzzling remark by Ralph of Diss) the pavement, soiled by muddy feet from the crowds, was taken up. No sound was heard from the great bells, and the crypt was sealed off, although news of miracles suggests that some of the faithful were allowed to penetrate to the saint's grave.

At length the Pope issued instructions for reconciliation. There was to be no actual reconsecration, but at least an asperging with holy water. The instructions were reinforced by Cardinals Albert and Theodwin in a letter to Prior Odo speaking of a petition he had submitted, and telling him to invite bishops and abbots to the ceremony. It was to be almost a year before Canterbury Cathedral was declared cleansed from the sacrilege. The day chosen was, most suitably, 21 December, the feast of St Thomas the Apostle, Becket's birthday. Bishop Bartholomew of Exeter was the chief figure and preached upon the theme: *For the multitude of the sorrows that I had in my heart, Thy comforts have refreshed my soul*. There was one conspicuous absentee from the service of reconciliation, namely the king himself, whose expressions of penitence had prompted hope that he would come. He was far away in Ireland, conveniently beyond the stormy seas, having decided that the best way to avoid trouble at the hands of the clerics who had him at such a disadvantage was to make himself scarce. Many years before, the English Pope Adrian IV (Nicholas Brakespear) had, so it was believed, assigned Henry a commission, signalized by the gift of an emerald ring, to invade and appropriate the verdant island and bring it under subjection to the Roman see.

Now was a suitable occasion to take up that commission, both to get away from the clamouring clerics and, by bringing a new province into the Church, to blunt the array of ecclesiastical weapons pointed at him. Gerald of Wales paints a picture of him dodging out

of Normandy into England, out of England into Wales, and out of Wales into Ireland, where no papal decree had any force at all. Papal commissions and glittering tokens aside, Henry was drawn inevitably into the vortex of Irish history. The fierce peace-keeper of so much of the Continent could not have disorder at his back door. In particular, he found it intolerable that the Earl of Striguil, known to legend and history as Strongbow, had worked his way into a position of great power. From many and mixed motives, the desire to escape from the clergy, the need to reduce Strongbow to size and to impress the Irish with a sense of his own overwhelming might, he organized the expedition of 1171.

Happily for King Henry the winter of 1171/2 was stormy – so stormy in fact that Ireland was cut off from the outside world and little news got through. When it did, Henry found to his disquiet that the papal legates were in Normandy waiting to impose conditions if the king were to be relieved from complicity in the murder. They had been there for months and were now growing impatient and threatening him with the rigours of Church law. Henry made what arrangements he could for maintaining peace in Ireland and returned with inevitable misgivings to England.

There was now nothing for it but to face up to his plight. Henry, one of the mightiest secular rulers in Europe, met the legates, Cardinals Albert and Theodwin, at the Abbey of Savigny in mid-May. Agreement was hard to come by and at one point Henry announced bluntly that he had plenty to occupy him in Ireland, offering a strong hint of his intention to return there. At length an agreement was thrashed out, and Henry assented to a great public penance to be performed at Avranches. Accordingly on 21 May 1172, before the cathedral door overlooking Mont St Michel, Henry bowed before the legates. The forgiveness and peace he sought was accorded to him by ceremonial admission into the building, on terms which nevertheless ensured that papacy and monarchy might work henceforth in reasonable harmony.

All this time the English Church still lacked a head. Even after all that had happened, nomination was not left to the papacy nor to the uncontrolled decision of bishops and abbots. A meeting for election was called for 1 September 1172 in the demonstrably lay surroundings of Windsor, at which the young king presided. An unexpected contestant for the archbishopric was Odo, the Prior of Canterbury who had taken office during Becket's exile and suffered a severe snub on his return. After long argument, carried to King

Henry senior in Normandy, the choice fell on Richard, Prior of Dover, the able administrator who had served Archbishop Thomas conspicuously in the weeks after his return from exile. At an interval in the long-drawn-out proceedings Prince Henry decided to go on pilgrimage to the new martyr's tomb, setting out some time in September 1172. He was greeted with a procession. Arriving at the tomb in the crypt of Canterbury, he flung himself down on to the floor, uttering deep laments that he had consented to his father's enmity against the saint and that it was he who had ordered him to go back to Canterbury and stay in his church, 'under pain of death if he came out'. The young man gave handsome gifts, making promise of more, and issued a charter confirming his father's benefactions to the cathedral.

From the struggle between Crown and Church, one long-term victory for the clerics can be identified: *benefit of clergy*. In England it was not until 1827 that this privilege, by then a much mutilated and hardly effectual anachronism, was finally abolished. Yet in the centuries after the Reformation, many a condemned thief or murderer was able to call in court for a book and, on demonstrating that he could read and was therefore a clerk, escaped the gallows. When clerks and even monks formed much of Henry's judicature, the dividing line between the jurisdiction of the two sets of tribunals, lay court and court Christian, could not fail to be blurred on occasion, although with advantage, if anything, to the secular side. Alan, monk of Canterbury and later Abbot of Tewkesbury, and moreover historian and panegyricist of St Thomas and a great upholder of the rights of the churches where he ruled, managed to square his conscience on becoming one of the king's justices itinerant.

Probably Henry's greatest disadvantage in this sequence of events was loss of face, and this was severe indeed to a feudal monarch depending so much upon his own personality to maintain supremacy. He could count on a core of faithful supporters, but to a half-tamed baronage the mere sight of their powerful and overbearing master put so conspicuously in the wrong prompted an appetite for freedom. Henry's growing sons fretted at restraints and rebellious cliques gathered around them, while external enemies and rivals, the King of Scots, the Counts of Flanders and Boulogne, and King Louis of France, all waited upon events.

In 1173 there was the rumble of rebellion, largely engineered by Louis of France. He was aided and abetted by his own ex-wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, who was now Henry's queen. She was

captured and imprisoned in the tower of Chinon, and there remained for about a year. At Paris King Louis held a great council at which he and his nobles swore to help the young Henry against his father. Then the youth, multiple traitor to father and king, promised to give 1,000 marks of income in England, together with the whole of Kent, the castle at Rochester and the castle at Dover – the very key of England – to Philip, Count of Flanders. Similar wild offers were made to Matthew, Count of Boulogne, and Theobald, Count of Blois. Under his own seal Prince Henry made over Northumbria as far as the Tyne to King William of Scotland, and to Hugh Bigot the castle of Norwich.

Many remained faithful to King Henry, who surpassed himself in miracles of travel and energy. A force bent on penetration of Normandy, headed by Matthew, Count of Boulogne, was defeated and Matthew slain. A Breton rising in which Hugh, Earl of Chester, was implicated was crushed by Henry's Brabantine mercenaries, while the king captured the castle of Dol containing many prominent rebels. In late September an invasion fleet appeared off Walton on the Naze on the Suffolk coast. The commander of the force, which consisted largely of Flemings, was Robert de Beaumont, Earl of Leicester, traitorous son of the older earl who had started reading sentence against Becket at Northampton Castle nine years before.

Miles up the road towards Bury St Edmunds stood the castle of Haughley, which was held by the loyalist Rannulph de Broc, Becket's old enemy. He managed to hold out for four days but was at length overwhelmed by the Earl of Leicester on 13 October. William of Canterbury remarks that it was only divine justice that a castle put into the hands of a son of perdition like Rannulph should be lost. Any suggestion that this war was a gentlemanly tourney can be ruled out. The rebels and invaders occupied the fortress and destroyed it in an orgy of slaughter and rape. Rannulph somehow managed to escape with his life.

With Haughley eliminated, the forces of the Earl of Leicester and of Hugh Bigot, Earl of Norfolk, set off westwards towards Leicester, but their army did not get far. Near the great abbey at Bury St Edmunds, as they were picking their way across the marshes, there sprang out a contingent of Suffolk peasantry armed with farm implements, beneath the banner of St Edmund, headed by Humphrey de Bohun, Constable of England. Flails and pitchforks destroyed the rebels as a fighting force. Leicester himself was captured, together with his warlike wife Petronilla, who had joined

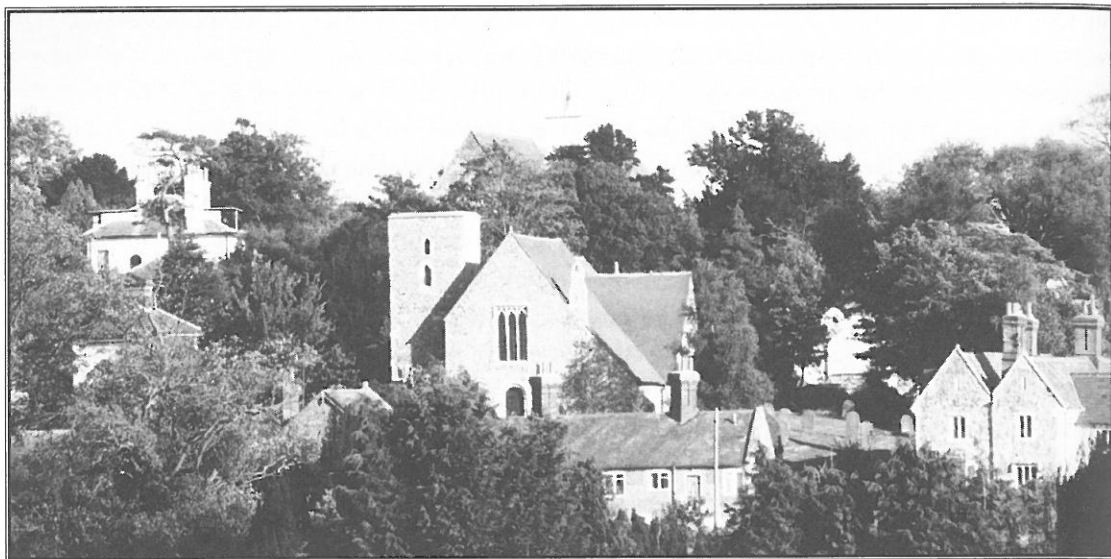
in the invasion with her lord. The 'Leicester War' was over. Truces were arranged over the months of winter 1173/4, but as spring came the rebellion broke out afresh.

The King of Scots again came over the border and settled down to besiege Odelin de Umfraville's castle at Prudhoe, close to Hadrian's Wall. The Count of Flanders, allied with Prince Henry, got as far as landing another force of Flemings at the mouth of the Orwell close to Ipswich, and joined with the Earl of Norfolk in capturing Norwich. Henry, then in Normandy, received an account of all the bad news from Richard of Ilchester, now Bishop-elect of Winchester. Even the king's stout heart started to fail him. There was an obvious cause of his troubles: complicity in the murder of Becket. 'St Thomas,' he cried desperately, 'preserve my kingdom for me.'

What was required was a great gesture of repentance. Henry abandoned his campaigning and rode to Barfleur. He rounded up a group of female prisoners headed by his own queen, Eleanor, with Margaret, wife to his son Henry, together with the Earl and Countess of Leicester. A force of Brabantine mercenaries was embarked and the king himself set sail for England on 7 July 1174. There were gales in the Channel but Henry threw himself on the mercy of St Thomas as protector and insisted on making the journey, arriving at Southampton on the next day.

The king's movements are not easy to follow in the next day or two. He apparently went to London, for horses were hired for some of the ships' crews 'to follow the king to London'. Certainly Henry made contact with Bishop Gilbert Foliot of London at this moment, for a briefing must have been held when a prepared statement was worked out to be read by the bishop on the king's behalf and in his presence at Canterbury a few days later. Harbingers must have been sent to Canterbury to announce the king's approach and to stage-manage the dramatic penance which was about to ensue.

On Friday 12 July the king approached Canterbury from the west and reached the leper hospital at Harbledown about a mile from the centre of the city. The house had been founded a century before by Archbishop Lanfranc and still stands today as an almshouse for elderly citizens. We owe details of this episode in the story of the murder and its aftermath to Guernes de Pont Ste-Maxence. The king dismounted at Harbledown and entered the chapel and said his prayers. For all his evil deeds he asked God's pardon. For the love of St Thomas he granted 20 marks' worth of income to the poor house. There was another almshouse a couple of leagues away, says Guernes,

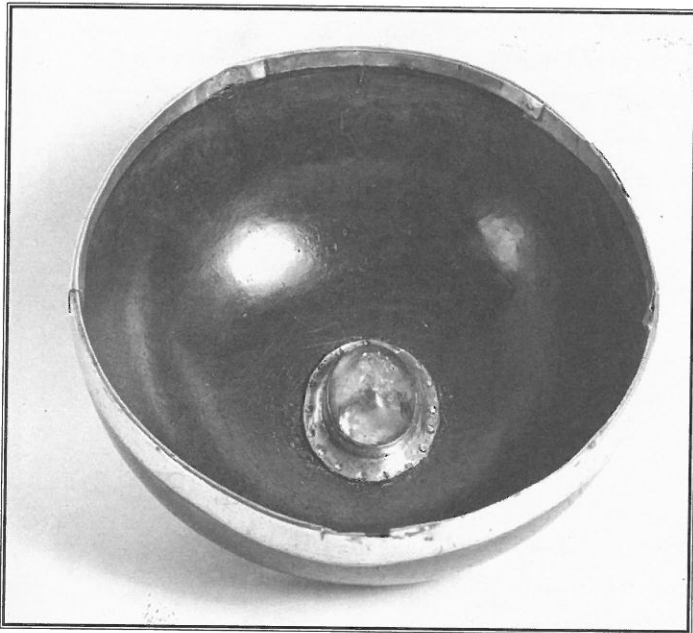


designed to harbour the poor. This was probably the obscure Hospital of Blean on the London road. To this house Henry assigned £5 per annum as a benefaction as part of his penance.

From Harbledown the king walked half a mile or more on foot to St Dunstan's, 'the first church you come to as you reach Canterbury', says Guernes, still true today. The church stands on the corner where travellers turned to pass the last quarter of a mile to the city's Westgate. Here in the church Henry stripped himself to his shirt. It was now raining and the king allowed himself the green cape 'such as he wore when hunting' to ward off the downpour. The lord of a large part of Europe now proceeded barefoot to the Westgate, watched by a wondering throng of observers. He walked up the High Street, through Mercery Lane where inhabitants like Solomon the mercer or Reginald the goldsmith must have gazed at him through their windows. At the cathedral the monks waited to receive him, as they had waited to receive Becket three-and-a-half years before in great joy on his return from exile. Normally a monarch would be received with the pealing of bells and with the solemn chant from the choir, called the *Laudes*, but there was none of that on this day.

At the entrance to the nave Henry knelt down, staying there a long time in tears and prayer. At length he rose and was led along the nave to the Martyrdom, as it was henceforth to be known, where Thomas had fallen on the fatal day. There Henry uttered the confession and kissed the floor where his enemy had lain. From the

The leper hospital, dedicated to St Nicholas, in Harbledown, where Henry II prayed before completing his journey to the cathedral on foot. (Photograph: R.W. Pepper)



Mazer (a drinking bowl, probably fourteenth century) belonging to St Nicholas Hospital. The crystal embedded in it is thought to be from Becket's shoe, which the great scholar Erasmus and his friend Colet, dean of St Paul's, were invited to kiss (to their disgust) when they visited the Hospital in 1512. The mazer is now on display in the Treasury of Canterbury Cathedral. (Courtesy of the Master and Trustees of St Nicholas Hospital)

Martyrdom he progressed into the crypt, evidently down the steps close by and through the adjacent and still existing portal. At the far end of the great vault he came to St Thomas's tomb, enclosed in its low wall with a marble lid. Again he flung himself into prayer, which lasted a long time, with grief and tears, an utterly contrite heart and deep devotion.

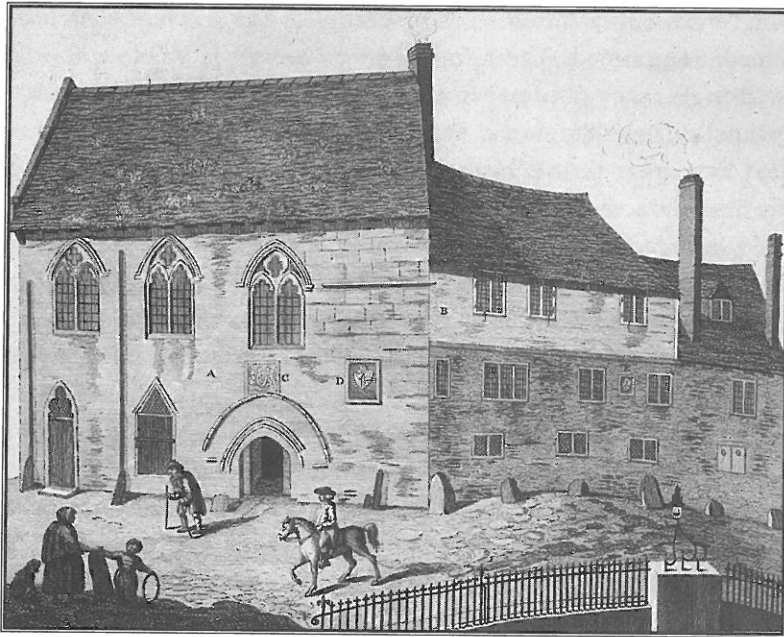
Bishop Gilbert, himself absolved from complicity long before, spoke on behalf of the king. 'He orders me', he said, 'to declare his unreserved confession on his behalf as I and others have heard it in private. He declares before God and before the martyr that he did not cause St Thomas to be slain, but freely admits that he did use such words as were the cause and origin of his being murdered. . . . He begs the saint to forgive his offence. . . . He returns all her holdings to this holy church, both to the archbishop and to the monastery. He asks you to pray to the true martyr lying here, beseeching him to lay aside all anger. The king has come here to make atonement.' Then the bishop went on to announce monetary compensation to Canterbury Cathedral, a benefaction of £10 per annum in addition to the £30 yearly already given at a previous date. King Henry then confirmed all that was said and the prior kissed him on behalf of the whole house.

Henry next removed his green cape and his shirt, and thrust his

head and shoulders into one of the openings of the tomb, leaving his back all bare. The Bishop of London, Becket's old enemy, picked up a whip. The faint remains of a thirteenth-century painting survive today upon the crypt wall overlooking the site, and show the type of whip probably used, a short turned handle with a leather thong. The bishop gave him five cuts. The Bishop of Rochester followed, and then other bishops, and then the Abbot of Boxley. To the lashes from bishops and abbot there were now added three from each of eighty monks. The total is not certain, since the number of bishops attending is unsure, but must have approached three hundred. After the flagellation the king withdrew his head from the orifice in the tomb and stood up. He tottered to a pillar (most probably the central shaft supporting the quadripartite vault) and squatted down in the dust.

If the chronology of events in Guernes' account is reliable, it may have been about this moment that the widow Rohesia (Becket), sister to St Thomas, was brought to the king. She had been among the sufferers early in her brother's exile, when Rannulph de Broc had carried out Henry's cruel orders and harried the saint's kinsfolk into exile. Henry implored forgiveness. 'Pardon,' he said, 'Gentle sister, pardon and grace!' He gave her a 'goodly mill' and, says Guernes, she makes a good ten marks rent a year from that mill! The mill stood in Canterbury not far away at the central bridge over the River Stour, which still today bears the name King's bridge, after the king's mill which once stood here. Rohesia was indeed well rewarded, for the mill truly did bring in ten marks a year (enough to keep her in comfort), as recorded in the annual Pipe Rolls. This is another testimony to Guernes' accuracy as a historian.

Henry's self-imposed degradation was not over yet. There in the crypt he remained awake all night, not getting up for any bodily needs until after Matins (held in the small hours). Then he rose and made a circuit of altars throughout the church. When morning came, he caused Mass to be sung. When he put his boots on to go, he pulled them on to dirty and muddy feet. Exhausted bodily and mentally as he was, he set off for London, ignorant of the fact that on that very day, as dawn broke, salvation had come to him in the far north, and that the bad weather which he had experienced in Canterbury had dispersed his enemies on the seas off Flanders, where his traitorous son was ready to lead a naval invasion of England. The king was sufficiently apprehensive about such an invasion that before he left Canterbury he told the citizens to move their goods beyond the River Medway for safety.



Eastbridge Hospital in the late eighteenth century, from the King's mill opposite (the road is shown still unmade following widening of the bridge in 1767). (Courtesy of the Master and Trustees of Eastbridge Hospital)

Henry's fears may have been realized, for there were local losses of corn and cheese in this year (probably stocks destined for Dover or Canterbury castles) 'through rapine by the Flemings'. When Henry reached London he enjoyed a modest triumph. The citizens turned out in their best attire and gave him an enthusiastic welcome, with every assurance that he need not fear for their loyalty. They escorted him to his palace at Westminster where, stricken in body, and exhausted and weighed down with worry, he took to his bed.

Far up in the north the dreadful conflict had continued. King William of Scotland failed to take Prudhoe and retired northward. Frightful brutalities were perpetrated upon peasants and townsfolk on the way. William dispatched two large forces with instructions to devastate the countryside, one under the command of Richard de Morville, brother of the murderer of Becket, while he himself settled down to invest Alnwick Castle on the Northumberland coast, where William de Vesci held out. Meanwhile a scratch force of knights and peasants loyal to Henry had been assembled and on the morning of Saturday 13 July (just as King Henry was rising from his fearsome round of penances hundreds of miles away at Canterbury), they emerged from a mist close to the castle and beheld the force of a

hundred Scottish knights lying around in a meadow, their king among them. Action was immediately joined. The knights were almost all slain on the spot or in flight, though some who survived allowed themselves to be captured rather than desert their king. King William's horse was killed by a spear thrust. He himself was taken prisoner and hustled away from the scene.

The story of the sequel is told in French by a talented dramatist born out of due time, Jordan Fantosme, in the language of the participants, so much closer to contemporary trains of thought than Latin.³ It was late on Thursday 18 July, as King Henry lay abed, that a shout was raised outside as a messenger demanded entry at the chamber door. 'Who are you?' demanded the chamberlain. He gave his name as Brian, sent by Rannulph de Glanville from the north. The chamberlain replied that the matter could wait until morning as his master was asleep. The voice without became more insistent. 'Let me enter, *chamerleng debonaire*!' The chamberlain answered, 'I daren't do it, the king is asleep.'

Henry started up at the sound of the voices. 'Open, Open!' he shouted, 'Who is it? Tell me!' 'Sire,' said the chamberlain, 'you shall know straight away. There is a messenger from the north. You know him well; he is one of Rannulph de Glanville's men, called Brian.'

'*Par ma fei*,' cried the king, 'that worries me. Bring him in.' In came Brian and saluted King Henry. 'Sir King,' he started, 'God who dwells in Trinity save you, first yourself and those about you.' Henry, all impatient and agitated, interrupted the courtesies. 'What news do you bring?' he demanded. 'Has the King of Scots got into Richmond? Is Newcastle on Tyne taken? Is Odelin de Umfraville [the loyalist castellan of Prudhoe] captured or driven away? Have all my barons given up their ground? Messenger,' he cried, '*par ta fei*, tell me the truth. Evilly have they served me and I'll be revenged!'

'Sire,' gasped the messenger, 'listen to me a little. Your barons up north are good people. *Do* listen to me on behalf of my lord. By me he sends greetings and friendship. You are wrong to worry,' and he at last managed to get out the words, 'The King of Scots is captured and all his barons too!' 'Are you telling the truth?' demanded King Henry incredulously. 'Yes indeed,' said the messenger, 'and you will know by morning. The Archbishop of York is sending two messengers. But I started first and I know the truth. For four days past I have hardly slept,' he went on, 'nor eaten nor had anything to drink, and I am very hungry.'

Said the king, 'Don't worry. If you have told me the truth you'll be

well enough off. Is the King of Scots captured? Tell me truly.' 'Yes, Sire, in all faith, otherwise let me be crucified on a cross or hung on a gallows, or burnt in a great bonfire, if by noon tomorrow everything is not quite clear.' 'Then', said Henry, 'Thanks be to God and to Saint Thomas the martyr and to all the saints of God.'

The messenger Brian was then sent to lodgings to eat and drink his fill. The king went off at once to his knights' quarters, crying out the joyous news. Confirmation of the glad tidings came, as predicted, on the next day, sent by Archbishop Roger of York. Brian was allocated an income of £10 per annum as his reward.

Penance and remission, cause and effect: the connection was obvious. Both Henry and Thomas had triumphed. The saint had forgiven his enemy. Nothing could be more straightforward to the medieval mind. The revolt collapsed. Across the water on the Flemish coast the fleet assembled by Count Philip and Prince Henry was dispersed by a storm. All Henry's illness, probably mostly of psychological origin, vanished away. In a blazing burst of energy the now forty-year-old monarch (already very mature by medieval standards) took horse and rode the fifty miles northward to the enemy-occupied castle at Huntingdon, where he pressed local carpenters into service to make siege engines. Within a few days (by 21 July) he had cleared the fortress. Thence he sped sixty miles eastward to Framlingham, occupied by the rebel Earl of Norfolk, Hugh Bigot, who had no doubt by now heard of St Thomas's intervention into the fortunes of King Henry. The earl, whose relations with St Thomas during his lifetime had not been altogether happy, decided that the moment had come for complete submission. He came out to meet the king and on 25 July gave up not only Framlingham, but Bungay Castle in the same area as well. The Flemings in his service were allowed to embark and go home.

Though in pain from a kick on the thigh from a horse, Henry now moved quickly over to Nottingham, another journey of a hundred and twenty miles or more. He reached the town by 31 July. Here he received fealty from Hugh, Bishop of Durham, whose conduct in bringing forty knights and five hundred Flemish mercenaries into the kingdom had been, to say the least, dubious. From one castle after another across England, representatives came in with offers of surrender. To Nottingham was led Henry's new prisoner, King William of Scotland, who was not to disentangle himself from the results of his misfortune for very many years to come. As far as England was concerned the revolt was virtually over.

The Continent now demanded Henry's attention. The most immediate anxiety was Rouen, where King Louis was conducting a siege in defiance of a truce with Henry. By 8 August, only a month from his departure thence, the English king was back at Barfleur. He made for Rouen where Louis straight away withdrew back through the Vexin into France proper, while Henry's Welsh mercenaries plundered his baggage trains. A few more energetic forays and the king was master of his wide continental possessions as well.

Within a few days of his arrival at Westminster, Henry had confirmed by a charter what he had already granted verbally on Friday 12 July when he descended from his horse at Harbledown hospital outside Canterbury. Acting as witnesses to the document were people prominent in the Becket story, such as Gilbert Foliot, Bishop of London, Roger, Bishop of Worcester, and Richard of Ilchester the archdeacon, now Bishop-elect of Winchester, who in company with Earl William de Mandeville had been one of the party appointed to arrest Becket in 1170. By the charter (which was destroyed in the great air-raid on Canterbury on 1 June 1942), Henry confirmed the grant to the lepers of 20 marks each year from his revenues in Canterbury until he should find some other source. A mark is 13s 4d and 20 marks amount to £13 6s 8d. The sum can be found charged annually upon royal income in Kent, registered in the Pipe Rolls.⁴ The lepers did not even have to wait until September and the beginning of the next full accounting year as would have been quite reasonable. Instead they were generously assigned 5 marks by King Henry for the very quarter in which the payment was initiated. Year after year the payment is entered either as 20 marks or £13 6s 8d paid *leprosis* or *infirmis de Herbaldun*.

In 1234 the citizens of Canterbury secured some measure of independence from the Crown by a charter of fee farm granted by Henry III, whereby they were allowed to compound directly with the Exchequer, instead of through the Sheriff of Kent as intermediary, for various royal rents with tolls and profits of justice, at the substantial sum of £60 per annum. The citizens were made responsible for paying the 20 marks due from the Crown to the hospital at Harbledown, and the £60 payable by them to the Exchequer was reduced by the same amount.

The oldest surviving account roll in the borough archives is dated 1272 and, covering a half year, mentions 10 marks paid to the almshouse. Payment went on all through the Middle Ages. It survived the Reformation. It survived the Civil War. By the eighteenth century

there was some idea that it had been ordained by Henry VIII, of all improbable people! When the Municipal Corporations Reform Act came into force in 1835 the city treasurer decided that payment of ancient dues of this kind had lapsed, and for many years the sum went unpaid. Eventually, representations were made to the government on behalf of the almsfolk. The payments were restarted and arrears made good upon orders from Westminster. During the nineteenth century the nature of the payment was obscured even further when it was classed in corporation accounts as tithe.

The ancient day for payment is 10 October. This date itself calls for comment. In 1752 eleven days were dropped from the English calendar to bring it into line with the Gregorian scheme prevailing on the Continent. It was, however, provided that any payment or accounting day could be postponed to what would have been the due date for payment if the calendar had not been altered. Thus the government itself postponed its grand annual audit date of Lady Day (25 March) for eleven days, arriving at 5 April where it has stood ever since. The borough treasurer of Canterbury likewise postponed his settlement date in connection with the benefaction to Harbledown. Eleven days subtracted from 10 October takes one to 30 September, the old morrow of Michaelmas. Not only do the almsfolk receive a benefaction from Henry II but it comes at his ancient accounting period. There has been another adjustment. In 1971 British currency was decimalized. The odd half mark or 6s 8d, one-third of a pound sterling, could not be expressed exactly in decimal currency, and so the almsfolk now receive only £13.33 – or one-third of a new penny less than the sum laid down by King Henry II in 1174!⁵

1				CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL			
				National Westminster Bank PLC &			
				Canterbury, City Centre Branch			
				P.O. Box 305, 11 The Parade, Canterbury, Kent CT1 2DT			
THIS IS A SECURITY CHEQUE		THE BACKGROUND CONTAINS ERASER SENSITIVE INKS		UV PROTECTED		60-04-27	
PAY THE SUM OF:		HUNDRED THOUSANDS	TEN THOUSANDS	THOUSANDS	HUNDREDS	TENS	UNITS
TO THE ORDER OF:		*****	*****	*****	*****	ONE	THREE
		DATE: 10/ 9/98					
		AMOUNT OF POUNDS IN WORDS, PENCE AS IN FIGURES					
		ST NICHOLAS HOSPITAL					
		ST NICHOLAS HOSPITAL					
		CHQ TO TREAS ADMIN					
		FOR COLLECTION BY L MCDAID					
		NOT NEGOTIABLE					
		A/C PAYEE ONLY					
		£13.33					
		NOT EXCEEDING £10,000 UNLESS COUNTERSIGNED					
		EXD					
		DIRECTOR OF FINANCE					
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One of the annual payments which Canterbury City Council continues to make to St Nicholas Hospital in fulfilment of Henry II's endowment.

After the débâcle, father and son, old king and young king, made peace, and late in May of the next year both travelled to Canterbury on pilgrimage to the tomb of the now canonized St Thomas. With them (so it appears) went the young Queen Margaret for a stay of four days. The character of the young man is easily deduced from his actions. He was selfish, short-sighted and irresponsible, almost at times unbalanced. Like his brothers, whom King Henry senior tried to groom as viceroys in his various domains, he was a bitter disappointment (though Richard at least showed determination and military skill).

The younger Henry's revolt in 1174 is but one manifestation of his fecklessness. He remained quiet for some years, but in 1182 was again in arms against his father, who besieged him in Limoges where he managed to antagonize the townsfolk by plundering the shrine of their patron, St Martial. When he returned from a sortie they drove him away with insults. Undeterred, he then plundered another shrine, that of Rocamadour, whereupon he was struck down by fever, dying in a smith's house at Martel in ostentatious penitence, clothed in a hairshirt and lying on a bed of ashes. Yet somehow he had had, and still exercised, personal attraction. He destined his body for burial at Rouen but on the way it was seized by the citizens of Le Mans, to the anger of the Rouennais, who intervened successfully with Henry II for its transfer to their cathedral.

Some said that the quarrel with his father was fomented by the famous troubadour Bertrand de Born, a story given permanent currency in the pages of the *Inferno*. When Dante and Virgil have descended as far as the eighth circle, second only from the bottom, they encounter the terrible figure stalking around, holding in his hands his own head separated from his body. He explains his punishment:

*sappi ch'i' son Bertram dal Bornio, quelli
che diedi al re giovane i ma' conforti.
Io feci il padre e 'l figlio in sé ribelli*

Bertrand de Born am I, and I have given
Such evil rede that sire from son is riven;
Old king with young king through my fault has
striven.⁶