Book One

The chapters of the first book begin.[1] [i] [O]f the portent in the mother's vision. [ii] Of the birth of Saint William and his venerable childhood. [iii] How he was in the habit of going out of his way to the Jews and for that was rebuked by his people, and henceforward kept himself away. [iv] How he was abducted by a messenger of the Jews. [v] How after entering the Jews' house he was mocked and killed. [vi] How the Jews accepted the plan to hide him. [vii] How and by whom he was carried away and hidden in the wood. [viii] How a hundred marks were given to the sheriff – then John – and the Jews were freed from the fear of death. [ix] How a light from heaven, in the shape of a fiery ladder, shone on the body of the holy martyr lying in the wood. [x] How and by whom he was found. [xi] Item, the second finding on that Saturday before Easter. [xii] How and by whom he was buried in the wood. [xiii] How the priest Godwin wanted to know whether it was him [William]. [xiv] On the foretelling in his maternal aunt's vision. [xv] On the mother's lament, accusing the Jews of her son's murder. [xvi] How the priest Godwin accused the Jews at the synod, and how he offered himself to prove by ordeal that they were guilty of the death of the boy William. [xvii] That Aimar,[2] then prior of St Pancras in Lewes, begged the bishop for permission to take the body of the holy martyr away with him then and there. [xviii] How he was brought from the wood to the city, was received by the monks, washed and found to be incorrupt in all his parts. [xix] On his burial in the monks' cemetery.

Here begins the first book.

[1] OF THE PORTENT IN THE MOTHER'S DREAM[3]

When the mercy of divine piety wished to visit the province of Norwich – indeed, the whole of England – and to give it a new patron for new times, it gave a boy who was to be listed among the principal martyrs and to be honoured by the entire company of saints; it had him conceived in the womb of a mother ignorant of what she carried, and caused a fragrant rose to grow, little by little, among the thorns.[4] His father was a certain Wenstan and his mother was called Elviva, and they lived a decent life in the countryside, abundantly supplied with all those things needed for living. No one should think it absurd that God wanted a boy of such future holiness and dignity to be born of humble parents, for He himself, it is well known, wished to be born of poor people. The mother, consequently, unaware that she had already conceived according to divine will, carried in ignorance the growing shoots of a male seed in the innermost of her body.[5]

It so happened, however, that she was chosen to be honoured with a vision, a foretelling of the great holiness and dignity that existed within her womb. It seemed to her, indeed, as she slept, that she was standing on a road with her father Wulward the priest,[6] who was a famous man at that time, standing together on a road, when they observed a light on the ground before their feet and a fish – commonly called a *lux*[7] – turning. The fish indeed had twelve red fins, as if sprinkled with blood. So she said to her father: 'Father, I see a fish, but I wonder greatly how it reached here and how it can live in such a dry place.' Her father said to her: 'Take it, daughter, take it and put it in your bosom.'[8] Once she had done so the fish was seen moving in her bosom and growing little by little, until the bosom could no longer contain it. And so it slipped away and, coming out of her sleeve, suddenly[9] sprouted wings and flew away, passing through the clouds, and the open heaven received it within.

Having seen this, the woman woke up and reported to her

father in the morning what she had seen in the dream at night. And so the father, having great skill in the interpretation of visions,[10] mulled it over in his mind and, after pondering the details a little while, answered his daughter: 'You know indeed, dearest daughter, that you are pregnant, and so rejoice in joy, because you will indeed be giving birth to a son, who will be accompanied by the highest honour on earth and will be raised to the height of the clouds, greatly exalted in heaven. Know also that when the boy is twelve years old[11] he will ascend to the pinnacle of his greatest glory.' It is not to be believed that the girl's father was announcing such firm words in this manner on his own, but rather by the divine spirit, to whom are known all present things as well as all those about to come. And indeed, in accordance with the father's speech, the daughter had a son, who reached the height of honour at the age of twelve, as foretold.

[II] ON HIS BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

After some time had passed, as the day of birth approached, the boy was born to the woman[12] and his name was called William. He was indeed born on the day of the Purification of God's mother [Candlemas, 2 February], the Virgin Mary, that is the day of candles, and perhaps this is significant, since the boy was to be of great purity and holiness, and he much loved candles and their lights. What I later learned from his mother and brothers, and from the priest who had brought him into the world again by baptism, I have decided by no means to consign to silence, but to insert into my story. For on the day of his weaning, when his father Wenstan joyously offered food to the relatives invited to the feast, a certain penitent – his arms in iron chains – entered, as if to beg for alms from those at table. After having eaten and delighted in his food, he took the little boy into his arms as if to admire him, and the boy in his childish innocence, fascinated by the iron chains, touched them with his little palms, and the chains suddenly cracked and broke into parts.[13] Those dining were stunned at seeing this and, amazed

at these wonderful ways, they ascribed what had happened to the boy's merits. And so the penitent, having been freed by divine grace, went away overflowing with thanks; and the said priest, who was among the assembled guests, collected the broken chains and deposited them on display in his church of Haveringland,[14] to serve as remembrance for those living and as knowledge for those to come, and took care to preserve them for a considerable time.

The mother, of course, who loved the child greatly, educated him with the greatest of care, and by her attentive education she led him from infancy to the years of understanding. By the time he was seven years old, as I have learned from the mother's account, he already began to be a lover of abstinence, so that while his older brothers did not fast, he did so three times a week; that is, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.[15] He also observed the days of the apostles and other saints, which are official vigils for the people, with pious fasts; and as the ardour of his devotion grew little by little, he passed several days on bread and water alone. Since he was overflowing with inner piety, whatever he was able to take away from his own food or to extract from his mother by his requests, he gave all away to the poor in secret if at any time he did not dare to do so openly. In all this he was not only pious but also kind, so that he conducted himself so wisely that in the same action he both benefited the poor, so far as was in his power, and caused no worry to his parents. He also frequented the church most willingly; he learned letters, psalms and prayers and worshipped with the greatest reverence all that was related to God. Since divine grace preceded him in all things, he had a zeal for diligent study, and just as he was gentle to all, he was loved by all and was vexatious to no one in any matter. Without doubt, the wisdom of divine dispensation was working great deeds of grace in the little boy, knowingly while he was ignorant, and prudently when he was untutored. And by some sure signs it was already then indicated just how many merits he would have in the future.

[III] HOW HE WAS IN THE HABIT OF GOING OUT OF HIS WAY TO THE JEWS, FOR WHICH HE WAS REBUKED BY HIS FAMILY, AND HENCEFORWARD KEPT HIMSELF AWAY FROM THEM

And so when he bloomed into such a venerable childhood, and was already eight years old, he was handed over by his parents to the skinners, to learn the art of tanning.[16] What next? He thrived in the tractability of his talent and displayed diligence in his effort; in a short while he far exceeded his peers in that craft and was equal to quite a few of his instructors. Finally, he left the countryside, moved to the city and lived with a certain master, who was very well known for his skill. Rarely spending time in the countryside, and now used to the city, he made great efforts with industry in his chosen craft and reached the age of twelve. Then, while he was living in Norwich, the Jews who dwelt there at the time chose him above all other skinners for the repair of mantles, furs and other things of this kind, which they either had as surety[17] or which they themselves used. For indeed they considered him highly suitable, either because they saw him as simple and skilful or because – led by miserliness – they reckoned they could pay him a lower wage.

But I think it is more likely that by the wish of divine providence he was already destined centuries ago for martyrdom and so was drawn to it step by step by degrees; and so he was chosen by the Jews as less wise and more fitting to be mocked and sacrificed, in disgrace of the Lord's Passion. We have indeed learned from some Jews who later converted truly to the Christian faith that at that time they intended to do this very thing to a Christian; and in order to complete their plan of spite, they chose in advance at the beginning of Lent the boy William, who was twelve years old at the time and innocent indeed. And since the venerable boy frequented the Jews ignorant of the fraud being devised, he was rebuked by his uncle by marriage, the priest

Godwin,[18] and by one Wulward, in whose house he lodged, and was prohibited from ever visiting them again. And the Jews, certainly regretting that their plan had come to nothing, persevered all the more keenly and with all their might to restore their act of malice as planned, as the day intended for the execution of their villainy came close and the victim whom they thought they had already caught had slipped away from their deadly hands. Assembling all the adroitness of their cunning machination, they found a certain man – I know not whether a Christian or a Jew – most crafty and suited to the execution of so execrable a deed of disgrace, and with much haste, for their *pascha* approached in three days,[19] sent him to find and bring back the victim who had slipped out of their hands, as I have already said.

[IV] HOW HE WAS ABDUCTED BY THE MESSENGER OF THE JEWS

As Monday after Palm Sunday dawned [20 March 1144], that detestable messenger of the Jews set out to execute the task they had enjoined upon him, and he finally found the boy William after searching for him with the greatest care. Once found, he caught the boy with lying snares of words; once caught, he deceived him with false promises. He pretended indeed to be the cook of William, Archdeacon of Norwich,[20] and that he wished to have him to work with him in the kitchen. If he [the boy William] came with him, he would thus later enjoy many profitable opportunities. The naive boy was deceived and believed the man. But wanting to have the approval of his mother's goodwill in this matter, because his father had already passed away, he went to her with the messenger.

When they arrived there, the boy explained the reason for his journey, and the traitor spread the snare of his lies as he had formerly expounded them. Promising much, to be sure, that son of perdition easily enticed the childish mind with his empty promises; but at first he could in no way extract the

mother's approval in the matter. The innocent boy agreed to the insistent traitor, but the mother resisted, her gut feeling warning her, fearing for her son with a maternal instinct.[21] Now the traitor, and then the mother; he begs and she refuses. He begs in order to destroy the boy; she refuses, lest she may lose him. He claims to be the archdeacon's cook, but she does not trust him at all. Between her and him, as between a sheep and a wolf, who first would you think the strongest, in the fight over a third? The lamb was in the middle, the sheep on one side, the wolf[22] on the other. The wolf stands in order to tear and devour; the sheep stands forth to rescue and save. But because the boy was lured, he favoured one of them and repeatedly begged the agreement of the other; until the mother, persuaded both by her son's many requests and also seduced by the man's good promises, was finally driven to agree, albeit against her will. She then begged for respite for her son until after Easter, but the traitor swore that he would not be without him for three days, not even for thirty pieces of silver.[23] The mother refused, and swore[24] that she would not surrender her son before Easter. And so the traitor took three shillings out of his purse, in order to undermine maternal sentiment, and diverted towards avarice the unreliable firmness of feminine fickleness, corrupted by the glitter of silver. The silver was offered as a gift, but rather it was the price of innocent blood.

And yet the mother's devotion was still not weakened, nor was her sense of foreboding of future evil easily allayed. It still continued: here with imploring and there with silver, so that if he did not soften the constancy of her resistant spirit by requests, the sheen of the brightness of money smiling at her might lure her to desire it. In these ways the mother's spirit was severely shaken and her maternal devotion was already gradually wavering; she was finally lured by her desire for the shining silver coins and, thus convinced, she bowed to the very thing she did not want, willy-nilly. And what more? When she was finally persuaded, the lamb was handed over to the wolf, and the boy William was handed over to the traitor.[25]

[V] HOW AFTER ENTERING THE JEWS' HOUSE HE WAS CAPTURED, MOCKED AND KILLED

And so in the morning that traitor and emulator in almost every way of Judas the traitor returned to Norwich with the boy. Passing by the house of the boy's maternal aunt he entered it with the boy, said that his mother had handed him over and hastily departed. Then the boy's aunt immediately said to her daughter, 'Quick, follow them,' carefully observing in which direction that man was leading the boy away. And so the girl went out in order to discover their route, and she followed them from a distance, as they turned, taking secret alleyways. Following in this way she watched them at last enter secretly into the house of a certain Jew, and noticed them immediately shut the door behind them. Having seen this, she returned to her mother and informed her of what she had seen.

Then the Jews received the boy kindly, like an innocent lamb led to the slaughter,[26] and he was ignorant of what business was being prepared for him, and he was kept until the morrow. And so, following daybreak, which was their *pascha* that year,[27] after the appropriate chants of the day were finished in the synagogue, the leaders of the Jews met in the house of the aforementioned Jew, and while the boy William was eating, fearing no treachery, they suddenly seized him and humiliated him in various wretched ways. For some of them held him from behind, others inserted into his open mouth a torture instrument known in English as a teasel,[28] and fixed it with straps either side of his jaws, to the back of his neck, where they made a very tight knot. Next they took a short rope, about as thick as a little finger, and made three knots in places marked on it, and encircled that innocent head from forehead to back; in the centre of the forehead they pressed a knot, as they did at each temple. Both sides of the head were tied to the back, extremely tightly, and there a firm knot was made. The ends of the rope were tied round the neck and around under the chin, and there this unheard of type of torture was

completed in a fifth knot. But the cruelty of the torturers could not be satisfied even by these torments and they added even worse pains. Indeed, having shaven his head, they wounded it with an infinite number of thorn pricks and made him bleed miserably from the inflicted wounds. They were so cruel and so very eager to inflict pains that you could hardly say which they were: more cruel or more eager in torture. Accordingly, their experience of torturing him fostered and furnished them with strength and with weapons. And so, while the enemies of the Christian name ran riot around the boy in such a spirit of evil, there were others among them who, in mockery of the Passion of the Cross, sentenced him to be crucified. Once they did so they said: 'Just as we have condemned Christ to a most shameful death, so we condemn a Christian, so that we punish both the Lord and his servant in the punishment of reproach; that which they ascribe to us we will inflict on them.'[29] And so, conspiring to execute such execrable malice, they next seized the innocent victim with bloody hands and raised him from the ground. He was put upon the cross and they competed among themselves in rivalry to kill him.

And when we were enquiring carefully into the affair,[30] we found the house and in it most definite and clear signs of the affair. Moreover, there was, as rumour has it, stretched out as a cross, a post between two others and a wooden beam in the middle, attached on either side to the two other posts. And, similarly, we later discovered truly the traces made by the wounds and the chains. On the right, the right hand and foot tightly bound by chains; but on the left, the left hand and foot both pierced by a nail. And they did this with such care, of course, that if he was at any time found with nails fixed into him from this side and that, it would not be indicated that he had been killed by Jews, but rather by Christians. But while they did so, they added to the painful wounds other pains and wounds, since they could not extinguish their mad cruelty, nor satisfy their inborn hatred of the Christian name. Truly, after so great and so many sufferings of tortures, they inflicted a grievous wound to his left side[31] up into his heart and, as if bringing the affair to an end, they extinguished the mortal life that still

remained within him. And since several rivers of blood flowed from the whole of his body, both in order to staunch the blood and to wash and close the wounds, they poured boiling water from his head downwards.

And so the glorious boy and martyr of Christ, William, dying in this world the disgrace of the death of the Lord, was crowned with the blood of glorious martyrdom and achieved the kingdom of eternal glory, alive for eternity.[32] His soul is exalted joyfully in heaven among the illustrious host of saints; and his body works wonders gloriously on earth by the omnipotence of divine mercy.

[VI] HOW THEY ACCEPTED THE PLAN TO HIDE HIM

Having accomplished their proposed malice in this way, the Jews consulted each other as to what more was to be done, took care to remove the lifeless body hanging from the post, and entered into collective consultation as to what to do with it. Several said it should be thrown into a privy,[33] for greater shame and degradation, but some of the cleverer ones thought to hide it in the ground, lest the Christians somehow manage to find it. Yet the working of divine clemency, which prepared for later times the discovery of so great a martyr, allowed neither that he be cast down into the privy nor that he be hidden in the earth. Therefore, by the provision of the divine plan, making them doubt themselves, not knowing for certain as yet what to do, they all agreed unanimously on the matter, that while they carefully reflected on the issue, they should keep him in the meantime in a more hidden place.

On the morrow, indeed, as day rose, they met again for the business at hand, and, as we later learned from one of them, while they were still discussing it and not knowing entirely as yet what to do, it is said a certain person who had considerable authority among them, divine will inspiring and urging him on

gave the following advice: 'Listen to me, brothers, followers of the Lord's law. I consider it utterly useless for us – and I fear greatly the danger which would follow in the future – if the body of this Christian were to be drowned in our privy or concealed in the earth within the area of our houses. Since, indeed, we dwell in rented houses, if within a month or sooner when some new reason arises, we move away from these dwellings to others, I fear what might follow after our departure, and I will be greatly amazed if what I fear were not to happen. For once we have left, the Christians who will move in will assuredly inspect everything, and one cannot believe that they will not – to shame us – either cleanse the sewers or fill up the old ones and dig new ones where they wish.[34] What then? It is likely and easy then that the body will be found by the cleaners or the diggers. Having found it, in no way will the deed be imputed to Christians, but the blame for the whole affair will undoubtedly be passed on to us. It does not seem likely that Christians would have been willing to do such a thing to a Christian, nor, up to a point, Jews to a Jew.

'Therefore, what remains to become common knowledge, if not the truth of the events, and the discovery of the truth to the detriment and danger of us all? Because of our lack of foresight, and not undeservedly, our people will then be totally eliminated from the realm of England.[35] Indeed, and what is extremely terrifying to us, we and our wives and little ones will be handed over to the Gentiles as victims, be carried off to death, be given to utter destruction, and our names will be as a reproach to all peoples to eternity. So as to avoid meeting such imminent evils, it is wiser that we be provident in counsel and take another route from the one we have planned. Be careful, I say to you, and pay heed to our advice. Since what is done is done and what has happened cannot be undone, above all we must take care both to hide the deed from the Christians and to avoid what we fear. What then? I say the body should be carried away and be left exposed in a place far away from us, where – if perchance it is found – the Christians may think of it, so to speak, as a murder. And when news of the murder becomes common knowledge there is no doubt that the officers

of the king's justice, to make their profit, may willingly lend covetous ears to the false rumour. At that time, when the blame has been attached to Christians, it will render us secure for ever.'

Thus he concluded and his speech pleased them all, and in the end his advice was adopted as the plan. The body was seized without delay and was delivered to a suitable secret place, where it was hidden carefully for a while, so that it could be buried secretly when an opportunity emerged to do so. And that day was the day of absolution, Maundy Thursday, on which a crowd of penitents of the whole diocese customarily gathered in the mother church of Norwich, and the streets of the whole city were then visited by an unusual multitude of people wandering about. For that reason they did not consider it safe to do with the body what they had planned on that day. Therefore, it was put off to the morrow, when it would be more convenient for them to be wandering in the streets and much safer than at other times to go where they wished.

[VII] HOW HE WAS CARRIED AND BURIED IN THE WOOD

The next day rose [Good Friday, 24 March 1144], on which wherever the Christian religion flourishes the ritual[36] of the Adoration of the Cross takes place. On that day, indeed, the custom of all Christians is – by avoiding gluttony more than usual, abstaining from all delicacies and delights, and visiting the churches of the saints devoutly – to persist most assiduously in pious labours of prayer. And so at the dawn of that light, the body of the blessed William the martyr was carried away enclosed in a sack by *Deus-adiuvet* [Hebrew: Eleazar] and another, Jews preselected for the purpose on the previous day. As they left the city with the body and were already entering Thorpe Wood,[37] they met by chance along the way a certain burgess, one of Norwich's richest and most prominent men,

that is Aelwerd, by surname Ded. After already visiting that night the churches which are in the city, finally he was returning, along the edge of the wood, with a single servant as company, from that of St Mary Magdalene,[38] a house for the sick in the same wood, on his way to St Leonard's.[39] This happened by the dispensation of divine grace, both in order that a credible witness be present and so that after the body was found the event would not be hidden from the Christians.

And so Aelwerd, coming upon the Jews on their journey, and indeed recognizing them as Jews,[40] wondered as to what it was that one of them was carrying in front of him on the horse's neck. Wondering in this way and turning over in his mind what business was being transacted by the passers-by and what the thing he saw them carrying could be – because Jews did not usually go out of their houses on that day[41] and he had noticed that they had already gone quite far – he held back for a little while and asked them where they were going. Coming closer and stretching out his hand, he touched with his right hand the object they were carrying and realized it was a human body. They, for their part, panic-stricken that they had been discovered and having nothing to say for trepidation, gave their horses rein, passed on and entered into the thickness of the wood. Not surprisingly, the suspicion of evil in the matter struck Aelwerd's mind, but he turned his attention back to the road he had embarked on with pious devotion. Meanwhile, the Jews entered the rough and thorny thickness of the wood,[42] and they hung the raised body from a tree by a flaxen rope; they left him there and returned home by another route. To them, struck as they were by no small degree of alarm and with new horrors born every time they met someone, I think that there happened what usually happens to very timid people aware of their own guilt. Whoever is in this situation suspects everyone they meet, they think there are pitfalls everywhere, they take the tree trunks and stones seen at a distance to be humans. Why say more? The returning Jews reported to the others the misfortune that had occurred to them on their way.

[VIII] HOW THEY WERE FREED OF FEAR BY GIVING THE SHERIFF 100 MARKS

The enemies of the Christian name were much upset and did not know what to do next. Since they were devoid of hope, while they discussed their common safety, one suggesting this and another that, they at length decided to hurry to John, the sheriff[43] – as to their one and only protector – who was a regular refuge to them. And so the decision was taken by all that some of them, those pre-eminent in authority and power, should go to him and so deal with him that, supported by his patronage, they would thereafter have nothing to fear. They went and entered the castle's rampart and were admitted to the sheriff's presence. They told him that they had a very great secret they wished to communicate only to him, very confidentially. All those present were at once removed; John ordered them to speak up and they said: 'We find ourselves here in great anxiety and we promise you 100 marks[44] if we are freed of it thanks to your help.' Attracted by that sum of marks, he gave his word both that he would keep their secret and that his help would not be lacking to them in anything as far as was in his capacity. Accordingly, once the matter of so great a secret was revealed, Aelwerd was immediately summoned. When he arrived there, under the urgent orders and coercion of the sheriff, he was constrained, willy-nilly, by his word and oath, not to defame the Jews over what he had seen, nor as long as he lived – or at least until the last day of his life – to divulge what he had seen.

Yet the dispensation of divine grace willed that what it had disposed to the praise and glory of God's martyr, and for the repetition of the memory of His own Passion, should not be forever hidden and should be revealed in manifold ways shortly after. For indeed, after five years had elapsed, that same Aelwerd was brought to his last hour, being seized by illness. And at the time of his final passing, he was admonished in a vision by the same holy boy William – who was already shining forth throughout the whole region by the abundant virtues of his miracles – not

to neglect to reveal the things he had seen to whom he wished. Summoning to him certain persons whom he thought worthy of being told so great a secret – the monk Wichemann, to whom in the counselling of penitents the bishop had committed his own functions,[45] and [46] the priest of St Nicholas – while dying and gasping his final words, according to the command of the same martyr, he set forth to them in order[47] those things which he had seen and subsequently knew for sure about him. I, Thomas, monk of Norwich, hearing report of them, and knowing it to be true indeed, have taken the care to put them down in writing, because I did not think such evidence of truth should be passed over or hidden in silence.

[IX] HOW LIGHT SHONE FROM HEAVEN ABOVE HIS BODY IN THE SHAPE OF A FIERY LADDER[48]

While these events were happening within the city, on that very day – that is the Friday before Easter of the Lord's Resurrection – divine grace, which is never absent from its servants, deigned to show signs of its mercy around the body of the glorious martyr lying in the wood. For indeed, around the evening of that day, suddenly a fiery light was sent forth from heaven above, and it stretched out at length to the place of the same martyr and shone brightly in the eyes of many people in diverse places. Henry of Sprowston, once the stableman of Bishop Everard,[49] certainly saw it as he was standing at the door of his house with his whole family. Lady Legarda – the widow of William Apulus[50] – saw it, too; a woman who, for the love of God, dwelt at St Mary Magdalene, serving the poor and in such service, like a beggar, seeking the salvation of her soul. But also the sick of that place, waking up in silence in the middle of the night for matins, had it pointed out to them by the same Legarda and also saw the brightness of the light. Many of them said that such splendour had already appeared to them as they gazed that morning – that is, on Saturday before dawn. Moreover,

that light was seen divided into two rays in the form of a very long ladder, stretching from below high up into the east,[51] for, as those who first found the body lying under the sky in the wood attested, one of those rays reached to the head, and the other to the feet. What else did divine grace wish to indicate to its faithful, but to take care and inform everyone with a clear sign how many merits he possessed, whom it so greatly glorified by celestial signs? In the shape of a ladder surely is indicated his ascent to glory; in the brightness of light indeed is signified that he has deserved to attain a crown.

[X] HOW AND BY WHOM HE WAS FOUND

As the day of Easter Saturday was dawning, that nun whom I mentioned just a while ago, Legarda, was so very concerned by so extraordinary a vision of light that, taking her companions with her, early before sunrise she made her way again to view the light, wanting to know what it was that the Lord wished to reveal by such signs. So walking, she fixed her bodily eyes outwards onto the light, while a light of pious devotion shone inwardly in her mind. The woman went, beseeching God piously that He might direct her by the correct route to the place of the light she had seen, and show her most clearly the sacred things hidden there. Before too long, led by divine mercy through thickset bushes, she was privileged with her companions to arrive where she found, in truth, that illustrious treasure overflowing with a wealth of merits. She saw indeed at a distance a boy lying at the root of an oak tree, dressed in a tunic, wearing shoes, his head shaven and pierced[52] with innumerable cuts; but, seized at once by feminine fear, she did not approach any closer. And when with intent and heartfelt gaze she considered the nature of what lay there, she saw two ravens above it, attempting with a frenzy of raven-like voracity to dismember him zealously with the beak, but in no way succeeding in making contact, they were toppling off from either side.[53] Though they attacked again and again from different directions, they did not succeed at all, and fell back from his sides.

And truly, as I think, with their animal instinct they believed the body lay there by chance and that they were allowed to tear it to pieces with their beaks as they usually did. Yet divine providence indeed saw to it that he was unharmed and uncorrupted,[54] and kept him intact from birds and wild beasts. And then, when the woman saw the wondrous and truly astonishing things that were happening miraculously around the body of the boy lying there – both intact from the ravens and manifested by celestial lights to the view of many – she recognized the [body] lying there to be of many merits. Without delay, having summoned up a brave spirit, she approached closer, shooed the ravens away, said a prayer and commended him to her saviour, and returned home with her associates full of thanks.

[XI] ITEM, THE SECOND FINDING

On that very Saturday after sunrise the aforementioned Henry of Sprowston entered the wood on horseback in order to examine it – since he was a forester – to see if perchance he could find anyone who had taken anything away without licence to the detriment of the forest.[55] And it so happened that either luck or – as I believe – divine will drew his spirit to the place where he had observed the rays of light the previous day. As he was walking here and there in that part of the wood, suddenly he came upon a man sitting there, who said he had found nearby a dead boy. And so, going there, led by that peasant, Henry came upon a boy, but he did not know who he was or where from. While he examined him with care to see if he might recognize him, Henry noticed that the boy was wounded and saw in his mouth a wooden instrument of torture. Seeing also that the boy had been handled with unusual kinds of torment, he began already to suspect from the nature of the wounds that no Christian but only a Jew would have taken it upon himself to kill the innocent in this way with such rash daring. Having carefully fixed the place in his memory, and taking note of the region of the sky, he knew for sure that this

was the place where the rays of light shone the day before and where he had seen them stretch up on high.

What then? Having without doubt contemplated these things with great wonder, Henry returned and told his wife and family all he had discovered. And after calling the priest, he informed him of the body of some innocent handled in the cruellest way, exposed in the wood, and that he [Henry] very much wished to carry it away from there and bury it in the cemetery of the church of Sprowston, if he – the priest – advised him to do so.[56] And after anxiously discussing such action they reached the conclusion that because the feast of Easter was about to take place on the next day, they should delay the execution of their plan to the third day, on which the act of their devotion would be more fittingly accomplished.

[XII] HOW HE WAS BURIED IN THE WOOD

So the business of burial was delayed, but meanwhile by these telling others of the affair, in this way the rumour resounded all around and entered the city, striking the hearts of hearers with a great deal of astonishment.[57] The city was shaken with a new disturbance and the streets were filled with restless crowds; and it was already claimed by many that only the Jews could do such things, especially at that time.[58] And so many stood still, as if shocked by so novel and unusual a matter; many ran hither and thither, above all boys and youths, and, guided by divine will, they rushed to the wood in large groups in order to get a good view. Indeed, they sought and found and identified the marks of punishments on him and, having then considered the matter with care, certain of them believed that the Jews were not guiltless of the crime. Some even claimed to have been inspired by a certain presentiment. When they returned, those who had stayed at home came together in groups, and when they heard how things were, they rushed to see, and when they, too, returned they testified about it to others. And so the whole

of Saturday and the whole of Easter Day were occupied with people going and returning in successive throngs, and the whole city was engaged and amazed. Hence zeal of pious fervour incited everyone towards the destruction of the Jews; they would have already laid hands on them, but were held back by fear of Sheriff John, and remained calm for a while.

While things unfolded in the city in this way over two days, the aforesaid Henry of Sprowston, with his wife and family, were about to execute his plan on Easter Monday, and he set out around the time of prime to that illustrious corpse of the renowned martyr where it still lay under the sky. Reaching the spot with his companions – forewarned, I believe, by divine inspiration – he decided to act differently from the plan, because he feared to execute it without the bishop's permission. And so, using a prudent plan, with as much reverence as possible, he buried the body where it had been found. But I think it should not remain unsaid that while he [William] was carried in the hands of those burying him, immediately such a sweet fragrance infused the noses of those present, as if an abundance of herbs and fragrant flowers grew there. Nor do I think that this came to pass without divine will, so that it might happen that he be buried there, and then be transferred later from there for the sake of greater veneration; and though he was translated, divine grace wished to distinguish him there, too, by many signs of his virtues.

[XIII] HOW THE PRIEST GODWIN STROVE TO FIND OUT WHETHER IT WAS WILLIAM

Once the body of the renowned martyr was buried, it became known through some of his companions that the boy William was in the habit of visiting the Jews in days past. Finally, news of this matter reached the ears of Godwin the priest, whose surname was Sturt, and who was the husband of the boy's aunt. When he learned it for certain from William's friends, he set

out to visit the place on the morrow, with his son Alexander, then a deacon, and Robert, the martyr's brother, in the first instance to find out more clearly whether it was him, and if so, to perform immediately the service of burial. And since he could not recognize him unless the soil placed over him was removed, they decided to dig. And so, while they were digging and casting out the earth, as they came closer to the body, suddenly in front of his face the earth seemed clearly to be lifted up from below as if by some powerful force, rising as if being pushed out. When they saw this, suddenly great fear and shock pervaded the hearts of the diggers; they drew back from there and ceased the toil they had begun. But when the priest called them back, they resumed their purpose with vigour and attacked the task they had stopped. When the same happened for the second time, it seemed to them that he was certainly not dead but alive. Then the priest, shouting, instructed them to hurry up, because he believed they might still find him alive. And as they rushed eagerly and already touched the body with the palms of their hands, once the dust was shaken off the face was revealed and it became clear who it was.

Brother recognized brother and friends recognized friend. Brother wept for dead brother; friends bewailed the dead. The more deeply they had loved him, the more greatly they mourned him in death. And when they approached closer, they were exceedingly surprised that despite the fact that so many days had already passed since the day they suspected of his death, they smelt no foul smell from him at all. And what was found to be more worthy of wonder is that although there was no sweet-smelling flower growing there, nor any herbs, the fragrance of spring flowers and of sweet-smelling herbs reached the noses of those who were present. What next? After the funeral was celebrated and the earth that had been dug up and uncovered was put back in its place, they commended body and soul to God and returned [to the city].

[XIV] ON THE PROPHETIC VISION OF HIS MATERNAL AUNT

As Godwin the priest returned home he recounted what had happened to his wife Leviva, who was the boy's maternal aunt.[59] At once she squeezed the palms of her hands together and broke out in a mighty wailing: 'It is true,' she said, 'and the dream that came to me on the Saturday before Palm Sunday[60] [18 March 1144] is certainly true, in which the Lord deigned to show me in advance and let me know the most certain truth of that event. For in a night vision I saw myself, perchance in the middle of the marketplace, when suddenly the Jews charged at me from everywhere; running they surrounded me as I escaped and caught me as I was encircled. And as they seized me, they broke my right leg with a club and tore it off the rest of my body and without delay escaped, and they seemed to be taking it away with them. Oh, what a true foretelling in a true vision! Oh, how truly happy I would be had the dream I dreamt not been true! When I told you, my Lord, of that dream, I remember you saying that it would come to pass that soon one of my friends would be lost through the Jews, one I definitely loved above all others! Behold, I hear what you have already said to me and I am distressed that what you had foretold of the future has not happened differently.'

Barely had she completed these words when a chill penetrated her marrow, her face became pale, she lost consciousness and, as if lifeless, she slipped to the ground into the hands of those present. After a while the woman rose up, having regained her strength as the blood flowed again, and at once she lamented with tears her nephew whom she loved best. Truly, from that day on, and for a long time, she could hardly contain her mourning, because she lamented him whom she loved most tenderly and with all her heart.

[XV] ON THE MOTHER'S LAMENT

In those very days, as the news was spreading, the rumour of her son's death reached the mother's ears; without doubt she was shattered by such lamentable news and at once collapsed, as if dead.[61] But after a while, having regained her strength, she got up without delay and hurried to Norwich to seek out the truth of the matter. There, indeed, on learning from the accounts of many people that her son was dead and buried in the wood, she at once tore at her hair, her hands repeatedly clasped, and she ran like a lunatic, crying and wailing through the streets.[62] Finally, arriving at the house of her sister, whom we have just mentioned, she enquired both of Godwin the priest and of her sister about the truth and manner of the affair, but she could learn nothing more for certain, only that he had been killed in an unusual manner. Nevertheless, out of many and credible conjectural arguments she was able to conclude that it was not Christians, but in truth Jews, who had dared to commit the crime in that way. She accepted these speculations with a woman's credulity; and she at once broke out in public with abuse of the Jews in word, noisy clamour and formal accusation. In this way, no doubt, the mother was influenced by the effect of a maternal instinct; here was a woman carried away by feminine and reckless daring. Again, whatever she suspected in her heart she took to be certain, and whatever she imagined she asserted, as if she had seen it with her own eyes; she conducted her roaming through small streets and large, and, compelled by maternal suffering, she accosted everyone with horrible cries and asserted that her son had been seduced by fraud, kidnapped from her by cunning, and killed by the Jews. She turned the minds of all in this matter towards the suspicion of the truth; hence it was cried out also by the voices of all that all the Jews should be destroyed, root and branch, as the constant enemies of the Christian name and cult.

[XVI] HOW THE PRIEST GODWIN ACCUSED THE JEWS AT THE SYNOD, AND HOW HE OFFERED HIMSELF TO PROVE BY ORDEAL THAT THEY WERE GUILTY OF THE DEATH OF THE BOY WILLIAM

A few days having passed, the day of the synod arrived and, as was the custom, Bishop Everard presided over it.[63] After the sermon was delivered, the aforementioned priest Godwin got up in the middle to present to the ears of the bishop and his fellow priests a mournful complaint the like of which was unheard of in present times. And so, silence having been ordered, he began in this manner: 'Lord, father and venerable bishop, whose past fatherly care is well known – and may it be so for ever – incline the ears of your kindness to our words of complaint. Let the holy gathering of fellow brothers and priests, which I observe attending the synod, deign to receive with a patient ear the sounds of my complaint on a matter neither small nor ephemeral. Certainly, I have come not so much to pursue a case for myself or my family, but rather I come forth to announce an affront recently committed against all Christians. And so I think that it is not unknown to your fatherhood, reverend bishop, nor do I take it to be hidden from many of you, dearest brethren, that a certain very little boy, altogether innocent, has been found in the wood, handled in pitiable ways during the week of the Lord's Passion, and that he is still buried there without Christian interment. He was, in fact, the cousin of my own sons, and because of the kinship that linked us he was very dear to me. Hence, as I complain about his death to the kindness of your pity in these words, I can hardly stop my eyes from crying. But I exculpate, first and foremost, all Christians as innocent of the guilt in so execrable a killing; second, I accuse the Jews, enemies of the Christian name, as guilty in this matter, spillers of innocent blood; third, I shall come forward to prove my assertion in these matters at any time and place in any seat of judgement of Christian law. Let no one

reckon me precipitate or unprepared in this matter, for if I were not utterly sure of the truth of it I would never have come forward thus far to offer the proof I have promised.

'And you yourselves can conclude that it is so, firstly from what by custom the Jews have been obliged to do on these days, and then from the manner of the pains inflicted and the type of wounds, as well as from the manifold agreements of many circumstances. To these and many other highly convincing proofs of arguments, Leviva, the maternal aunt of the boy in question, is added with her most valid forewarning, as is his lamentable mother, in tears, who complained of the crafty frauds of the cunning messenger of the Jews, who cheated her and led her astray and abducted her son. In this manner, since it is so certain: "my property is in danger when the neighbouring wall [house] is on fire",[64] I turn to you as my sole and unique defender, and put before you this complaint the more confidently in that I reckon you will not depart in any way from what is true by law or equity.'

With these words the priest brought his speech to an end[65] and awaited the bishop's response in the matter with ears pricked, his eyes fixed to the ground and his mind on tenterhooks. And so everyone was shaken and astonished by the matter, and the bishop was so agitated by the atrocity of the deed that he was ablaze with a fervour for justice, and they say he answered the priest in this way: 'Because what you assert as certain truth has not been so far proven to us, we shall take immediate steps to find out the reliable truth of the matter. And if it is established as you claim it to be, you can have it for sure that the rigour of our justice will not be deflected. Nevertheless, since it is not right for a just judge to pass judgement on those who have not been seen or heard, the Jews will be summoned tomorrow, will be tried and, if found guilty by the merits [of the case], the appropriate punishment will ensue.' And so, discussion of this affair thus being delayed to the morrow and the business of the synod having been transacted only in part, everyone left with the intention of returning once more in the morning.

On that day, at the order of the bishop, the dean of Norwich[66] assembled the Jews and proclaimed that they should appear on the morrow in front of the bishop and synod in this weighty

matter. What then? The Jews became agitated and they returned – all together – to the sheriff John as to their only haven, seeking help and advice in so difficult a case, relying on his protection, by which they had evaded many dangers on many occasions. Having thus entered into consultation, John, acting as if he were aware of the truth of the matter, did not allow the Jews to appear at the synod on the next day, but rather sent his own men to the bishop to say that the Jews belonged to him and that they would not answer such trifling charges by Christians in the king's absence. After the message had been received, and with the priest wanting to repeat the complaint of the day before in full synod, the bishop asked Aimar,[67] Lord Prior of St Pancras [of Lewes], and other highly learned and most wise men, who happened to be attending the synod, what they thought should be the answer in such a case. They said unanimously that violence had been publicly perpetrated against God and Christian law and advised that it be speedily punished by the rigour of canon law.

Amidst all this, the bishop, not wanting to seem hasty, nor detracting from the spirit of justice, judged that the aforementioned enemies of Christ should be summoned a second and even a third time, lest too great hastening of the sentence exceed either moderation or the boundary of custom. And as the bishop ordered, the dean did not delay to execute. But when the Jews refused to come, the bishop consulted the wise men after the conclusion of the synod as to what was to be done in such a case. And a common opinion was reached to suggest to John that he should not support the Jews against God and that a peremptory sentence be communicated to them, that if they did not come to purge themselves[68] very soon, they should know that they would without doubt be destroyed. Urged on by these words, John came without delay with the Jews to hear what was said against them and appeared in fury in front of the bishop. Without delay, the oft-mentioned priest [Sturt] arose and repeated the charge he had already made, and promised that what he had testified in word he would prove without delay by ordeal.[69] On the sheriff's advice the Jews denied the crime imputed to them, but asked that over the issue of proof by ordeal they be granted some short respite to deliberate.

While the priest firmly resisted every pretext for delay, yet with the bishop's assent [the Jews] went ahead to discuss the case in private consultation. The sheriff advised them what remained for them to do in such a crisis, since, on the one hand, they judged that the granting of a postponement was unlikely, and on the other, they feared greatly the proof by ordeal.

As they discussed their dilemma with many salutary speeches, going over every aspect appropriately, they found no other sure way out of such a crisis, nothing more profitable, than postponement and delay. If they had these, they hoped that the corrupt favour of the king might easily be extracted by wealth of argument and thereby quash thoroughly the case brought against them. And so, after most of the day passed in consultation, a message was sent to the bishop that the requested delay be granted in one way or another. When their requests were rejected, the angry sheriff left with the Jews, without obtaining the necessary permission, as is the custom. Since it was unsafe for them to remain at large, he protected them within the fortification of the castle, until they could be restored to safety and peace for the future by the royal peace issued in a writ and confirmed to them. When it was reported to the bishop and others who were with him that they had left, because he feared to confront the king and his officials openly, the bishop kept silent for the time being and reserved his judgement – interrupted, but by no means abandoned – to be used afresh at some favourable opportunity at a future time.

[XVII] HOW AIMAR, PRIOR OF ST PANCRAS, SOUGHT A LICENCE TO TAKE THE BODY OF THE HOLY MARTYR AWAY WITH HIM

After seeing, hearing and taking note of what had happened, touched by an inner devotion of the spirit, Aimar, the aforementioned prior of St Pancras, drew the priest aside and endeavoured

to find out, fully and carefully, how much could be known from him about the affair. He found out about the manner of the death, both according to the type of torture and the shape and number of the wounds; he considered these details: how else could this most holy boy have been killed except by the Jews in an affront to Christ? Hence, impelled by some inner zeal of piety, he approached the bishop at once and urgently demanded – with many prayers – that he be allowed to take the aforementioned boy away with him. When he did not succeed in his request, it is said that he answered that if the boy had been kept at St Pancras he would not have allowed him to be taken away for any sum of gold or silver, but rather would have guarded him with the greatest care, as the most precious of treasures, as one who had been rightly exalted for his merits and celebrated by a constant cult of veneration. The prior's words moved Bishop Everard's spirit so much as arguments in favour of a cult, that they ministered to the holy boy an increase of devotion. Compelled by this, and inspired by the advice of many, he arranged to have the body of the most blessed boy brought to the cathedral and buried it in the monks' cemetery.

[XVIII] HOW HE WAS CARRIED AND WASHED AND FOUND TO BE UNCORRUPTED

And so the bishop chose some of the monks, together with some members of the clergy, to lay him [William] out; and he directed those chosen to execute the assignment on the eighth calends of May [24 April 1144]. As they fulfilled his orders and were already on their way back, so great was the multitude of people that you would think that only a few had remained in the city. And so, that precious and desired treasure was carried, to the greatest delight of clergy and people, was received by the venerable chapter of monks in a procession, was led into the church of the episcopal see, and was placed with its bier[70] in front of the altar of the Holy Cross.[71] The bier was covered by

a cloth[72] and at each of the four corners stood a candelabrum on which wax candles burned. A Requiem Mass for the faithful was sung solemnly by the monks and the whole church was full, back and front, with a crowd of townspeople. Finally, after the celebration of the Mass, he was placed – after deliberation – between the choir screen[73] and the monks' choir, lest the crowd pressing to kiss the bier – indeed, pushing with the desire to see the body if possible – would be more of an impediment than a help to the brothers at work conducting the required funerary ritual of washing.[74] To be part of such a spectacle was the greatest joy; to stand by, good fortune.[75]

Why say more? Some of the brothers were chosen to wash the body and, once he was washed, to wrap him in an alb[76] and blessed linen, and so wrapped, to put him onto the bier as before. And so, when they gathered to conduct the service enjoined upon them, they undressed the body of its tunic, removed the shoes from the feet and prepared him according to the custom of washing the dead. While they washed, a wonder occurred, more admirable than any wonder. Although thirty-two days had already passed since his death, he was found whole and intact in all his parts. In the hands of those carrying him, he appeared so supple in his fingers, arms and other parts that you would believe him to be asleep rather than dead.

And then something even more astonishing happened, because while he was being washed fresh blood suddenly gushed from his nostrils, and this truly astounded the throng of bystanders. Those who were attending the ritual removed the flowing blood, drop by drop, with linen cloths, and when it ceased they cleaned the face once more. And those who were present at this wondrous event later affirmed to us that when the body was being washed, and above all when the blood flowed, so remarkable a waft of smell reached their noses that that very sweetness clearly caused one to understand that the Author of this sweetness had truly been present at the funeral of the sacred body. What else did the sweetness of divine presence want to indicate to us, but to declare by it how great was William's merit in heaven?

And we have also learned from the reports of those people

that they understood there to be sure and public signs of martyrdom in him. For one thing, once the head was washed, when they studied it carefully between the palms of their hands, among the multitude of thorn pricks some of the thorns had been pressed into the head and had stuck to it. When they found the thorns they extracted them and took care to keep them as far as possible with the greatest zeal of devotion. For another thing, furthermore, when they had looked over each and every part of the holy body, they identified telling signs of martyrdom committed on the palms, feet and side.[77] Additionally, from several of the marks that appeared to them, they found that he had been immersed in very hot and boiling water. Finally, after the body had been washed, they dressed him in a white robe and then put him back onto the bier, wrapped in linen cloths.

Meanwhile, while they were doing this, a coffin in which the most holy blessed martyr might be buried was sought throughout the city, but none was found. So in the cemetery, under the wall of the chapterhouse, a ditch was dug where a coffin might be found and the body laid in it. And while they were digging, wonderful to tell, they found a coffin lying on top of another one. Each of these was clean and spotless, because no corpse had ever been put in either. So this was rightly taken to be a miracle, since among the leaders of the church and its first founders[78] not one was found who could remember such a coffin, nor by whom it had been brought or when it had been buried there. And in consequence we conjecture that divine providence had kept it intact and unharmed all that time for Saint William.

[XIX] ON HIS BURIAL IN THE MONKS' CEMETERY

After all these events were completed, as we have recounted, and after the commendation of the soul was done, as is the custom with the dead, the community of brothers led the procession with psalms and chants of praise; the illustrious martyr

followed, to be buried in the inner cemetery.[79] The cemetery was filled with thousands of people entering from the other side by the gate and there was hardly enough space there for all the entrants. On this side, the monks and clergy celebrated the solemn burial service with praise of psalmody, and on the other, the laypeople stood by there with the greatest of joy. Those who were present, however different they may have been in lifestyle or sex, were nevertheless all as one as they watched.

After the funeral rite was celebrated and the tomb at the entrance to the cemetery on the side of the cloister was properly arranged, the body of the most blessed martyr was taken down from the bier and placed inside. Once he was put in the grave, it was possible for the eyes of all to see that he was wrapped in a robe, and they stayed on to watch for the space of about an hour. But those who happened to stand closest, as I later learned from the reports of some of them, happened to smell there a sweetness of fragrance. In the end, because they did not have one, they put on top a slab from the other tomb, which was concave in the middle, and one stone was stuck to the other with cement. That being finished, and God remaining there as guardian, the convent of monks returned to the church, chanting psalms; others indeed returned to their own homes glorifying God's great deeds.

Here ends the first book.