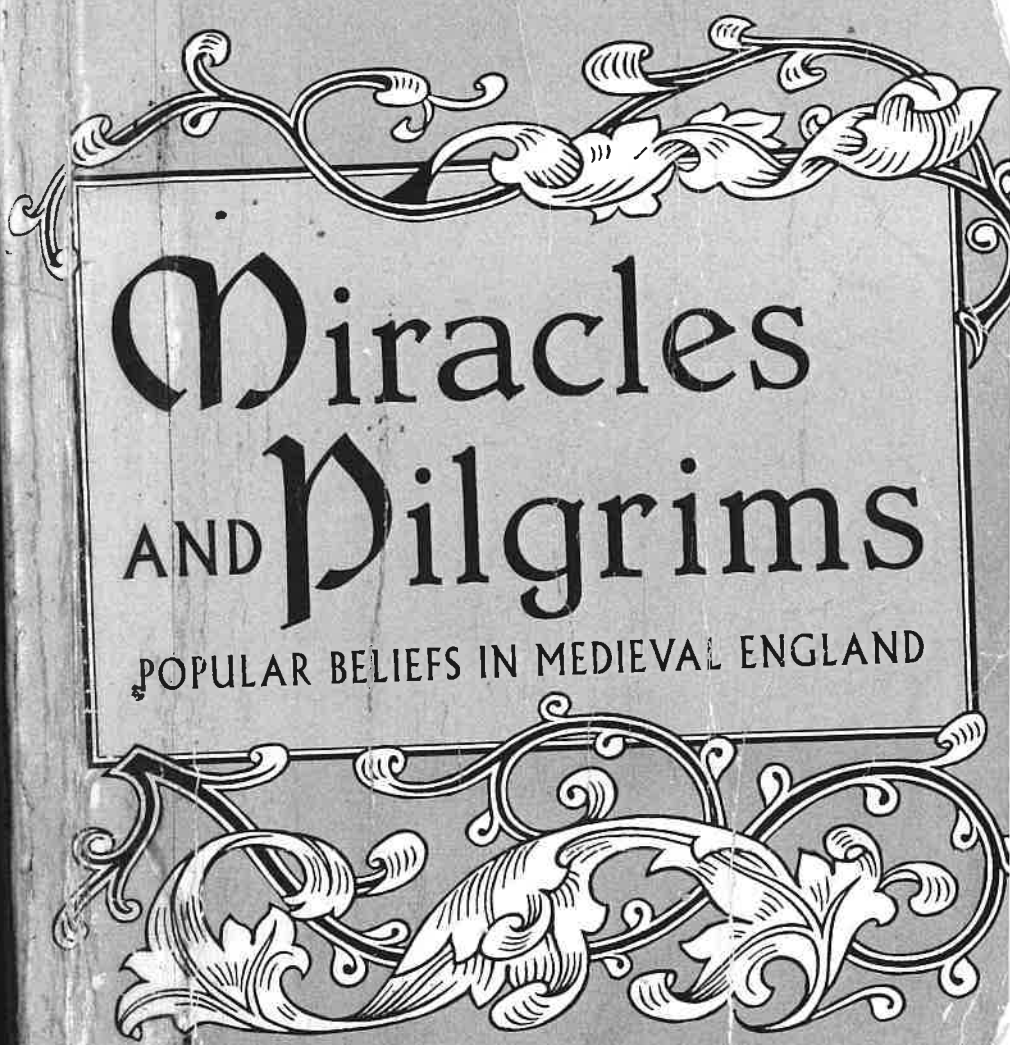
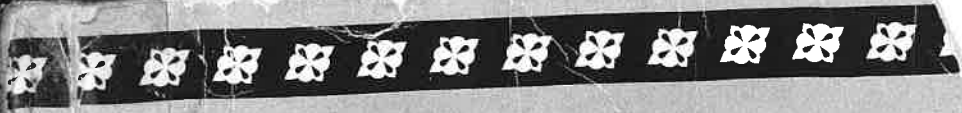




Miracles AND Pilgrims

POPULAR BELIEFS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

RONALD C. FINUC

Introduction

This is a study of about 3,000 medieval people who claimed that they had experienced a 'miracle', in most cases a miracle of healing. A great many of them received their supernatural assistance after praying to Thomas Becket or going on pilgrimage to his tomb. Today, innumerable English and foreign tourists wander through the cool vastness of Canterbury cathedral, stopping for perhaps an hour on their way to London or to a summer's holiday at the seaside, pausing to gaze through the space where Becket's shrine once stood. Six centuries ago a visitor might have caught the notes of pipe and drum on the green as a worldly group of pilgrims arrived, having started out, perhaps, from an inn called Tabard in Southwark; he might have heard their raucous, holiday-maker voices as they filed in to visit Becket's monumental shrine at the apex of steps and altars, where for a few coins they could have seen the canopy of the shrine raised up to reveal gold and silver ornaments and gems and rubies that burned blood-red. After viewing the sights of city and cathedral and spending a night at an inn they would move off next morning on the homeward ride, with badges and phials of Canterbury water to prove to their neighbours that they had really seen the famous tomb. Going back to the early 1170s, however—before Becket's shrine and cult had become embellished, encrusted with 'respectability'—all was different.

A modern visitor, magically transported to the darkened crypt of this ancient church, would probably be astonished if not repelled by the sight of wretched cripples writhing on the floor at Becket's simple tomb, by the screams of fettered madmen straining at their bonds and the low moans of lepers and the blind, and by the characteristic odour of the Middle Ages, the stench of poverty and disease. The pious would pray noisily in the dancing shadows of the crypt or offer their hard-won pennies and home-made candles. An uncouth peasant gesticulates wildly as he tries to explain his miraculous cure to the monk in charge of the tomb; he knows no Latin, no French, and his English dialect is of the scarcely comprehensible to the guardian-monk. The recorder of the

miracles, perhaps a monk named William of Canterbury, scribbles briefly on a scrap of parchment and waves away the pilgrim, who shrugs and shuffles from the crypt and goes up into the Kentish sunshine. A small deputation from Flanders arrives to describe and swear to the miraculous recovery of a child drowned but resuscitated after prayers and vows to the saint: the crowded crypt is hushed by foreign accents piping from the little girl herself who praises the great Saint Thomas Becket who had saved her life. After the rejoicing dies away a few noblemen, with a clutch of clerics, step forward to present their gemstones, their silver images, their models of human limbs and animals made of wax, their testimonial letters with pendant seals and copied into the great book of miracles, *liber miraculorum*, placed alongside tales told by peasants who could only speak *Anglice*, in English.

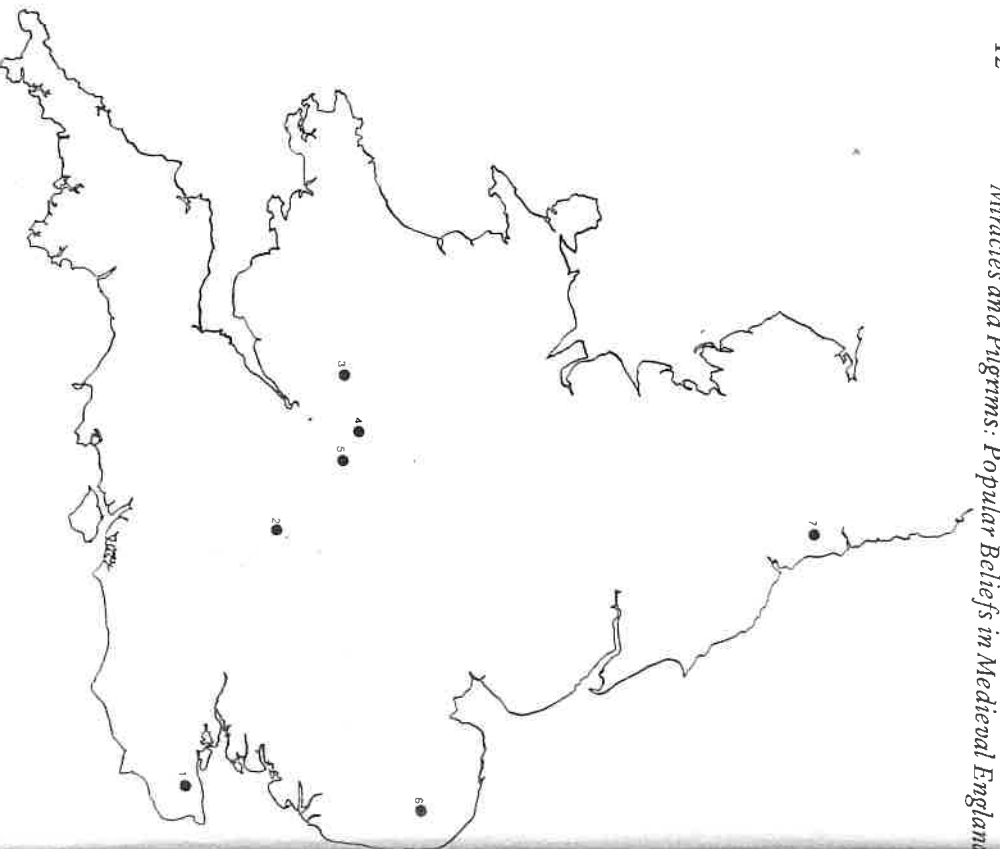
The focal point of all this activity was the corpse of an archbishop murdered in his cathedral in 1170, to modern eyes a mere human skeleton, to medieval eyes one of the most famous relics of western Europe, the almost integral remains of an undisputed saint. But what was so special about a dead man's bones, not merely those of Becket, but of all the other saintly corpses revered in the Middle Ages? Why did these mouldering remains draw crowds of pilgrims: why should anyone pay for the privilege of kissing an ancient toe bone or touching the cold marble of a tomb? It is hardly satisfactory to say that these things occurred 'naturally'; there is little in the New Testament to suggest that the bones contained in reliquaries would loom so large in the popular religion of medieval Europe. Yet even today at Christian pilgrimage centres the shrivelled remains of saints are on display to crowds of eager visitors.

As we examine the historical and ideological background to beliefs about pilgrimage and saints, their relics and miracles, it will become clear that from the earliest Christian centuries there were conflicts about the extent to which these beliefs should be encouraged, even permitted. This running battle was fought not only between clergy and laity but within the Church itself. But 'the Church' is really a convenient expression almost devoid of meaning. At its extremes it say, to the medieval villagers of Oxenton in rural Gloucestershire, There was not only an Italian and an English medieval Church, as a modern historian has emphasized,¹ there was a French Church and a Spanish, an Icelandic and a German, each with its own history, traditions, liturgical uses and saints. Within these Churches were hundreds of divisions subdivided again into thousands of smaller units, ending at last with a semi-literate cleric in some rude chapel in the midst of inhospitable forests or fields, surrounded by peasants who muttered

charms over their ploughs and whispered magic words at crossroads. It was a very long way from pope or prelate to peasant-priest, a long way in distance, education and attitude. This is why there was contradiction, misunderstanding, fraud and credulity within 'the Church'; why popes defined and pseudo-friars defiled the concept of 'saint' or 'relic' or 'miracle'; why there were conflicts about these aspects of popular religion. We are apt to forget this diversity when discussing 'the Church', but in such a gigantic organization the wonder is that there was not more dissension in the Middle Ages. And outside this convoluted corporation the laity stood excluded, an exclusion which grew as the power of the clergy grew. As we shall see, these conflicts about popular beliefs were more or less resolved in England in the sixteenth century during the Reformation when the sources of discord were removed by sweeping away both the shrines and their thaumaturgic relics.

Faith-healing at the shrines of medieval saints² cannot be separated from this changing historical background, nor from the people who were actually involved. To appreciate the popular beliefs and rites which centred on curative shrines we need to know something not only about the particular saint and the origin and development of his cult,³ but also about the pilgrims affected by his miracles, their social status and sex, where they lived, what particular 'miracle' they enjoyed. Some of the posthumous miracles provide extraordinarily intimate views of English life, detail down to the red laces of a peasant girl's new shoes.⁴

Our emphasis is upon English saints whose popular cults emerged between the Conquest of 1066 and about 1300. Although drawing upon more than 3,000 posthumous miracles—wonders attributed to saints after they had died—associated with a score of saints, both English and foreign, the main conclusions will be based on nine 'major' cults, seven English and (for comparison) two French, in which slightly more than 2,300 miracles were registered.⁵ These were, in the twelfth century, the cults of William of Norwich, Thomas Becket, Godric of Finchale, and Frideswide of Oxford; in the thirteenth century, Wulfstan of Worcester, Simon de Montfort, Thomas Cantilupe of Hereford and, in France, Edmund Rich and Louis of Toulouse. Of the nine, five were officially canonized by the pope. These nine cults were chosen for three reasons. First of all, at least 100 posthumous miracles were registered in each cult. Secondly, the cults developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, rather than in some legendary period for which we have very little historical evidence. These two criteria ensure that there are sufficient miracles for each cult from which to draw general conclusions, and that, excepting the cults of Wulfstan and Frideswide, the pilgrims were contemporaries of the saints to whom they attributed their miracles. The saints were 'real' people, the



1 The seven selected English cults: (1) Thomas Becket, Canterbury (2) Frideswide, Oxford (3) Thomas Cantilupe, Hereford (4) Wulfstan, Worcester (5) Simon de Montfort, Evesham (6) William, Norwich (7) Godric, Finchale

pilgrims were 'real', regardless of what may be concluded about their miracles. Thirdly, and related to the second point, is the fact that these were all 'new' cults. It is a commonplace that from a very early period the medieval universe was peopled with a multitude of saints; Britain was no exception. The Anglo-Saxon writer Aelfric boasted of the great numbers of English saints of his own day. With the Conquest England lost some of the old Anglo-Saxon saints but gained a great many from

Europe. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the English peasant who stood in his parish church on a Sunday would have been surrounded by the images of a score of saints to whom he might turn in his hour of need; they were part of his world, they were 'received' from earlier ages. But each of our selected saints' cults was something new to contemporaries, a fresh addition to the legions of spiritual helpers. We have chosen them because in them we can observe the impact of a novel saint upon society, as his cult takes shape. The evidence of how these 'new' saints affected the people of their regions lies in the posthumous miracles. We have chosen to examine only posthumous wonders because the miracles reputedly performed by a saint during his life tend to be far fewer in number and, as the product of a single admiring biographer, far more 'literary' and imitative than posthumous miracles. In our records, on the other hand, it is not the saint but the pilgrims themselves who work their 'miracles'.

Admittedly the pilgrims who reported these miracles represent only a fraction of all of the people who visited shrines, the registrars exerted a filtering effect upon what the pilgrims reported, and the whole concept of 'miracle' presents innumerable difficulties to many modern readers. These problems will be considered in due course. In our examination of the pilgrims and their miracles at medieval shrines we shall discover not only that there were characteristics common to all miracle-touched pilgrims, but also that the miraculous cure or other wonder reported by any given pilgrim tended to be related to the sex and social class of that pilgrim; the incidence of certain illnesses was not the same for all classes and sexes. We shall also discover that shrines might attract their own social 'types' and that the ratio of men to women varied, sometimes strikingly, from shrine to shrine. In other words, the people involved in miracles in different saints' cults were not all alike. Finally, our study will lead us to conclude that each saint's cult had its own history: at different periods a saint's shrine performed different functions in medieval society, and furthermore as those functions changed, so too did the characteristics of the pilgrims.

Perhaps the most primitive and immediate need which shrines satisfied was that of healing but, since this depended upon human enthusiasm, it was the most quickly extinguished and transient of all characteristics. Rather more long-term was the way the shrines served the needs of special-interest pilgrims who visited and attributed miracles to the entombed as honoured individuals, for example for political reasons. But as new generations replaced the old and the memory of the dead man or his cause faded, this appeal ceased too. Shrines also served medieval society as funds of spiritual comfort. Beyond the many subsidiary needs satisfied by the enshrined saints, medieval pilgrims, both the sick and the well, found relief in the assurance that they had

spiritual protectors not only in earthly matters but also in that more important, everlasting world to come.

In the event this spiritual function outlasted all the others. Some saints, such as Becket, continued to the end of the Middle Ages to perform this service and attract pilgrims for that reason. This is not to say that society outgrew the need for curative shrines, which continued to appear in England up to the eve of the Reformation. But at almost any shrine the 'spiritual' vitality of the place might continue centuries after the miracles once performed there were only a memory.

The events at curative shrines are worth studying because they provide a glimpse of the behaviour of medieval people at centres of popular religion and an indication of what sorts of people were involved. They illuminate many aspects of the beliefs of the Middle Ages in a way that other historical sources—theological, liturgical, even (strictly speaking) hagiographical—cannot do. This has been recognized in recent years by a few European historians,⁶ but so far there has been very little substantial work of this kind dealing with the English saints' cults, and it is hoped that the present study will stimulate further historical research into a fascinating body of documentary material. In addition, perhaps the information provided by medieval curative cults may appeal to those interested in modern 'faith-healing' and other alternative therapies in both the West and the East. Some of the findings may elucidate the behaviour of pilgrims at shrines which still play an important part in the lives of many people, as in India for example, where more than 1,800 holy places draw ever-increasing numbers of pilgrims every year. Whatever may be the other 'applications' of this study, however, the main purpose will be to find out how medieval people interacted with their spiritual heroes, the saints. We shall examine not only their beliefs, but also the actions which flowed from those beliefs. Finally, we shall look at the conditions of medieval life which reinforced this faith in wonder-working saints, and made them so important to the people who lived and died so many centuries ago.

Part One

Historical Background

Chapter 9

Maps and Miracles: The Geography of Pilgrimage

The divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, being famed abroad among all men, in consequence of his wonder-working powers, attracted immense numbers.

Eusebius

Eleanor of Alnwick was tormented by illness for months until she learned that two of her neighbours, one deaf and the other partially paralysed, had been cured by the holy corpse of Gilbert of Sempringham. She made her candle and her vow, went to the tomb, and she too was cured. As Thomas of Monmouth put it, 'The frequent success of those who had gone before, invited others to favourable expectations.'¹ It is clear that the spread of news about miracles was essential to the development of popular cults. But how and by whom was such lore broadcast? who were the potential or passive and who the active, carriers or agents? what were their motives?

At its simplest, someone unexpectedly stumbled across a fledgling curative cult and then carried the news to others, often their relatives, at home. One man, for example, had heard about Becket's miracles while travelling about on business, and Lady Mabel de Bek learned of William's wonders when passing through Norwich on her way home. In several cases the miraculous healing of one family member was followed by that of others, like the two children cured of blindness after their aunt returned from Hereford with exciting stories of Cantilupe's wonderful powers. Tales of miracles passed round the family circle and made each member a potential enthusiast, but when a saint was also related by blood, marriage or friendship, family interest knew no bounds.² 'Family' in the wider sense included retainers, and the master-servant relationship was another channel for news of curative shrines. The seneschal of Battle Abbey, miraculously healed by William of Norwich, came home, found his miller ill and recommended a pilgrimage to the Norfolk city. Sometimes news about miracles went from lower to higher social levels within the 'extended family': a

Pembroke knight followed his reeve's example in seeking saintly aid and a Lincoln matron acted upon similar advice from her own serving-girl.³

The news of miraculous relics often, but by no means always, came into villages in this way, brought by individuals to their families, and then there was a chain-reaction from one family to the next. In the close-knit society of the English village, where gossip was—and is—the stuff of social life, anything unusual in an individual or family could not be kept secret for long. News of a miraculous cure flew from hovel to cottage to manor-house and the claims of the latest 'saint' were soon acknowledged by many of the village folk and became common knowledge. When a woman returned to her village in the thirteenth century after being cured at a shrine everyone rushed out to look at her as if she had returned from the dead; after a drowned boy's revival, his parents lost no time in passing the news along to their neighbours, *immediate miraculum conicinis eorum puplicantes*. Serious illness and other life crises, though personal, were not particularly private. The sickbed or accident scene buzzed with friends and neighbours, some of whom would later testify at a shrine or before a papal commission about the miracle they saw when they called down the saint to ease the pains, or restore the life, of a fellow villager. One man struck down by illness was advised 'by his friends' to put his trust in Becket; elsewhere friends crept into a sick-chamber to suggest that candles be sent to William of Norwich.⁴

A whole village sometimes supplied witnesses to miracles, or so the registrars claimed. The 'whole island of Thanet', for instance, reportedly came to Evesham to verify a cure of Simon de Montfort; of course in most cases such expressions are not to be taken literally. In England generations of villagers were used to sending three or four of their number—usually of the more substantial sort—to various courts and meetings to represent 'the whole village'. A parish priest, for example, arriving to give evidence of a miracle, was accompanied by the more respectable villagers, *majoribus et melioribus villie*, a phrase which would not have been out of place in a writ for a local inquest before the sheriff. More than one village could easily become involved in a single miracle. After a young girl 'drowned' one Sunday in a tavern garden but later revived thanks to Cantilupe her overjoyed father swept her up and rode toward Hereford, accompanied by several villagers. Others joined them as they passed through one village after another; even the Hereford people came out (for the news had preceded the party) to greet the girl 'brought back from death'. Few villagers along that route could have been ignorant of Cantilupe's powers after that. After a French boy had been reputedly snatched from the arms of death by saintly intervention, the bells of his village church rang so energetically

that the clangour disturbed three nearby villages; in another case the bells of Hereford Cathedral and of all the surrounding village churches and chapels rang out as news of a wonderful cure spread into the countryside.⁵

As a saint's fame grew, so would his successes within particular villages, even to the point of stimulating two or more villages to experience a miracle. In William's cult, for example, eight villages outside Norwich boasted more than one miracle-touched resident, and about sixty-three villages and towns outside Canterbury and London and twenty-eight places in France witnessed at least two (sometimes several) instances of Becket's miraculous virtues. In some cults the closer the village was to the shrine the stronger was the saint's influence: three-fourths of all the places containing at least two cured villagers were less than twenty miles from Godric's tomb at Finchale.

Villagers may also have had special ties with saints. Becket once carried out a confirmation service at Newington about eighteen miles west of Canterbury. After his death the place became a secondary curative centre where at least fifteen miracles were supposed to have occurred. The village-saint relationship was expressed in various ways. A cripple from a village belonging to the Worcester monks remained at Wulstan's shrine several days without a cure. Addressing the saint he complained, 'Was I not born and raised on the land of your church? You cure foreigners and strangers daily' but not, he continued, 'your special servant.'⁶

Such villages were sources of propaganda for a saint. Strangers to the village market-place or ale-house might overhear—or perhaps be told—the story of local people who had been blessed with a miracle, or perhaps someone would be pointed out whose miracle was *notorium in parochia*, as one Cantilupe witness put it. Places, too, became magically endowed with miraculous associations: strangers in a certain French village were shown 'the well where Ernulphus was drowned' and had been revived by saintly assistance.⁷

Those who learned such things in the villages through which they passed would themselves become potential agents for the wider dissemination of a holy cult. Some travellers were more involved than others in this labour of love and hope. They were the active, as opposed to the passive, carriers, of whom perhaps the most effective—because they were the most enthusiastic—were those people who had personally experienced a miracle. A certain Henry who had a relative among the monks of Rievaulx spent all day telling them about his wonderful cure at Godric's tomb. That regrettable weakness, a compulsion to tell others about one's medical experiences, was utilized by medieval monks who encouraged such eager folk to remain a few days at the shrine as living proof of the saint's powers. Afterwards they set off to

tell anyone who would listen about their happy encounter with the other world. Some already-cured pilgrims played even more active roles, like the stranger passing through a particular village who was drawn by the sounds of lamentation to the side of a 'dying' child. He recommended that she be given water from Canterbury; after all, it had cured *him*—of insanity.⁸ Many miracles were suggested by such 'strangers' who happened by, and in so doing stimulated yet another village to rely upon the new saint. These strangers need not all have been personally cured, and many an outsider, *ignotus quidam*, simply offered the recommendation he had heard from others on his travels.⁹ On the other hand a few pilgrims who discovered that their 'cures' were merely temporary could be found bewailing their misfortune up and down the public roads.¹⁰

The records sometimes illustrate the peaceful chance encounters among wayfarers, striking up conversation as they walked or rode along.¹¹ In the usual search for apt topics for discussion, the latest saint would be a natural selection. A knight and cleric would exchange greetings as well as news of Becket's miracles; a party of Welshmen going home told an abbot about the cures of Canterbury; a crippled cleric met some prelates while travelling in France and as a result of their conversation he eventually found himself giving thanks at Pontigny for his miraculous cure.¹²

The people who spread the word about saintly deeds were of all sorts and conditions, the merchant on his business rounds, the homeward-bound miller cured at a shrine who launched into praise of the new saint whenever he had the chance, the peasant who passed some strangers as he plodded toward the village market and overheard wondrous rumours of the dead resuscitated and the crippled unbent. The higher the social status of the teller of the tale the more weight his words carried whether he repeated his story on the road for the benefit of strangers or at the side of the holy dead, at the shrine itself. Becket's scribe, William of Canterbury, as we know, expected beggars to be liars and the nobility to tell the truth. In fact, whether he spoke wild lies or uttered truths upon a Bible, to a registrar the miracle of a single nobleman was worth a dozen dead and revived peasant children. In the matter of propaganda, it meant a great deal if a nobleman or a knight was on one's 'side'. In addition, the greater wealth of the upper classes provided them with the mobility which was very important in developing a new cult. For example, a knight who was healed by Godric (he was one of the few knights involved in the cult) told his story to other knights at a royal residence (*palatio regis*) after which they all devoted themselves to the dead hermit of Finchale. Mathew, Count of Boulogne, was at the Canterbury shrine with his entourage when he overheard a Berkshire knight report a miracle.

News of the wonderful event went back to France with them.¹³

In a few of the Cantilupe miracles these movements in the upper echelons can actually be traced. A knight took his falcon to the Hereford shrine and told the story of its miraculous cure, in the hearing of the Earl of Cornwall and other noblemen preparing to go into Wales, and in their presence a cleric with crippled hands was healed. The nobles and their men then went off to attack Dryslwyn Castle. During the course of the siege one of the knights was hit under one eye with an arrow and part of a wall fell and crushed several others, burying one unfortunate warrior under the rubble so that only his feet were visible. These calamities were alleviated, however, by prayers to Thomas Cantilupe.¹⁴ It is unlikely that the wounded and upended knights—or their friends—would have thought of Cantilupe had they not seen and remembered the miracles of the clergyman and the knight's falcon, nor is it likely that they would soon forget them.

These examples suggest that unqualified statements about the 'growth of the cult' of a saint may be misleading, suggesting that such 'growth' was an abstract, even automatic, process unrelated to the society in which it occurred. The awareness of curative cults was not silently and mysteriously communicated to peasants in their huts or to knights in their halls, but was physically carried to them by living individuals. Who these individuals were, and how far they travelled, to a great degree determined the effective limits of a curative cult.

Prelates, clerics and monks were more important than the laity in spreading news of miracles because of their influence over the spiritual welfare of laymen, their literacy, and their more efficient channels of communication. Naturally news of miracles was thickest in the air at the centre of a cult, near the entombed saint. The clergy who manned these centres were usually quite willing to have the bells rung and a *Te Deum* sung after a miracle. Solemn announcements of miracles could be heard now and then above the murmuring crowds of ill and healthy travellers in the nave or round the holy shrine. After letters confirming a miracle were received at Lincoln, for instance, a procession was formed and the cured woman was led to the tomb while the cathedral bells rang out and the faithful offered up their joyous prayers. A public announcement about the miracle followed. Pilgrims who did not witness miracles or join in the liturgical jubilation which followed them could, if literate, turn to the written accounts of saintly wonders which were hanging up near many shrines.¹⁵

Just as the members of a family were all involved in the miraculous experience of any one of them, so all the members of spiritual 'families' such as monasteries were equally involved. At an early stage in William's cult seven persons associated with the Norwich priory were affected by miracles or visions, one after another; two monks even

experienced a second miracle. Just as demons might infect entire religious communities, saints could cure several inmates at once. Of fifty-five recorded miracles attributed to Gilbert of Sempringham's bones, sixteen involved Gilbertine nuns, monks or dependents. We can identify two or three members of St. Frideswide's priory at Oxford, and four from the great monastery of Reading, reporting miraculous interventions of Thomas Becket. These self-stimulative tendencies in monasteries and cathedrals were sometimes jogged by the recital of miracles in chapter. After a knight was cured he told his story in the Lincoln cathedral chapter-house, *in publica audientia*, and another miracle was made known *multitudine cleri et populi in capitulo Lincolnensi*; after which a canon from another house, present in chapter, added his own report of a miracle. The chapter-house was, among other things, a place where the beliefs and expectations of tonsured and lay auditors were confirmed and guided, as the nave was for *hoi poloi*. This applied to other tales as well: the abbot of Bury was so impressed by a vision described to him by a passer-by that he 'told the story in full Chapter with some sharp comments'.¹⁶ Monastic and cathedral institutions were important, then, because knowledge of miracles was instantly carried to all members who in turn communicated such information to lay and ecclesiastical visitors (unless perhaps a new saint might rival their 'own').

Some individual clergymen were very active indeed in spreading the good news, not necessarily about saints of their own diocese or house. Secular priests, who usually got out and about more than regulars (monks), sometimes appeared at shrines with two, three or four different miracles to report. Henry of Houghton, a priest, knew of two and Ralph of Froyle four miracles credited to Becket; a rector reported two cures involving himself, one of his cow and another of a pet bird belonging to a local noblewoman. When such individuals reported multiple miracles it is possible that they themselves had suggested the ghostly remedy in the first place. Paulinus, a priest of Leeds, witnessed a blind girl's cure at York in June, 1171; a few days later a blind man who had lodged with Paulinus was also cured at St. William's tomb at York. Shortly afterward a man with internal afflictions was healed there and the affair was witnessed by—Paulinus the priest of Leeds.¹⁷

The clergy popularized cults in other ways, for instance by making saints' relics available to their parishioners. Just as families treasured relics and passed them down as heirlooms, parish churches (and of course cathedrals and monasteries) stored up relics too. Sometimes, it is true, parish priests were rather over-protective and tight-fisted with their thaumatugic possessions.¹⁸ Customarily ampoules of Canterbury water were suspended in churches as relics, *in ecclesiis pro reliquiis sanctis suspendunt*, to be taken down and rushed to the dying or ill as

needed.¹⁹ One twelfth-century rural pastor had a church or oratory about eight miles from Canterbury, in which he used to hang the *ampullae* brought back by his parishioners from Becket's shrine (at that distance the availability of such relics may have lowered their value if not their curative powers, hence his 'collection'). Some of them he thought less full than they ought to have been, no doubt because of evaporation, so he poured out what was left of all of them into a basin, added 'ordinary' holy water from the church supply, refilled them, and then hung them up out of reach. No one would know the difference, anyway.²⁰ Such supplies of Canterbury water were kept in monasteries as well, for example at Reading, where a monk was cured through its virtues, at the Premonstratensian house of St. John of Croxton and at a great many other religious houses both English and foreign. Besides collecting their relics, the clergy also encouraged saint-veneration by dedicating altars to them, as the Archbishop of Rouen did for Becket at Barfleur.²¹ More directly, they advertised the cult and miracles by means of the spoken word, through preaching.

The sermon, more and more common in later medieval England, was often very close to the realities of village life. We have seen that mothers were warned about crushing their infants, and so on. The priest might also inject an element of levity or entertainment into his spiritual instruction, perhaps assisted by one of the many collections of amusing but moralistic sermon-tales or *exempla*. It was standard form to embellish miracle stories if this would keep the flock from dozing. The recitation of miracles in sermons was hardly a novelty in the thirteenth century, since St. Augustine of Hippo and Ambrose of Milan were doing it about nine hundred years earlier. Some of the English miracles suggest that a sermon was going on in the background, as it were. A Berkshire knight lay at home ill in bed with a swollen arm on 3 January 1171, a Sunday, when

the lady of the house, having come home from church, broke out in gentle weeping. The knight, supposing that she was weeping out of sympathy for him, chided her in soothing language, declaring that the scourge of the Lord was good for him; he would be able to escape it when it pleased the Divine Pity. But the woman replied in these words: 'It is not, most beloved lord, it is not as you think. I am disturbed not only on your account, but I mourn for our father and the father of the whole realm, that is the Lord Canterbury, who was slain in his church with the swords of the most villainous conspirators.'

And she then explained everything she had heard. No doubt many congregations, as in this village some 115 miles from Canterbury, heard the news of the martyrdom from the local priest on this first Sunday after the murder. Becket remained to the end of the Middle Ages the 'national hero among the saints of the English pulpit'.²²

We may contrast the foregoing example of a simple village priest passing along news of Becket's death, with the following impressive exposition of one of St. Wulfstan's posthumous miracles. The resuscitation of a dead child at Wulfstan's tomb at Worcester (in 1220/21) having been investigated and proven to the satisfaction of Bishop William of Blois, a solemn procession was formed from the cloister into the church. Then, as it was Sunday, the mitred bishop himself followed. The procession ended, silence fell, and the bishop preached at length about the miracle. Afterwards he came down into the nave and briefly narrated the miracle to the royal justices who were holding court in the western part of the cathedral church. And then, beginning a *Te Deum* with a sonorous voice, the bishop processed with all the people to Wulfstan's shrine to give thanks to God.²³ When cures occurred, or as in the foregoing case were proven, on Sundays or feastdays, they naturally became known to an augmented congregation. It is clear that in the early history of most cults miracles tended to 'bunch up' on these special days, when more people were present. Although preaching about miracles is documented in many English (and in the French) cults, the sermons were not necessarily based upon recent miracles. Lessons read on major feastdays might include an account of a few famous miracles attributed to the commemorated saint, and these same events were repeated year after year. Preaching, to sum up, reinforced belief at cult centres and introduced the saint and his miracles to more distant congregations. In addition to the spoken word, however, the clergy had at their command an even more powerful tool for influencing opinion.

The advantages of clerical literacy were heightened by a network of communication which spread, in theory, from the pope to the lowliest vicar and then through all ranks of lay society. An abbot in Yorkshire could send a letter to a sister-house in Provence and expect it to be duly received and considered, perhaps in chapter, in 'the usual manner'. Few secular rulers could hope for the same, on such a wide scale. These letters from the clergy flew above and beyond the limited horizons of the peasantry who relied on the spoken vernacular, not the written Latin, word. Within the two spheres the same ends were attained but at different rates and by different means. Letters about saints and miracles aroused interest not merely in nearby regions but across whole territories, between realms. In Becket's cult there was a flurry of letter-writing on both sides of the Channel, French prelates reporting local miracles ascribed to Becket, English churchmen writing to encourage the cult among their French colleagues. One such letter went from Canterbury to the abbot of St. Remi in France and then to the convent at Mt. Dieu where one of the brethren read it and cured himself by applying it to his body. Nor was it merely single letters. Odo, once

prior of Canterbury, sent a copy of William's whole collection of Becket's miracles to the Cistercians of Igny in France; this was lost so he sent a second collection (this time the one made by Benedict) which was in turn copied and sent on to other French monasteries.²⁴

Looking for a moment at a small selection from the corpus of printed letters for Becket's cult, the prior and convent of Canterbury or sometimes the archbishop and even individual monks, received letters about miracles from, for example, the abbot of Welford (Sulby), the Bishop of Norwich, Reading monks, the abbot of Shrewsbury, a chaplain of Luton, the dean of Gloucester cathedral, the Bishop of Glasgow or his archdeacon, a member of the house at Much Wenlock, clergy of Exeter cathedral, abbots of French houses, Pontius, Bishop of Clermont, Hugh, Bishop of Durham, Richard, Bishop of Coventry, the prior and convent of Taunton, Robert, Prior of St. Frideswide's, the abbot of Derby, the treasurer of Lisieux cathedral, and so on. We must imagine the registrars receiving these letters and adding or copying them, often without comment, into their lists of miracles. In one of the French accounts of a miracle the writers ended by pleading 'that you cause this to be written down among the miracles of the precious martyr'.²⁵ And so it was. John of Salisbury exchanged several letters about Becket's *cultus* and miracles with French prelates in 1171 and 1172. When he moved to France as Bishop of Chartres he wrote to Canterbury between 1177 and 1179 to report a miracle he himself brought about with one of Becket's relics.²⁶ People wrote about other miracle-working saints as well, but there is no collection—for an English saint, at any rate—to match the letters which have survived for Becket. The importance of the letter-writing clergy and occasionally the laity (including English kings at times) cannot be overestimated. Their messages not only spread the news of miracles to distant regions and educated audiences, they also moved the saints within the range of a papal canonization.

An awareness of miracles at a particular place was broadcast in these diverse ways, from simple villager to villager, parish priest to town-dweller and up and down the ecclesiastical ladder in England and abroad. The result of this activity was the development of an area around each shrine within which tales of miracles worked by the holy dead became common knowledge. By tracing pilgrims back to their towns and villages and plotting these sites on a map we can obtain a rough picture of the region which included most of the people directly involved in the miracles of a particular cult (as it stood when the list of posthumous wonders was completed). It is not always easy to locate the places the pilgrims lived. What the editor of Becket's miracles said about this is just as true for the other cults examined in the present study:

The attempt to identify the places which are mentioned in the miraculous narratives... has cost me very considerable labour; but this labour has often been vain, and has no doubt often resulted in mistakes, for which... I have to beg the reader's indulgence.²⁷

There is often no mention of an origin, or the origin is sometimes indicated in general terms, as 'from Suffolk' or 'of France'; sometimes it is difficult or impossible to locate certain places even when a name is given because such a place has ceased to exist or more often because more than one place of the same name exists or once existed, or because orthographical changes have made identification questionable. The approximate proportion of pilgrims' origins we have managed to locate (including cases in which distance but not site is known) will be noted in each cult. Distances between origin-sites and shrines are expressed in simple linear terms, without regard for actual travelled distances. In this attempt to establish a geographical field of participation around each of the major cults we begin with that of William of Norwich.

Most of William's miracles were reported by local folk. More than half (57%) of his recorded pilgrims (94% located) lived less than ten miles from the shrine and most of these came from the city of Norwich itself. After ten miles or so there was a sharp decline in pilgrims' villages. This decline continued until, at a distance of about fifty miles, very few individuals felt sufficient thaumaturgic radiation from the child's bones to experience a cure or undergo a pilgrimage to seek one.

William's is one of the few cults in which we can trace the changing geographical pattern in time as well as in space. Thanks to Thomas of Monmouth's extraordinary affection for the dead boy the body was translated several times, and each translation can be dated and the miracles then assigned to periods between successive translations. When this is done it becomes evident that, as time passed, the average distance between pilgrim-villages and the shrine increased. People came from more and more distant places. In 1150-1 the average was twenty-three miles; in the period 1151 to 1154 it rose to thirty-two miles, and for the long stretch between 1154 and 1172 the average distance had increased to forty-five miles, twice the original average. In determining the above figures only pilgrims extraneous to Norwich were considered. By asking whether more pilgrims came from Norwich or from outside the city over these same periods, we find that in each successive stretch between translations fewer and fewer people who lived in the city of Norwich became involved in the miracles of the saint. At the peak, in 1150-1 when Thomas of Monmouth's efforts were first rewarded by public interest, two-thirds of those concerned in the wonders were Norwich denizens. By the last period, however, less than one-third of the pilgrims actually lived in Norwich, the majority being

'outsiders'. These figures, if plotted on a graph, will show a constantly declining participation-level on the part of Norwich citizens over the years. And as the folk touched by miracles tended to shift from the city there was also a concomitant shift in their social classes, from urban workers to rural peasantry, from shoemakers to shepherds.

These findings may be taken as demonstrating the expanding sphere of attraction around the shrine over the years, drawing more and more distant folk into the cult. This may indeed explain some of the shifts, but it is hardly realistic to suggest that—even in the barbarous state of medieval communications—it took several years for news to travel some thirty or forty miles into the countryside. There is another reason: a decline of interest at the centre of the cult. Perhaps after a few years the new saint, having ceased to be a novelty, no longer excited Norwich citizens in whose midst he resided in his easily-accessible shrine and therefore no longer worked wonders for them. The same circumstances have been observed at a modern shrine where,

except for the original cures, Lourdes has failed to heal those who live in its vicinity. This suggests that the emotional excitement connected with the preparatory period and journey to the shrine may be essential for healing to occur.

And the immediate neighbourhood provided no 'patients' among the possessed girls said to be cured in a cave in modern Spain.²⁸

There is little doubt that the frequency of Norwich miracles declined steeply after the outburst of 1150-1 stimulated by Thomas of Monmouth and other cathedral officials. The wonders of William dropped from about one every ten days to one every five months or so, though these are averages and can only give a very general impression. Summing up, then, between about 1150 and the end of the 1170s, diminishing numbers of Norwich people were involved in William's miracles as more outsiders tended to show up in the records. At the same time, fewer and fewer miracles reached the ears of Thomas of Monmouth. In this sense, at least, the cult languished and nearly died out.

To pass to the next saint is to move from small things to great, from a one-city cult to one which attracted notice throughout England and in foreign lands as well. At first glance Becker's widespread fame would seem by its very magnitude to present insuperable problems. If the whole of Christendom acknowledged him, can a geographical pattern be identified for all those masses of pilgrims? Sympathy for Becker, or at least knowledge of his plight, had affected Christians from one end of Europe to the other, so that the emotional reaction to his death has the appearance of being spontaneous, after which miracles occurred everywhere at once. Nearly every British town of any size from Dover

to Scotland contributed pilgrims, sometimes several pilgrims, to the two miracle collections. In addition, no other cult involved so many 'foreign' visitors. Nearly a third were external, most of them from northern France. Many French prelates, as we have seen, exchanged news about the miracles and some of their enthusiasm must have rubbed off on their associates as well as on the laymen whose souls were within their jurisdiction. The social status of the laymen who came from other lands was, on the whole, higher than that found among English lay pilgrims, another way of saying that people from distant parts tended to come from higher social ranks (in Becker's cult at any rate). Many places in France such as Clermont, Eu, Lisieux, Poitiers, Pontigny, and Rouen sent three or more cured visitors to Becker's tomb. Northern France contributed many pilgrims because of geographical proximity to Dover and because of the associations between the northern regions (Becker's ancestors were Norman) and Becker as Chancellor as well as exiled archbishop. He left behind him scores of relics and after his death any French church possessing such treasures was quick to make use of them.

We have discussed the importance of the dispersal of relics in the fortunes of a cult. In Becker's case this is obvious. English churches and monasteries came almost as a matter of routine to possess—or be expected to possess—the Canterbury ampoules, and they found their way to the continent as well. Each phial, when carried about as a talisman, was in effect a perambulatory shrine. Whether stationary or not, the pious might use Canterbury water as a source of miraculous virtue instead of travelling to Canterbury. Rather than postulating ever-widening circles of influence growing outward from Becker's shrine, a better model includes many intermediate epicycles representing places where several cures were wrought, often by the miraculous water. Other Becker-relics had the same effect, like those carried home by a Cheshire nobleman which were credited with no fewer than twenty-two miracles at Whitchurch, on the Welsh border. This must have happened at many other places in England and abroad. Chapels and crosses erected in Becker's honour were as effective as material relics: a French knight cured at Becker's shrine went home and built an oratory in the martyr's name; that very night a paralysed woman was cured and over 300 local folk came to marvel at the miracle. Cures happened, too, at the small altars or *aediculae* mentioned by pilgrims, wayside shrines on the route to Canterbury, as well as at places associated with events in the archbishop's life such as Newington, mentioned earlier.²⁹ These circumstances make it difficult to recognize a 'pattern' among the pilgrims since there were so many ways to broadcast Becker's cult and they were all in play at the same time. Another complication arises from Church support. No other saint

could number so many bishops, abbots or other highly-placed churchmen among his followers, actively exchanging letters, relics and accounts of miracles.³⁰ The significance of the letter-writing campaign is obvious. An immobile little clique of Norwich monks, for instance, might be able to interest the local city people in William's cult, but their powers were limited. It made a great deal of difference whether a cult was supported by ten monks or ten bishops, and Becket's fell into the latter class. Becket also claimed a high proportion of the upper social levels among the laity, precisely those elements in medieval society with greatest wealth, mobility and influence outside the Church.

Although this cult is complicated, with great interest shown by the *literati*, with French associations, with several secondary shrines and an abundance of relics circulating from one end of Europe to the other, still it is possible, by examining the 700-odd pilgrims listed by Benedict and William, to reach certain conclusions about the geographical patterns of participation built up around the English Delphi, Canterbury.

Subtracting all pilgrims for whom no origin is given (99) and all those whose origins cannot be pinpointed on a map (71) leaves 531 individuals. About a third of them (171) came from places outside the British Isles, leaving 360 recorded British men, women and children who were personally involved in a Becket miracle, and whose places of origin are known. Generally speaking, more than half (56%) came from south-eastern England, hardly surprising since this was the most highly-populated area of the country. But the localization even in this great cult is striking: one-quarter of all of the recorded British pilgrims originated in Kent or Canterbury itself. After Kent the greatest numbers of pilgrims came from London, followed by Berkshire and Oxfordshire, Sussex, Essex and Suffolk. There were relatively fewer pilgrims from more distant counties such as Devon, Somerset, Cornwall, Hereford, Shropshire, Durham and Northumberland, though York contributed rather more than the other northern, midland and western regions.

Within England, then, although many cured pilgrims travelled many days to pray at the tomb, most of them came from areas at no great distance from Canterbury, many from Kent itself. In this respect Becket's cult was not much different from many others. As mentioned, many bystanders dipped cloths and fingers into the archbishop's blood at the cathedral on the night of the murder and later wrought cures with these relics. These Canterbury people, a short walk from their homes in Rutington Lane or Monastery Street, were the first modest ripples before the tidal wave of the later 1170s. On the other hand, even from the very first there were indications of the long-distance influence of the cult. As early as the fourth day after his death, Becket's power



- 2 Places containing two or more individuals affected by the miracles of Thomas Becket in the twelfth century (open circles = two individuals, solid circles = three or more)

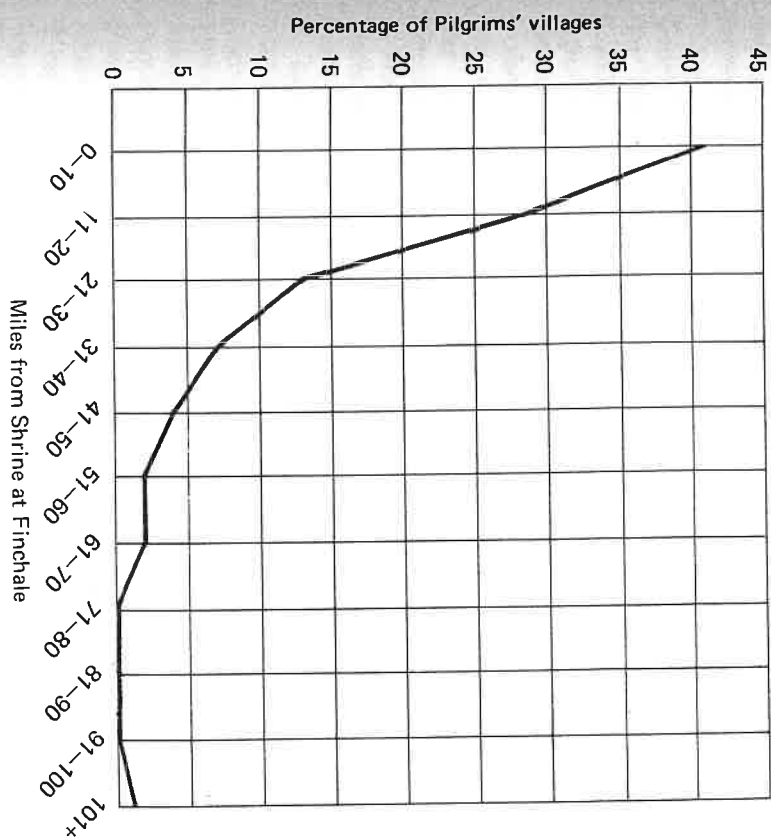
wrought a cure in Gloucester, about 170 miles away, and next day someone in Berkshire, 115 miles distant, felt the dead archbishop's healing hand.³¹

The pilgrims did not, therefore, come 'from everywhere' to become involved in Becker's thaumaturgy. Nor did the excitement reach all parts of Christendom at once. It is true that relatively few of the miracles were dated either by Benedict or William, but Benedict, who began writing a year earlier than William, tried through the first few months at least to keep his records in chronological order. From an examination of the first 100 entries in Benedict's list (which brings us to about mid-May 1171) it is clear that there was at first a noticeable degree of localization, with twenty-two pilgrims coming from Canterbury and seventeen more from the rest of Kent, a total of thirty-nine 'local' pilgrims out of 100. Only a single person among those with an identifiable origin was 'foreign'. William's later list presents a different picture: at least nineteen of the first hundred pilgrims were 'foreign' and only eleven originated in Kent and Canterbury. We already know a thing or two about William and will not be surprised to see him preferring the foreign to the local visitor. Although he listed not quite twice as many pilgrims as Benedict, in total, William included seven times as many foreigners. In addition to illuminating William's prejudices, however, these differences probably also indicate a real shift away from purely domestic participation—evident in Benedict's earlier compilation—to European interest in the cult.

As noted in an earlier chapter, there was a shift in the social levels among the pilgrims from the lower, during the first few months, to the upper at a later stage in the cult's development. While this was going on the geographical origins of Becker's suppliants were also changing, moving outward from the immediate vicinity of his simple tomb and eventually involving, as the twelfth-century monk wrote, 'the whole world'.

The pilgrims who visited Godric's tomb at Finchale, like those at William's shrine at Norwich, were local people. Nearly all of them (89% of the two hundred-odd pilgrims with known origins) came from villages within forty miles of Finchale, but, unlike William's followers they were more evenly spread over the Durham countryside (graph number three). There was a heavy concentration of William's pilgrims in Norwich and then an abrupt decline as the city was left behind. In Godric's case there was also a decline, but a far smoother, gradual and regular one, which suggests a relatively constant diminution of interest or enthusiasm at increasing distances from the shrine. Both were local cults but Godric's was, if it may be put this way, less local.

A chronological framework is absent from Godric's miracles but by



3 Geographical distribution of 204 pilgrims' villages in a 'local' twelfth-century cult (Godric of Finchale)

assuming that they were recorded more or less in order of occurrence—the compiler uses no obvious system of categorization—then at least their sequence may be of some help. Examining the miracles as they are listed, it would appear, first of all, that there was no significant difference between the average distances of the earlier, and of the later, pilgrims. It cannot be shown, in other words, that earlier pilgrims came from local villages, later pilgrims from distant ones, the sort of thing noted for William and even Becker. The second point is that there was a shift in the proportion of male to female pilgrims. When the cult started out in 1172, the majority of the pilgrims were women (forty-four out of the first fifty listed) but gradually the ratio changed. More and more men appeared until, among the last fifty pilgrims, men outnumbered women (thirty to twenty). It may be that women, having found an alternative to the unkind misogynist St. Cuthbert of Durham, led the



3 A local cult: Godric of Finchale (open circles = town or village with one person affected by Godric's miracles, solid circles = two or more people affected)

way and that men turned to Godric after several cures had demonstrated to them that the cult was no mere flight of female fancy.

Regardless of changing levels of participation, the majority of Godric's pilgrims were women and most of his suppliants were indigenous northerners whose very names recall their mixed Anglo-Scandinavian past: Acke, Addoc, Briciva, Crin, Eccoc, Goda and Iggu, Sungiva and Thoke, Tunnoc and Ulfkill. Their villages lay between the Pennines and the sea, and not much more than forty miles to the north and south of the Finchale shrine. Godric's miracle-working powers never seem to have reached much beyond this northern region. The cult remained simple, local, unpretentious—like the hermit himself.

There is little to be gained by a detailed study of Frideswide's or Wulfstan's cults. Both were local, drawing upon nearby villages for most of their pilgrims. Half of Frideswide's visitors lived twenty miles or less from her shrine, three-quarters less than forty miles. In Wulfstan's case there is very little evidence to go on since over half his pilgrims had either no stated origins or were described in very vague terms. Of the few who can be traced back to particular villages and towns it seems that—as in Frideswide's cult—three-quarters lived less than forty miles from Worcester. Mere physical or geographical descriptions cannot, of course, tell the whole story about these two or indeed about any of the other cults. Frideswide continued to be mentioned in a variety of documents up to the fifteenth century and Wulfstan became an officially-approved saint, to be remembered by the Church Universal on his feast day. But in their beginnings there was nothing remarkable in their cults or their recorded pilgrims.

When we turn to Simon de Montfort's cult, there are reasons for expecting more unusual geographical patterns since the circumstances of his popular 'canonization' were hardly routine. Political interests, which ran like a minor chord through Becker's posthumous career, have in Simon's case come to the fore as a major theme. Much of this political propagandizing has been mentioned in earlier chapters, as well as the deliberate comparisons of Simon with Becker. In addition Simon's was a cult in which more men participated than women, many of these males coming from the upper classes and the ranks of the Church. Against such a background, does the pattern of pilgrim-origins (just over half mapped) show anything of these influences? In the first place, though more pilgrims lived within twenty than within forty miles of the shrine as in 'local' cults generally, the differences were negligible. There was no great concentration around Evesham with a gradual decline over increasing distances. In the second place, *most* of Simon's pilgrims lived *more* than forty miles from his tomb. In every cult so far examined (except Becker's) most

pilgrims came from places less than forty miles from the shrines.

Though he was buried in their midst, many of the anti-royalist knighthood and noble families of the immediate area probably chose to honour Simon with prudent reserve. The *Dictum de Kenilworth* called for an end to his cult in no uncertain terms and many people were unwilling to risk royal displeasure or ill-treatment at the hands of roving, victorious king's men. This also occurred during the early stages of Becket's cult, when anyone who praised the dead prelate might be intimidated by self-appointed protectors of the king's interests. Even with all these risks, however, many of Simon's pilgrims did come from this unsettled region, an irregular area bounded by Derby, Oxford, Hereford and Northampton. Other more distant regions which had also supported Simon's cause while he lived and sent their contingents of suppliants to his tomb, were London, whose citizens had been notoriously pro-Montfortian, and, surprisingly, Canterbury. Considering Becket's nearby shrine this emphasizes the political—rather than pious or therapeutic—interest in de Montfort. Perhaps this is what is to be expected of the chief city of the rebellious county of Kent which was only subdued by the king with difficulty after Simon's death. A few pilgrims even came from the little hilltop village of Brill, over forty miles from Evesham. It is probably not just a coincidence that Brill had been condemned as 'contumacious', that is, anti-royal, after Simon's death.³²

Ecclésiastics were prominent among Simon's pilgrims. Simon had established close ties with many churchmen and he had also attracted the sympathetic attention of the friars, whose habits of perambulation and preaching were eminently suited to spreading the influence of his posthumous cult over wide regions and through many social levels. Because of special interest among people living in widely separated parts of England the geographical pattern for Simon's pilgrims is not a neat, regular falling off in participation at greater distances from his shrine. It is a combination of mild local interest with continuing involvement up to and beyond one hundred miles from Evesham.

The patterns of some of the English cults are also found in the two French examples. In one, the cult of Edmund Rich, there is no need for much comment. His pilgrim-field was quite similar to what was observed in Frideswide's and Wulfstan's cults. Most of his suppliants were local people, many drawn from the villages and towns through which he had passed while alive and dead. Louis of Toulouse, however, like William of Norwich, was a one-city saint as far as miracle-touched suppliants were concerned. Most of the pilgrims with identifiable origins (93%) came from Marselles itself—about three-quarters of the total. This suggests that the miracles, which are undated in the manuscript, were recorded not long after his entombment of 1297. His life

and death had attracted some notoriety and it may be that miracles eventually began to affect people from places far beyond Marselles, but the evidence does not indicate this. Many of the city folk who were cured by the saint lived along the waterfront and in the eastern district between *Porte de la Franche* and *Porte du Laurel* (to be decorated in future years with a statue of the sainted 'prince'). They were craftsmen, artisans, skilled and unskilled city types, and the lower—unspecified—levels, who lived in streets with homely names like Skinnners' Street or Fishmonger Row (*Rue pelliparia*, *Rue pecherie*). Some came from the less-crowded suburbs, the *Bourg Ste. Claire*, or the *Bourg de Sion* beyond the eastern walls of the busy seaport. It was a crowded, not particularly healthy place where, as we have seen, one-quarter of all the pilgrims complained of (probably malarial) 'fevers'. In spite of the modest following suggested by his miracle-touched suppliants, however, Louis became a canonized saint and eventually attracted the greatest nobles of France to his shrine.

Cults differed as to the origins of their recorded pilgrims. One way to 'rate' this difference is to answer this question: if we were to set an imaginary pilgrim in motion and direct him to walk away from a shrine, at what point would he find that one-half of the pilgrim-villages were behind him? The case of William of Norwich and Louis of Toulouse cannot be considered since they were so closely associated with a single city, and there is not enough information to help with Wulfstan's cult. But for Godric, for example, our hypothetical pilgrim would only have to walk beyond a circle with a radius of about fifteen miles from Finchale to leave behind him half of all the villages containing a miraculously-cured resident. At Oxford he would walk twenty miles to reach the half-way point and for Cantilupe just beyond twenty miles from Hereford. About forty-five miles from Simon's tomb at Evesham would take the pilgrim to the imaginary circumference; the distance cannot easily be calculated for Becket. Turned around, these figures mean that the pilgrim-villages would become noticeable some distance from Becket's shrine, but our traveller would have to draw closer to Evesham to encounter such places, closer still to Hereford or Oxford before many villagers personally knew of the powers of Cantilupe of Frideswide, and closest yet in Godric's case.

Not only were there differences in pilgrim-sites from one cult to the next, there were also changes within each cult. Although the dead saints attracted local people at the start of their careers as wonder-workers, eventually more and more 'outsiders' were noted in the records as enthusiasm declined at the centre. At the same time, at least in some cases, fewer and fewer women were involved; with this change there was a correlated change in the social levels of the pilgrims as well

as in the types of miracles they reported. While all this was going on the frequency of miraculous cures declined. These conclusions, reached by piecing together information from separate cults, are tentative since medieval scribes so often failed to identify the pilgrims clearly and were especially careless about dating their reported miracles. There is one medieval English cult, however, with an appreciable number of miracles, most of them clearly dated, which would allow us to put these conclusions on a firmer basis. That cult was made up of the followers of the thirteenth-century prelate, Thomas Cantilupe, Bishop of Hereford.

Chapter 10

The Changing Fortunes of a Curative Shrine: St. Thomas Cantilupe

Even from two hundred leagues away people came on pilgrimage to the Hereford church and hastened to his tomb as if to a saint.

Witness at 1307 inquiry

A life of Thomas Cantilupe published in Ghent in 1674 is still the only substantial study of the saint. Most modern articles about him and his cult are based upon a fourteenth-century manuscript edited in *Acta Sanctorum* in the eighteenth century, but unfortunately both the author of the 1674 book and the *Acta* editor used second-hand materials provided by others who had transcribed the Vatican manuscript for them. *Acta* is a difficult source to use because only parts of the original process were transcribed, the sequence of events was disrupted, and errors are all too common. For instance, the 'Willelmi de Vrap, de Enthfolk' of the printed version turns out in the manuscript to be 'Willelmi le Draper de Suthfolk'. The arbitrary rearrangements which the editor made in his materials have misled nearly every historian who has used the printed edition of the process for his information about the cult, and the errors, once committed, have been perpetuated by successive modern writers. In what follows we have relied upon the manuscript (in microfilm) for details concerning this cult, supplemented by additional printed documents.¹ A proper edition of the entire work would provide historians with what appears to be the longest complete process of canonization of any medieval English saint—the only Englishman canonized in the fourteenth century and one of the last saints of medieval England—and, after Becker's, the largest collection of English miracles to have survived until the present day.

Some of the miracles provide wonderfully detailed descriptions of the events of a single day—even a single hour—in the lives of the

ordinary villagers of Herefordshire, whether we credit their 'miracles' or not. Take the Saturday morning of 28 May, 1300, for instance. The view from the village church of How Caple has probably changed very little during the past seven hundred years. Rough pasture slopes down to the River Wyre some four hundred yards to the south, the hamlet of Ingestone lies just visible through the trees on the other side of the river, still as insignificant a place as it was when Edward I was king, and on all sides the hills seem to shut out the rest of the world. This peaceful scene was transformed on that May morning by the shouts of How Caple villagers scrambling down the field to the riverbank, where John Fisher was dragging his son's body from the water. Margaret Francis from Ingestone had seen him slip and fall in, as he searched for something in his father's boat tied to the bank, but she could do nothing since no one heard her screams and there was no bridge to bring her across the river to his aid. The rigid victim, measured to Bishop Thomas Cantilupe, recovered within a few hours. On Tuesday the parents and their neighbours walked eight or nine miles to Hereford cathedral, told the canons the story, and then joined in the general celebration of yet another miracle attributed to the dead bishop.² When the Fisher family arrived at the cathedral they would have found the saint's tomb in the north transept surrounded by a mass of candles, wax votives and jewellery and guarded by a *custos* or two. It was not always like this. When Thomas was buried in his episcopal church in 1282 his tomb lay elsewhere. It was devoid of pilgrims' offerings, and his bones worked no miracles.

Thomas had gone to Italy to appeal to the pope against Archbishop Pecham in a conflict over ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Here he died, on 25 August 1282, at 'Castro Florenti' (Forento), six miles south-east of Montefiascone on Lake Bolsena (seventy miles north of Rome). The body was transported to the monastery of San Severo near Orvieto and the flesh and viscera, separated from the skeleton, were buried in the abbey church. The heart and bones were taken to England, the former to Ashridge—heart-burial was a not uncommon medieval form of commemoration—the latter to Hereford.³ The bones were buried in the Lady Chapel in the east end of the cathedral under a large flat stone of a type customarily used for prelates and the nobility. Nothing more is heard about the dead man for three years, until 1285 when three bishops allowed indulgences in exchange for prayers for his soul, and next year another bishop offered a further indulgence. These were probably issued at the request of Cantilupe's successor Richard Swinfield, Bishop of Hereford from 1282 to 1317, one of the main promoters of the cult. In 1286 he instructed two Hereford proctors in Italy to find out whether any miracles had occurred at San Severo and to inquire about the pope's attitude toward Cantilupe's canonization.

Meanwhile, he had his own plans for his predecessor: on 3 April 1287 he moved Cantilupe's bones to a new tomb constructed in the north transept of the cathedral. On the same day a handful of people claimed miraculous cures. The popular cult was under way.

During the next fifteen years Swinfield wrote to the pope, sent Hereford proctors to the papal curia, busied himself in lobbying for his 'saint' at English church councils and parliaments, and solicited further letters from his fellow-prelates. It was not until King Edward I became involved, however, that the papal wheels began to turn. Edward I and Thomas Cantilupe had both, at one time or another, supported Simon de Montfort's programme. After Edward became king, Cantilupe was one of his counsellors. The king wrote to the pope in 1305 requesting Thomas's canonization so that his friend on earth could be his patron in heaven. Edward also wrote to seventeen cardinals.⁴

At first glance 1305 was not a propitious year for asking favours of the Supreme Pontiff since the newly-elected French Pope Clement V was wandering about the plains of his beloved homeland, Gascony, reluctant to go to that volatile capital of the Italians, Rome (he was to enter Avignon, not Rome, in 1309). He was attended by a skeleton administrative staff who had with them only the essential collections of official documents, the viatory archives, for routine matters. Although Clement was unable to consult the Cantilupe dossier because he did not have it, papal organization and expertise easily overcame these obstacles. He wrote to three cardinals at Rome and instructed them to look into the matter. They replied that they found in the bishop's file letters from the English king, the Archbishop of York, fifteen bishops, seven abbots, eleven earls and several barons and nobles urging canonization (the fruits of Swinfield's labours). Meanwhile the Hereford chapter, with an eye on the way things were going, set up their own commission to investigate local miracles in September of 1306.⁵ They could not yet have known that on 23 August 1306, in Bordeaux, the pope had at last issued his mandate for an inquiry into the life and miracles of Cantilupe, appointing three commissioners to carry out the examination in England, and setting the time limits. A week later, however, someone reminded the pope that Cantilupe might have died excommunicated (by Archbishop Pecham, with whom he had quarrelled). Obviously it would not do to sanctify one who may have been forever barred from heaven. Clement sent a second letter instructing his agents to hold a preliminary hearing and, if they found no evidence for the alleged excommunication, to proceed to the canonization inquiry.⁶ The excommunication hearing began in London on 15 April 1307, and Cantilupe was found to have died reconciled to the Church. This cleared the way for the second stage.⁷

The three men who formally opened the canonization hearing in

London on 13 July 1307 constituted, in modern terms, a board of inquiry sitting to collect sworn testimony. It would be up to the papal curia to decide whether this testimony was evidence which warranted canonization. The commissioners were William de Testa, a papal tax collector whose fiscal duties took him away from the inquiry on various occasions; Ralph Baldock, Bishop of London, who—as it happened—became Chancellor of England a week after the excommunication inquiry opened, found himself even more distracted by the death of King Edward I a week before the canonization inquiry opened, and was called away on matters of state several times throughout the hearing. The third member of the panel was William Durand the Younger, Bishop of the French see of Mende, who appears to have been the only member of the trio who sat through the entire process. The hearing itself was conducted in a relatively formal way. On one side sat the commissioners, and by them the three or four notaries who jotted down the testimony *verbatim* in clerical shorthand and later compared notes and prepared a formal transcript. Sometimes the notaries went to the homes of sick witnesses to record their statements and some of them also acted as interpreters, for although clerical and upper-class witnesses gave evidence in Latin or French, most laymen spoke English, and one witness testified in Welsh. It all had to be turned into good ecclesiastical Latin: an English witness who said 'alas, alas' meant, one of the notaries explained, '*heu, heu*'.⁸ Facing the bench was the proctor or official representative of the Hereford canons, sometimes assisted by a co-proctor. And in the middle, the witness. He or she was called in, took an oath on a Bible and was then asked a pre-arranged set of questions, or interrogatories, about the life and miracles of Cantilupe. Other witnesses were brought in and asked the same questions: it is little wonder that the hearing took the full four months allowed by the pope.

Both sides, the commissioners and the Hereford proctors, called witnesses, just as both sides—plaintiff and defendant—call their own witnesses in modern trials. Naturally, the proctors' witnesses (Cantilupe's friends or associates and people cured by him) spoke favourably of the dead bishop. The commissioners' witnesses, however, in theory people who could provide an unbiased account, were not always full of praise for Thomas. Most of these witnesses were systematically summoned by the commissioners from the monasteries and friaries of London and Hereford, and many Franciscans called by the commission denied knowing anything about his miracles, or replied in a derogatory manner to questions about them. Perhaps they were still irritated by his old conflict with the Franciscan Archbishop Peckham. Altogether, by the end of the hearing the notaries had listed 223 witnesses (in *Acta Sanctorum* an extra hundred witnesses were

added in error), which is somewhat misleading since the witnesses who testified more than once were given a different number each time. In fact, the Hereford proctors called 164 witnesses, the commissioners called thirty-nine *proprio motu*, and two witnesses were called by both sides, a total of 205. Only thirteen men were called by the Hereford proctors to give testimony about the virtuous and saintly life of Thomas, without reference to his miracles.⁹

To return to the chronological development of the process, after more than three dozen people in London told what they knew of the life and posthumous miracles, the hearing was adjourned on 12 August for a change of venue to Hereford, where it re-opened on the 28 August. Next day the commissioners carefully inspected and inventoried the offerings at the shrine (a second inventory was taken at the end of the hearing), interviewed the past and present *custodes tumuli*, then settled down to hear more testimony about the bishop's life and miracles.

About September 15 the notaries began to record testimony under a new rubric, 'The Beginning of the Second Part of this Process, on the Proof of the Miracles'.¹⁰ They used this heading even though they had already collected a great deal of information about miracles in London and Hereford. Several of the miracle witnesses were passing through or lived in London when the commission first opened the hearing there in July, and at Hereford some of the witnesses who were called to discuss Thomas's *vita* included a *miraculum* or two as well. This unobtrusive detail about the rubric is interesting—for two reasons. It shows that there was still room for procedural flexibility—even clumsiness—in a canonization inquiry in the early fourteenth century, and secondly it illustrates yet again why the printed version of this process is difficult to use. The *Acta* editor, perhaps misled by his secondhand sources, separated the testimony about Cantilupe's life from that concerning his miracles, disregarding the fact that the two were mingled day by day through half the hearing. He thereby made a muddle of the chronological sequence and form of the inquiry, and the process has remained more or less incomprehensible until the present study.

The last 'official' day of the hearing was 13 November 1307. For four months the commissioners had listened to testimony about Cantilupe's life and twenty-five of his posthumous miracles. Now, on the final day, the Hereford proctors offered as further proof of his spiritual powers a list of 207 miracles arranged by type—raising the dead, cures of the blind, and so on. Nor was this all: they persuaded the board to allow them to present witnesses to twelve more miracles, witnesses selected from the 'great part of the citizens of Hereford congregated in the cathedral to give evidence'.¹¹ The commissioners, meanwhile, noticed that many of the 207 miracles were undated, so

they requested the proctors to remedy this. Apparently it was easier for the Hereford canons to copy and submit their entire chronological list of miracles (out of which they had chosen the 207). When duplicates are eliminated from this mixture of oral and written posthumous wonders, about 470 miracles remain. This bulky file—now containing testimony from 205 witnesses to Cantilupe's life and thirty-seven miracles, two long lists of miracles (one chronological and the other topical), two inventories of the shrine, copies of official letters from the pope and Hereford chapter and postulatory letters from various prelates—was finally sent in December 1307 to the papal curia with a 'covering letter' summarizing the year's work. At the same time the new king, Edward II, urged the pope to expedite the inquiry 'undertaken by the urging' of his father King Edward I; he also sent similar letters to no less than twenty-five cardinals.¹²

King Edward II continued his epistolary prompting of pope and cardinals and in 1312 also wrote to the King of France, who was by then exercising greater control over the Avignonesse papacy and who, apparently, had expressed an interest in Cantilupe in the recent Council of Vienne (1311-12).¹³ As a result of this the file was taken out and inspected in 1313, the contents were listed, but once again the dossier was put away to gather more archival dust.¹⁴ Edward persisted, sending not only letters but special envoys to hurry up the long-delayed canonization. At last on 19 March 1320 Pope John XXII in consistory in Avignon opened the formal scrutiny of Cantilupe's case. A few well-attested miracles were discussed by the cardinals (only those attested by *viva voce* witnesses; the two long lists were ignored), and by March 22 the pope expressed his satisfaction that Thomas should be enrolled among the saints, but because Easter was near (30 March) these findings were kept secret until after the Paschal celebrations. On April 16 the pope opened the formal ceremony of canonization and brought it to a conclusion next day, on which he established Cantilupe's feastday as 2 October.¹⁵ At long last the Bishop of Hereford was a canonized saint, and although Bishop Swinfield may have been responsible for 'creating' a popular saint out of Cantilupe, it is no less certain that royal interest had made him an official saint as well. Edward I and II between them wrote to various popes seven times or more and sent at least fifty-nine letters to the cardinals on Cantilupe's behalf. In addition, both the Hereford cathedral chapter and the kings kept proctors at the papal curia for years and paid particular cardinals to forward their interests, including this canonization.

After news of the canonization arrived in England, some prelates issued indulgences to stimulate pilgrimage to the new saint, and the Bishop of Hereford, Adam of Orleton, wrote round to his colleagues and to all the parishes of his diocese inviting everyone to Hereford for

the first celebration of the saint's feast on 2 October. A parliament called for 6 October may have prevented some bishops from being present in Hereford, but a few managed to break away from parliamentary affairs long enough to send indulgences from London.¹⁶ A translation of the corpse to a more prominent place was usually the next step. King Edward II authorized seven Hereford proctors to circulate through England and Wales to collect donations toward a new shrine and he instructed his own bailiffs to co-operate with the proctors. The collection must have been profitable, for in the single archdeanery of Norfolk (the diocese was divided into four arch-deaneries) the collector came away with over £45, by medieval standards a considerable sum of money.¹⁷ Preparations went ahead: materials were purchased, craftsmen were hired, indulgences were issued, but year after year the bones remained where they had been since 1287. Finally, after a crescendo of letters from the king to the pope, the pope to the Bishop of Hereford, the bishop to his episcopal colleagues, and after their replies and excuses for non-attendance, the day of the translation was set for Sunday, 25 October 1349.¹⁸

In the presence of many clerical and lay notables—Edward III had fallen ill but miraculously recovered on his way to the ceremony—the cathedral clergy and honoured guests assembled in the north transept. The tomb was opened and inside they found a wooden chest—so fragile that it crumbled to powder at the lightest touch. The bones and skull were taken out of this container, passed among the privileged on-lookers to be kissed with pious joy, then placed in the new shrine in the Lady Chapel at the east end of the church. Sixty-two years after he began to work miracles, St. Thomas Cantilupe was at last put to rest in the same chapel where he had originally been entombed, but now in a shrine which suited his celestial status. There, a medieval prayer predicted, he would remain until Resurrection Day. The translation was thought to have had far-ranging beneficial effects, for afterwards 'they said' that God stayed his vengeful angel's hand and the Black Death, which had raged for more than a year, abated in England.¹⁹

This was the last time that Cantilupe's name and sanctity stirred up popular excitement and devotion, at least in medieval England. His feast was celebrated every year in all the English churches and three times yearly at Hereford, when the miracles listed in the papal bull were read to the assembled public; his image was put up in stone and coloured glass in some Herefordshire churches, though all of these marks of official recognition came decades after the great outburst of miracle-working in the late thirteenth century.²⁰

The development of Cantilupe's *popular* cult—his career as a dead miracle-worker, distinguished from the steps leading up to his formal canonization and translation—can be reconstructed from the posthu-

mous miracles themselves and from other records. During the 1290s there was a considerable influx of pilgrims. Some of the more famous were Edward I, his two queens, Eleanor of Castile and Margaret of France, his brother Edmund of Lancaster, Gilbert of Gloucester and other noblemen.²¹ The income from oblations of both famous and insignificant pilgrims, and wax offerings, was sufficient to excite a controversy among the Hereford canons who eventually, however, agreed on a just division of the spoils. In nearby Worcester it was said that pilgrims *en route* to Hereford left about £10 per year, some giving a farthing, a half- or a whole penny before moving on to Cantilupe's shrine. If these figures can be trusted (which is doubtful), and if most gave a halfpenny, this suggests about 1,200 Hereford-bound pilgrims annually leaving an offering at Worcester alone.²² Pieces of Cantilupe's clothing were dispersed among friends and family, and even a few of his bones had come into private hands, presumably during the trip from Italy to England. At his birthplace, Hambleton, his image and a knife he used to eat with were working miracles, and votive offerings were hanging there just as at Hereford. In fact the Bishop of Lincoln had to prohibit pilgrimages to Hambleton in 1296—the cult was not officially authorized at that time—though the bishop himself had written to the pope asking for Cantilupe's canonization a few years earlier.²³

In 1307 when the commissioners were gathering evidence, many witnesses tended to refer to past, rather than to present, glories of the saint. By that date, too, there are indications that the offerings left by pilgrims were already in decline. A comparison of the two inventories of the oblations at the shrine (taken seventy-eight days apart) leaves us less impressed than the seventy-year-old witness who claimed that a six-horse wagon would hardly suffice for all the votives.²⁴ On the one hand, the commissioners noted that during their stay pilgrims brought in one wax and two silver ships, one silver and eighty-five wax images of people, two children's shifts, and candles. But on the other hand, the *total* number of such wax images at the shrine, besides coins and candles (the most common offering) had actually declined—by 127—while the inquiry was being held in Hereford. In addition, one *custos* claimed that only one-tenth of all wax offerings remained, another (the shrine-keeper of 1307, in fact) said one-third, the rest having been consumed with age or put to other uses.²⁵ During the two-and-a-half months of 1307 there had been no increase in offerings of wax animals or birds, crutches, carts of wax, cloths of gold and silk, chains and anchors and, more surprisingly, rings and other jewels, a common gift from well-off pilgrims. Based upon the commissioners' own inventories, then, there is an impression of a slowing down or stagnation in ordinary offerings at the tomb and, for one very popular oblation—wax images—there was actually an overall decline.

Although pilgrims still went to the tomb all through the rest of the Middle Ages, voluntarily and as penitents,²⁶ and crowds had been attracted by the 1349 translation, the fortunes of the shrine eventually dwindled. Even before his canonization new would-be saints were beginning to steal Cantilupe's potential pilgrims. About 1316 a local Herefordshire man who fell into the Wye and 'drowned' was measured not to the defunct bishop of his local cathedral but to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Winchelsey, who had died in 1313.²⁷ In 1336 the pope indirectly acknowledged the decline in offerings and by 1387 the cathedral Fabric Fund took in less than £2 in oblations from the shrine, whereas in 1291 the figure had been over £178.²⁸ At the end of the Middle Ages a hospital's income was united to the cathedral's revenue because, among other losses, offerings at Cantilupe's shrine had fallen so low that lights could not be purchased for his chapel and other altars. In 1535 in his will the Bishop of Hereford left a gold ring with a sapphire to Cantilupe 'to ornate his shryne'²⁹ which must have been scantily ornamented by then. The great wealth of silver ships and golden jewellery had gone long before, to meet cathedral expenses. Perhaps the bishop's ring was one of fifteen found by the Dissolution Commissioners when they stripped the shrine of its valuables in 1538. In 1307 there had been over 500 rings of silver and gold, some with precious stones.

The miracles themselves provide much more information about the development of the popular side of the cult. Once miracles began, others follow. The first thing to note is the lapse of five years between Cantilupe's entombment and his posthumous wonders. Obviously this was not a case of spontaneous thaumatourgy. His corpse lay in the east end of the cathedral without giving the slightest hint of supernatural powers from 1282 until 1287, and then for some reason the wonders began. Someone had to stimulate the popular cult, and Bishop Swinfield seems a likely choice. Before 1287, as noted, he procured indulgences and directed his agents into preliminary negotiations abroad; he also had a new tomb built to a rather unusual design, almost but not quite a shrine.³⁰ Before he moved the bones into this new tomb in 1287 he took the trouble to invite certain friends along and he scheduled the event for 3 April 1287 knowing full well, no doubt, that since Easter was very near (it fell on 6 April in 1287) the cathedral would be packed when Cantilupe's bones were shifted.³¹

A week before the translation, however, Cantilupe obligingly performed his first posthumous miracle, or so it seemed, for we must admit that the event was very liberally interpreted in the dead bishop's favour. On March 28 Edith, a *furiosa* or mentally-disturbed woman, was playing at the altar of the Holy Rood in the cathedral, her husband

having taken her there along with her measured-candle dedicated to the Holy Rood. During her wait at this altar, however, a 'certain cleric' of the cathedral suggested that she might be cured at Bishop Cantilupe's tomb, at that time still a simple affair in Lady Chapel. She was obviously not as disturbed as one might think, being rational enough to follow this advice. She went there but nothing happened. Shortly after returning to the Holy Rood, however, the *furiosa* felt sufficiently improved to claim that she was cured. The interesting point is that Edith did not ascribe the cure to the Holy Rood, but to Cantilupe, and so did the clergy; if all the story were known, perhaps it was the other way around. However, the bells were set going, the *Te Deum* sung, and the first posthumous miracle of the good bishop made known to the crowds.³² It seems more than coincidental that this happened only a week before the shift to the new tomb, but it does not necessarily also point to conscious fraud.

After the move to the new tomb/shrine on 3 April, it was claimed that the shift had taken place according to the last will of the dead man and with the concurrence of his executors. This carefully-prepared statement shielded Swinfield from a possible accusation of carrying out an unauthorized translation of an unofficial saint.³³ The translation, or whatever it may have been called, had predictable results: five people were cured at the new tomb on that Thursday and the miracles continued daily thereafter.³⁴ Swinfield even had the foresight to prepare for such wonderful events since, the day after the translation, the new tomb was already under the care of not one but two custodians,³⁵ ready to write down any evidences of Cantilupe's miracle-working powers. The first cured pilgrims had been attracted by news of the transfer of the bishop's bones, or were already in Hereford awaiting the celebration of Easter. In addition, some cured pilgrims said that they had come to the shrine after hearing rumours of Edith's cure and other subsequent miracles. Although some miracles still occurred at the site of original burial (in the east end of the church) until about 20 May, the second tomb was the real focal point of the new devotion. The cult was on its way, though not everyone approved—the day after the cure of mad Edith an official of the Archbishop of Canterbury suspended the canon responsible for publishing the news of her miracle.³⁶

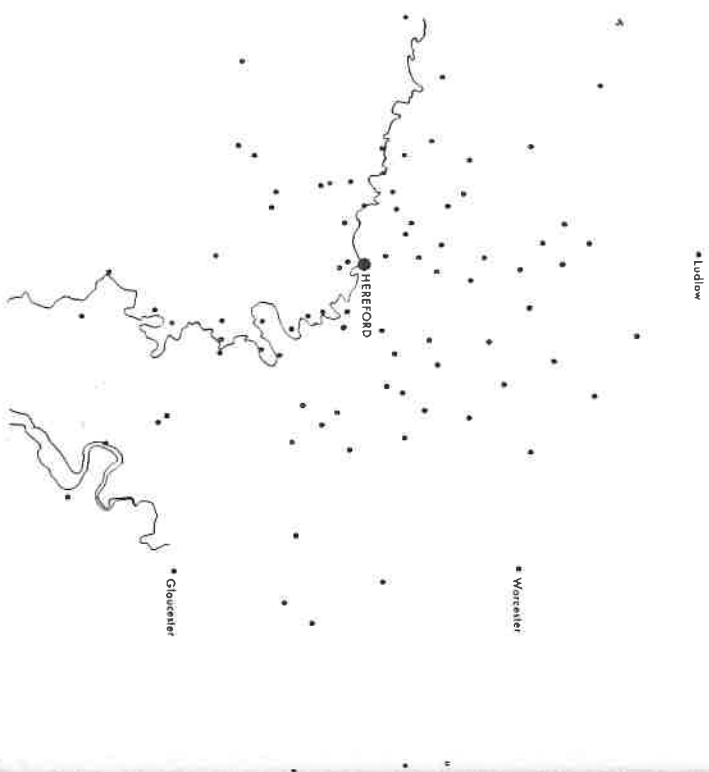
After Swinfield had had the satisfaction of seeing miracles performed by the score for some months, he instituted on the Feast of All Souls, 2 November, 1287, an annual obit or commemorative service for Cantilupe, to begin on the next anniversary of his death, 25 August. Obits were sometimes established for the dead as a way to honour their memory, and there was usually no implication of sanctity in the deceased (though Swinfield did mention the possibility of a canonization when he instituted the obit). Again it seems curious that Swinfield

waited five years to carry out this rather elementary commemoration of his predecessor.

In the end, it is probably not unreasonable to conclude that at the high point in the Christian year Swinfield performed a pseudo-translation to a mock shrine and later established a quasi-feastday (the obit) for Cantilupe in order to stimulate popular veneration which he hoped would lead to canonization. As we know, it did, thirty-three years later and three years after Swinfield's own death. The tomb he built for Thomas still stands in the transept of Hereford cathedral, scarred by the marks of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century vandalism common to so many memorials of the Middle Ages; as for that sumptuous shrine in Lady Chapel where the bones were taken in 1349, not a trace remains.

Once the miracles began in 1287, by the usual self-stimulative means further miracles followed. These tell us a great deal about the people whose ills were relieved by Cantilupe (as they believed) and about the rise and decline of popular devotion in general. Although Cantilupe was credited with some 470 miracles (about 500 when all manuscript evidence is considered), we shall limit ourselves to the 450 miracles which were conveniently arranged, by medieval scribes, in chronological order. The first point to consider is the frequency of these events. It is clear that the tremendous burst of miracles of 1287 was followed, with occasional exceptions, by a steady annual decline, for instance from 160 miracles in 1287 to thirty-four in 1288, nine in 1300 and only one 1312. They cease to be recorded after this last date, with the exception of a solitary cure written up in the back of an Oxford college manuscript in 1404 in what appears to be a contemporary hand.³⁷ This decline began even during the very first year: in April 1287, seventy cures were recorded, in May thirty-eight; the frequency was down to two or three a month by the year's end. Month by month, year by year, fewer people called on Cantilupe in their distress—or, shall we say?—fewer were answered, with a miracle.

These pilgrims, about three-quarters of whom we have been able to locate on the map, were relatively evenly spread out around Hereford. Nearly half lived less than twenty miles from the city, with a decline thereafter. This is the static view, but in the dynamic it is evident that changes were occurring from one year to the next. Most of the miracle recipients of the first year, 1287, were local people, over half living less than ten miles away, within easy walking distance. After this the proportion of 'strangers' increased while at the same time the miracles were becoming less frequent, a trend that is apparent from the start. In April 1287 when seventy miracles were recorded the people reporting them lived on average nine miles from the shrine; next month, the pilgrims' villages lay twenty miles from Hereford; in June, when only



4 Thomas Cantilupe: villages, towns and cities containing at least one individual affected by his miracles

eighteen wonders were registered, the average distance to the pilgrims' villages had increased to twenty-two miles and by July (eleven miracles) it was thirty-four miles. Even though diminishing samples imply less significant averages, there could be no better illustration of the 'shock-wave' of enthusiasm spreading out into the countryside from the point of origin and at the same time losing its power to attract cure-seeking pilgrims to the shrine. As enthusiasm declined at the centre, there was 'infilling' from the outside. These trends continued to the early fourteenth century; ironically, when the papal commissioners were meeting in London in 1307 the active phase of the popular cult—the 'miraculous' period—was already practically at an end.

These were not the only changes at the shrine. For example, over the years there was a shift away from female to male registered pilgrims,³⁶ the same change we observed in Godric's cult. In Cantilupe's case, besides allowing that men may have waited until several women had 'proven' the miraculous powers of the saint, there may have been another reason for increasing male participation, applicable to other



5 Thomas Cantilupe: places containing two or more individuals affected by his miracles (small circles = two or more places, large circles = ten or more)

cults as well. Men were more mobile than hearth-bound women: as mileage to the shrine rose the proportion of women fell and that of men increased. This was especially noticeable after about forty-five or fifty miles, when the participation-level of women dropped very sharply, while that of men continued as before. This is roughly a two-day journey or four or five days altogether from village to shrine and back again; apparently women were able to manage one or two days easily enough but the more the distance increased beyond twenty miles the less able were they to go to the shrine. Until about April 1289, when the average distances rose above forty-five or fifty miles, most cures occurred at the bishop's tomb, but after that at the pilgrims' homes or elsewhere. At such distances most people preferred to wait for their cures in their own homes rather than journey all that way and risk disappointment at the shrine and, in any case, most of the people who *did* make the long journey were men.

These changes had two consequences. Since the population of women fell, and since, as we know, women were predominantly lower-class, the overall level of upper-class pilgrims increased slightly (by 11%). But a second and even more striking change occurred in the type of miracle reported. Contrasting the first with the last hundred pilgrims, cures of the blind and lame dropped from nearly three-quarters in the first group to less than one-quarter in the last (73% to 21%). Conversely only one out of the first hundred pilgrims reported a miracle involving accidents or woundings or non-healing events, but forty-four out of the last hundred had experienced one of these, especially accidents (thirty-one). At least part of the reason for these contrasts must be the correlation we have discovered between certain social classes and sexes, and certain types of miracle. But changed attitudes may also have affected what miracles pilgrims believed they had experienced.

The scenes at Cantilupe's shrine in 1287 were probably quite different from those which would meet us around 1300. At the first date we would see a multitude of miracles and pilgrims, much bell-ringing and *Te Deum* singing, and general commotion in the north transept by the tomb. The participants in the miracles would usually be simple women who lived within walking distance of the church, whose miracles were cures of typically 'physical' ailments, especially blindness and crippling debilities. Most cures occurred at the shrine itself. By about 1300, however, the noise of crowds has given way to quieter cathedral sounds; the flurry of miracles is now only a memory although of course miracles still happened now and then. The average pilgrim of 1300 is a man from some village forty miles away or more. He is often somewhat elevated in social status, his miracle is less 'traditional' in type, and anyway it has probably already occurred in the privacy of his

home or some other distant place.

These changes at the shrine were themselves caused by changing attitudes. The first hundred registered pilgrims, having heard that—in effect—there was a new healer in town, eagerly flocked to the tomb animated by that hopeful expectation which is essential to faith-healing. The enthusiasm of such local potential cures was eventually exhausted, and by the time the last recorded hundred pilgrims were arriving in Hereford a decade or so later, local enthusiasm was no longer prompting so many supplicants. On the contrary, many of the late-comers had appealed to Thomas only after some unforeseen and infrequent calamity and not in the midst of their common illnesses. The saint, for the second group of pilgrims, was no longer thought of in the ordinary distresses of life but only in the *extraordinary*, and to that extent Cantilupe was already slipping away from the thoughts of Herefordshire villagers. Most of the 'early' pilgrims came to the tomb at once, ill but in hope, while many of the last group only called in tardily, for other reasons. Put another way, at first Cantilupe was sought out as a remedy for illness, a common or ordinary part of life; but after the passage of ten years or so he was appealed to not in common sickness—the ordinary side of life—but only in uncommon accidents, woundings, non-healing situations, the more extraordinary problems. He had ceased to be a source of immediate therapy; other newer saints, perhaps, were now turned to for healing. At some point even these 'emergency' cases ceased; the distant, male pilgrims stopped coming to Hereford to report miracles, and Cantilupe's unrecorded visitors were casual callers drawn by curiosity and conventional piety to the once-famous healer of Hereford.

Local enthusiasm, sparked off by a burial or translation or miracle, probably gave way to more distant, occasional interest with concomitant changes in the sex, social class and miracles of wonder-touched pilgrims at other shrines as well, though at different rates and, as in Becker's and de Montfort's case, for example, in different circumstances. Some of these changes have also been noted in a French cult which was recently investigated.³⁹

The fact that holy bones eventually ran out of miraculous power—at many of the shrines, within a decade—had little to do with the later history of the 'official' cult. Though Cantilupe's spring of healing was already beginning to fail in 1307 and had run dry by 1320, this did not affect the canonization commission or the papal bull which raised him to sainthood. By then, the whole matter had shifted into another plane, and by 1307 and 1320 it was in the hands of the pope, not the pilgrims. After the translation of 1349 the cult seems to have faded into the quiet respectability of a lawful feast of the established Church and the only miracles the clergy and people of Hereford came to know were the

same ones, repeated year after year, mentioned by John XXII when he raised the bishop from the ecclesiastical to the spiritual nobility.

Cantilupe's cult and canonization demonstrate the many complicated operations in the business of saint-making, which incidentally has become no simpler since the Middle Ages. The records of his miracles also establish quite clearly that popular movements which centred on such holy places had a history of their own, an inner development (only glimpsed when dealing with the other major cults). There were changes in the types of people who reported miracles, as well as changes in the miracles themselves. In addition, both the geographical area of attraction and the frequency of the miracles, and presumably overall numbers of pilgrims, changed from one decade to the next. These conclusions are applicable to Cantilupe's cult and are very likely true of many other thaumaturgic shrines of medieval England. But society had its inner developments too, and in the England of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries criticism of pilgrimages and relics grew even while new shrines were becoming more popular. That conflict would be resolved only in the aftermath of the Reformation.

Part Three

The End of the Middle Ages and the Reformation