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ABSTRACTINTENTION AND ACHIEVEMENT IN LA VIE DE SAINT THOMAS BECKETBY GUERNES DE PONT-SAINTE-MAXENCE by JOHN ROBERT SIDDLE LITTLEFAIR

It is hoped to establish the motives and intentions of Guernes in undertaking his poem, to evaluate his success in fulfilling his ambitions.

Chapter one outlines the historical background to the dispute between Henry II and Thomas Becket; in composing this chapter no attempt has been made to exclude any historical details which may originate from Guernes' poem, or from works which Guernes may have consulted. The aim here is to give a balanced picture of events, and to this end modern historians as well as mediaeval sources have been consulted. This may lead to accusations of historical impurity in subsequent chapters, but it leaves the question of Guernes' sources open for discussion; this is a more important consideration in this study.

Chapter two discusses the dating and sources of Guernes' poem, and considers the evidence and significance of the fragments of the first draft of the poem, recently discovered.

Chapter three attempts to establish the intentions of the poet, by examining his own statements in the poem and attempting to establish to what degree they may be religious, devotional, panegyric, historical or political.

In chapters four to eight the poet's treatment of his material is studied; chapters four, five and six are concerned predominantly with the figure of Thomas Becket, chapter seven with King Henry II and King Louis VII, chapter eight with the remaining figures in the poem. Where appropriate the poet's treatment is compared and contrasted with that of his sources, and with the surviving fragments of the first draft. Consideration is also given to Guernes' consciousness of his audience and to how this may have influenced his treatment of material.

In chapter nine the poet's achievement and his success in fulfilling his stated ambitions are evaluated.

INTENTION AND ACHIEVEMENT IN LA VIE DE SAINT THOMAS BECKET
BY GUERNES DE PONT-SAINTE-MAXENCE

A study of the aims of the poet in undertaking his work,
of the means and methods by which he proceeded, and an
evaluation of his success in achieving his aims

in THREE VOLUMES

VOLUME ONE

by JOHN ROBERT SIDDLE LITTLEFAIR

Submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the
University of Durham

Department of French

1980

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CHAPTER ONE

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

If we may judge from the actions and attitudes of the people living in the decades which followed the reign of King Stephen, we may deduce that few of them viewed those nineteen years of trouble and confusion with much affection, or their passing with much regret. No one would have presumed that the accession of Henry Plantagenet, the eldest son of Geoffrey Plantagenet of Anjou and the Empress Matilda, was going to solve of itself the problems caused and created during the uncertainties of Stephen's reign, but the grandson of King Henry I returned to England in late 1154 with three useful advantages; he was the undisputed successor to the throne; a year had elapsed since the agreement ensuring this succession had been made with Stephen on the death of Eustace, Stephen's son, and Henry had been able in some measure to prepare himself for the future; and, he knew that after the better part of twenty years, England had grown more than weary with the 'tempus werre'. Nevertheless, the English barons, who had grown in strength and stature as a result of Stephen's rather irresolute and ill-advised policies, were ready to exploit the new king should they be offered the opportunity, and Henry knew that he must quickly dispose of all the causes which the barons might find for the renewal of warfare, and leave them with no reason to distrust him. Accordingly, having ordered the departure of the Flemish mercenaries who had lately been engaged in England, the king began to ensure his position by ordering the demolition of the remaining strongholds where opposition might otherwise become effective, and



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he boldly forced the barons to relinquish the custody of the king's castles, a move calculated to strike decisively at baronial control in the provinces. Henry may not have been surprised to encounter some resistance to this last plan, and he was openly defied at Scarborough by William Le Gros, Count of Aumale, who had been created Earl of York by King Stephen in 1138. Henry, taking prompt action, quickly forced Aumale's submission of the castle. Similar difficulties arose with the hostility of Roger, Earl of Hereford, until he was persuaded by Gilbert Foliot, Bishop of Hereford, to submit, and with that of Hugh Latimer, who persisted in his opposition until he was beaten by the king. Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester and brother of the late king, fearing humiliation at the hands of the new monarch, retired to the Abbey of Cluny whilst his castles were destroyed. Having achieved his immediate objective, Henry II spent much time in hearing complaints, and setting lands and castles back in the possession of the rightful owners, as far as he could ascertain with fairness, and taking, wherever it was possible, the state of affairs as they had been in the 'time of his grandfather' to be of paramount importance. Quickly and efficiently, the new king, in sharp contrast to the mediocre efforts of his predecessor, had mastered the barons. But the barons had not been the only parties to assert themselves during Stephen's reign. With the failure of the king's court to deal with all the cases due to come before it during the years of disturbance, the Church, perhaps not unwillingly, found that its own courts were being required to deal with more cases, especially those directly concerned with ecclesiastical matters, than had been the case in the reign of Henry I. Stephen had made worthless promises to the Church concerning its power and position, and had been forced to grant some concessions to it in a charter of 1136. He was almost

excommunicated for forbidding Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, to attend the Lateran Council of 1148. But the Church itself had come to realize the need for there to be a stronger king than Stephen had proved, if the possibility of detrimental effects of a necessary papal intervention were to be avoided in the future. The papal interdict placed on England had largely been ignored by the English bishops, 'preferring peace to duty' in this instance, but Theobald and probably his colleagues must have known that the new king might undertake vigorous actions to clarify the Church's position, in much the same way as, in the event, he clarified that of the barons on his accession. Hence Archbishop Theobald, backed by Henry of Winchester, Philip, Bishop of Bayeux, and Arnulf, Bishop of Lisieux, recommended to the king's service a man from whom they felt that the Church might expect a favourable representation and defence in the face of the king's policies concerning it, a man who should be readily acceptable to the new monarch not only because he was a prominent Londoner and as such might help to win over to the king a city which had shown itself to be less than friendly to the Angevin cause during Stephen's reign, and was as yet uncertain as to where its loyalties should lie, but also because he was a man of proven ability and potential, to whom the king's attention had been drawn in the past. Within a matter of weeks of the accession of Henry II to the English throne, Thomas Becket, the recently appointed Archdeacon of Canterbury and provost of Beverley, became Chancellor of England.

Thomas Becket was born on 21 December, possibly in 1117, but more probably in 1118, in Cheapside in London. His father, Gilbert, was a merchant, a member of the most respectable class, and for a time portreeve, or chief magistrate, of the city. Either Gilbert, or, as J. C. Robertson suggests,¹ more probably his father had come over to

England from his native town of Rouen, for migration from Rouen to London must have been fairly natural and common in the wake of the Norman conquest, as these were the chief ports of entry and commercial centres of Normandy and south-east England. The confusion concerning Thomas' mother's name is also probably best explained by Robertson. She is in turn Matilda and Roësa, from Caen. According to Robertson's theory, Thomas' grandfather, who was probably called Gilbert also, came across to England, possibly after the birth of his son, and his wife was called Roësa. The son, Gilbert, later married one Matilda, and their son was Thomas. This does not, however, solve all the problems, for it does not answer the question as to which of them, Roësa or Matilda, was a native of Caen, once we have established that they are not one and the same person, and it seems that we can do little beyond assuming that at least one of them was. We can however, with some degree of safety discount as highly improbable stories of Gilbert's expedition to the Holy Land, whence he was followed by a love-struck emir's daughter whom at length he had christened Matilda and whom he subsequently married. Thomas Becket was, then, of Norman descent, and indeed his name derives from the Norman, meaning "little brook", despite the attempts of Mr. Thierry and others to give him a purely Saxon background, and to make him subsequently the champion of the Saxon cause. What is true is that, as we have seen, Becket's family had probably been in England for more than one generation. Thomas had at least three sisters: Mary, who was a nun of Barking and ultimately became abbess; Agnes, the foundress of St. Thomas's Hospital; and Roesia. He also had at least four nephews, three of whom were probably the sons of Roesia.

When he was ten years old, Thomas, who seems to have owed something of his piety and devotion to his mother's attentions, was

sent by his father to Robert, Prior of St. Mary's, at Merton in Surrey. As Dom David Knowles has pointed out,² this was not, as has commonly been assumed, the Robert who became Becket's confessor and later confidant, the latter being a canon of the recently established Augustinian house. Merton served only as a preparatory school, however, and a few years later Thomas entered one of the three main schools in London, possibly that of St. Paul's. He seems to have displayed some intellectual ability and an especially sharp and retentive memory. It was about this time that he met Richer de l'Aigle, of Pevensey Castle in Sussex, with whom Thomas went hunting and hawking, narrowly escaping death in a mill-stream on one occasion. From the London grammar-school, Thomas went to Paris, in 1135 or 1136, where he followed the arts course. Teaching at the schools in Paris at that time were Abelard, Peter the Lombard, and the Englishman Robert of Melun; John of Salisbury went there to study in 1136, although there is no evidence to suggest that Becket met him at that time, and we know little of Becket's way of life during this period. When Becket was twenty-one years old, his mother, whom Knowles regards as having been hitherto 'the greatest influence on his life and conduct', died.³ Knowles thinks that his freedom from her supervision may have increased his contacts with Richer de l'Aigle, and that this may, indirectly, have led him more towards the circles around the court of King Stephen, as Richer's confidential secretary. If this is true, Thomas cannot have remained in this position for very long, for, apparently soon after his return from his studies in France, his father suffered considerable losses, due partly at least to a fire or fires in the city of London, and the need for Thomas to find a more permanent form of employment must have become more pressing. A friend of his father, Osbern Huitdeniers,

offered him employment as an accountant, and he also filled a position as clerk and auditor to the portreeves of London. He would thus have become acquainted with the financial and mercantile business carried on in the city, and would also have come into contact with the workings of the royal exchequer.

But if Gilbert Becket appears to have fallen upon harder times, it seems that his son owed his next change of status, indirectly at least, to the fact that Gilbert still entertained in his house guests of some influence. Although there is some confusion as to how the move came about, one suggestion is that two brothers, Baldwin, the Archdeacon of Sudbury, and Master Eustace of Boulogne, who had stayed with Gilbert and had been impressed with the ability of his son, recommended the latter to the service of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Theobald. Another source suggests that an official of the archbishop's household recognized Thomas' talent during a similar visit to his father's house, and was instrumental in achieving the move, whilst it is also possible that these agencies may have done no more than encourage or inspire Thomas to apply for a position in Theobald's household himself. At all events, Thomas entered the Archbishop's service as a clerk in the winter of 1143/4, at the age of twenty-five⁴.

Tempting though it is for Becket's supporters to see this move from a purely secular establishment to a society concerned directly with the Church as being inspired by a desire for a more pious and religious way of life, and this is how his sympathisers viewed the move in retrospect thirty and forty years later, we must allow, as Radford puts it, that: 'it is at least probable that the young layman ... was as fully alive to the fact that the surest way to eminence for a commoner lay through the Church as he was to the difficulty of living a religious life in a secular environment'⁵.

Whether it was because Thomas quickly won Theobald's confidence and respect, or because he seemed ambitious and could excel in arguments and disputations, the newly arrived clerk made some enemies for himself among his colleagues in the archiepiscopal household. Bearing in mind the events which took place some twenty years later, it would be natural for his biographers to wish to dwell on the rivalry which existed between Thomas and Roger of Pont L'Évêque, and perhaps to exaggerate it, but nevertheless, Roger did succeed in having Thomas dismissed twice from the archbishop's service, with some degree of injustice, we may presume, as on each occasion the primate's brother, Walter, then Archdeacon of Canterbury, had him reconciled to his master and reinstated. Becket acquired favour quite rapidly, although it would appear that both Roger and John of Canterbury established themselves above him in the order of preference. Walter became Bishop of Rochester in 1147, and was replaced as Archdeacon of Canterbury by Roger. Roger became Archbishop of York in 1154 and John had become treasurer there in the previous year. Thomas, in the meantime, was accumulating a modest collection of benefices, although he was not made deacon until 1154.

During his service in the archbishop's household, Thomas spent some time in study abroad, although we cannot ascertain the exact dates of his absence from England. The archbishop encouraged him to further his studies in this way, and he spent a year at Bologna, where Gratian, the great authority on ecclesiastical law, was then teaching, in the study of canon and civil law, and a shorter period at Auxerre. Indeed, it seems that Becket concentrated on canon law rather than theology, which was to have a bearing on his approach to the conflict which ensued in the eleven-sixties.

Thomas was also entrusted by Theobald with some important and delicate missions. He helped to achieve the revocation of the legation of the Bishop of Winchester, who must have been regarded as a serious rival to the primate, and the clerk accompanied his master when, contrary to the king's orders and despite the fact that the ports were being carefully watched, Theobald made a precarious crossing of the channel to attend the Council of Rheims, to which he had been summoned by Pope Eugenius III, and which was to open on 21 March 1148. It is perhaps worth noting that, in the events which followed this act of defiance, Theobald suffered exile, and had his property confiscated by the king, albeit only for a relatively short period, about three months, during which time Theobald promulgated the interdict sanctioned by the pope, to which mention has already been made, and which the English bishops chose largely to ignore.

One other incident of significance should be recorded; in 1152, King Stephen, anxious at that time to ensure the succession of his son Eustace, sent Henry, Archbishop of York, to Rome in an attempt to secure papal approval for the coronation of the heir to the throne. Thomas, acting as Theobald's agent, was reported to have been largely responsible for bringing about the refusal of Pope Eugenius III to agree to this proposal. Eustace in fact died unexpectedly in 1153, and Stephen was moved to recognize Henry Plantagenet as the rightful successor to himself by the formality of accepting the young prince as his adopted son, but the events at Rome in the previous year had already achieved their objective of leaving the possibility of Henry's succession open, whilst Eustace was yet alive. Thus it is possible to see Thomas Becket, and certainly his master Theobald, as instrumental in the struggle to pave the way to Henry's succession. Thus when Henry did come to the throne, late in 1154, he was very aware that he

owed a debt to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Theobald, on the other hand, thought that he foresaw a means of protecting the Church's interests from any excessive attempts on the part of the new king to encroach upon the power which the Church had won during the reign of King Stephen. Thus as we have seen, he recommended to the king's notice his clerk, Thomas, from whom Theobald had in recent times received much useful service, and for whom the archbishop felt respect, not to say attachment. As we have seen, he was supported in this view and in making the recommendation by a number of other prelates, including Henry, Bishop of Winchester, Philip, Bishop of Bayeux, and Arnulf, Bishop of Lisieux, so it may be fair to assume that it was something more than a personal esteem for the young clerk which led to his appointment in late 1154 or early 1155 as Chancellor of England. Following the departures of Roger of Pont L'Évêque and John of Canterbury to York to become archbishop and treasurer respectively, Thomas had recently come into greater prominence than hitherto in the archbishop's household, replacing Roger as Archdeacon of Canterbury, a post he was to retain, despite complaints from Theobald that he was neglecting the duties which the position required him to fulfil, throughout his office as chancellor, until Henry II himself obliged him to resign from it soon after Thomas had resigned as chancellor. Thus, in suggesting the appointment of his new archdeacon to the service of the king, Theobald must have hoped that he was achieving the best means of assuring a fair consideration of the Church's interests, just as it may be possible to speculate that in nominating his previous archdeacon to the vacant see of York he was aiming at the best means of achieving a peaceful settlement of the vexed question of the primacy and the positions of York and Canterbury relative to

each other. In this last matter, he was not seeking so much to assert Canterbury's supremacy over York by having one of his own household installed, from whom he might expect subservience to his will, as to end equitably and quietly a dispute from which he saw little benefit accruing to either party. After his death, the problem was taken up again with as much venom as before, but his hopes over the appointment of Thomas to the chancellorship were to be cruelly deceived in his own lifetime.

It is not possible to know the nature of Thomas Becket's private thoughts at the time of his appointment, but in view of the picture which is often held of him as a result of the events of later years, his willingness to enter the king's service is in a sense more disturbing than his apparent 'conversion', which took place when he became Archbishop of Canterbury. But having enjoyed a degree of success in diplomatic missions, it seems that he had little reluctance to return to the secular sphere where he could indulge not only his abilities in that direction, but also that side of his nature which enjoyed the expression of the grandiose and even the extravagant, and which the office which he was now offered seemed more likely to accommodate than his present status. His natural ambition would have directed him to see in this new post a more rapid means of advancement than any other avenues at that time open to him. This is not to say that he must necessarily have abandoned the pious or religious inclinations which he may have felt, for he could have, as some of his biographers would have us believe, maintained them in private, whilst still giving free rein to that side of his nature which was more effusive, more aspiring, more worldly.

It is necessary to see at the outset what the office of chancellor actually entailed. The chancellor had no direct judicial

duties. He had the custody of the Great Seal, the superintendence of the royal chapel, the care of vacant sees, abbeys and baronies. He was entitled, without the need of being formally summoned on each occasion, to attend all the king's councils, and all royal grants passed through his hands. The office itself was not one of vital importance to the king, as is witnessed by the fact that, on Thomas' resignation, Henry continued without a chancellor eo nomine, although Geoffrey Ridel undertook most of the duties pertaining to the office. What was undoubtedly of greater significance was the position in which it placed the incumbent as regards the king. Thomas, although he was the king's senior by some fifteen years, rapidly struck up a rapport and a relationship with the king which far exceeded the bounds which were strictly necessary for each to fulfil his rôle adequately, and Thomas became a trusted guide and adviser to the king, not only in official or state business, and his ready favourite companion when the king was indulging his taste for the sports of hunting or riding. Thomas' rise and his success with the king did not leave him without enemies in court circles, where, as had been the case in the early days in Theobald's household, as we have seen, he was beset with envy and initial malignity, and at least one biographer would have us believe that in those early days at court he would have given up the chances of riches and splendour to escape from such vilifications, had it been possible for him to do so without disgrace. Whether we discount this account as a mere rationalization on the part of the writer to explain that the chancellor was constrained to remain in office almost against his will and his better judgment, or whether we accept it as containing a grain of truth, it is revealing in that it betrays, either in the mind of the writer who attributed the

feeling to the chancellor, in the mind of the chancellor himself, the desire to avoid the interpretations of one's actions as admissions of defeat or of having lost face before one's rivals. This reaction, natural enough in most men, became of paramount importance in the mind of Thomas Becket, and played an essential part in the development of the conflict in the latter years of his archbishopric.

The chancellor was very active in his new position as Henry's confidence in him grew, and his status increased in the eyes of the world. He helped the king over the matter of bringing reluctant barons tardily into line, he went abroad with the king who, early in 1156, was going to resist the claims of his brother Geoffrey to Anjou and Maine, and to receive homage from Aquitaine, and we find the chancellor being of great assistance to his sovereign during the campaigns. Soon afterwards, Thomas was back in England acting as an itinerant justice in at least ten counties. Thomas succeeded in elevating his status as chancellor, having fifty-two clerks at work in his office, and, when two or three could have performed adequately in the writing office, he had an estimated fifteen at work there. Thomas, indeed, became renowned for his munificence as chancellor, and for the splendour in which he himself saw fit to carry out his functions. Perhaps the greatest expression of this aspect of his career was the pomp and magnificence of his embassy to Paris in 1158, when he was charged with the negotiations concerning the marriage of the infant Margaret, daughter of the King of France, Louis VII, to the eldest surviving legitimate son of the English king, Prince Henry. The splendour of the procession, with its array of fine teams of horses and wagon upon wagon of costly garments intended as gifts, barrels of the best English beer, and many of the chancellor's other expensive personal effects, aroused wonder and

amazement as the Englishmen made their way towards the capital of France and passed down the streets of Paris to meet King Louis. The expense was doubtless regarded as justified, as the chancellor carried his mission to success, and the troubled, contentious area of the Norman Vexin was won as the dowry. On another occasion, Becket was able to give his own king a ship from what seems to have been his personal fleet, which contained, at any rate, more ships than Henry seemed to have at his disposal. Knowles notes, with more than a hint of disapproval, that:

"...on more than one occasion at different times in his life, we seem to note in Thomas a love of the display of wealth and expensive things which is open to criticism, not only as unbecoming in a cleric and even in a devout Christian, but because there is in it a note of rhetoric, if not vulgarity, that is inconsistent with a character of true dignity. Moreover, the instances of this in Thomas' life are not always explicable as the means chosen by an expert propagandist as the only, or at least the most effective way of gaining his end...some of them...were criticized by contemporaries as errors of judgment, and a critic might say that ends that could be gained only in this way were, perhaps, not worthy of a wise man's efforts."⁶

We shall see that such effects as were achieved in Paris and elsewhere could not be gained without certain consequences which could also lead to other charges being laid at the door of Theobald's archdeacon in his capacity as Chancellor of England. It is not perhaps pure coincidence that contemporaries spoke of Thomas' 'kingly status', as W. L. Warren suggests in his work on Henry II that the latter shifted on to the shoulders of his chancellor those aspects of kingship which irked him or which he found boring, and that thus it was that the

chancellor, and not his monarch, came to have his splendid, lavish court, and display all the necessary pomp and ceremony, and also undertook to entertain all the kingdom's important foreign visitors, and pour hospitality upon them, however boring the task in that particular instance might be.⁷ Indeed, according to Warren, it was from his chancellor, as well as from his mother, the former empress, that Henry drew some of his sense of the 'mission of kingship', and that it became more impressed upon his mind as a result of this. But whether this was a conscious agreement or an unconscious process between the two men, the evidence suggests that Becket enjoyed the role he had to play.

The chancellor seemed equally at home on the field of battle, distinguishing himself in the campaign in Toulouse in 1159, when there was the possibility that the Toulousain might split from its ties with Aquitaine and become a separate state, or possibly join with Spain to create a more powerful one. Despite the entreaties of Louis VII, who was sympathetic to both sides in the dispute, and had ties with both, and who tried to act as mediator, Henry remained intractable in his bold decision to go to enforce the loyalty of the city himself. Louis therefore felt compelled to defend the city, and Henry was most reluctant to attack his feudal overlord, although he was probably in a strong enough position to have done so, had he dared or wished to try. In coming to his decision, the English king had to ignore some very strong advice from his chancellor to attack Toulouse and take Louis captive. In the event, some of the English army fell sick, but this did not prevent Becket, left behind with a punitive force, from recovering Quercy, in which episode the chancellor seems to have displayed more brutality than the situation demanded. Eventually a tenuous truce was made, in

the form of an uneasy peace settlement which really failed to resolve the problems at issue.

We shall return to the Toulouse expedition of 1159 and its implications in due course, but for the moment we have probably seen enough of the chancellor at work in secular affairs, and it is now time to turn to his dealings with the Church, to which he may be said to owe much in the matter of his appointment to his present position, and see whether his actions fulfilled the hopes which the Archbishop of Canterbury and probably others had placed in him concerning the Church's relationship with the state.

It would be illuminating to know archbishop Theobald's thoughts in the early period of Thomas' chancellorship, as he and the king grew closer together, and Thomas gained more influence with Henry, until he became, as it seemed, the second most important man in the land, and as it were the king's 'alter ego', as Knowles once describes him. But if the archbishop waited for some indication that this newly acquired influence was to be turned to the Church's advantage, he waited largely in vain. Thomas seems to have realized quite soon during his tenancy of the chancellorship, as he did during his archbishopric, that it was not possible for him to try to serve two masters; at least, if he felt that his actions as chancellor towards the Church were in her best interests, he remained reticent and unwilling to defend them as such to those who might accuse him. However, when he became archbishop, he could indicate his decision and show where he was to take his stand by resigning the chancellorship, thus making it plain to his king whose interests he was going to take it upon himself to defend. When he was taken from Theobald's household to become the king's chancellor, no such symbolic gesture was open to him, unless he had cared to resign as

Archdeacon of Canterbury, and this archdeaconry was a post to which he seemed particularly attached - he did not resign it until after he had resigned as chancellor, and then only because he was compelled to do so by the king. Thus Becket was left with no means of signalling his intentions, had he wished to, presuming that he himself had at that time a clear impression of what those intentions were, and the archbishop and others were left to discover gradually, during the course of the years 1155 to 1161, how the chancellor was to behave when involved in Church matters. We know now what Theobald could not have foreseen then, and these years must have left him saddened and somewhat disappointed and disillusioned with his former clerk.

One of the concessions which King Stephen had been forced to make to the Church was his withdrawal of the royal prerogative to hold the revenue of vacant sees and abbacies. Henry II, however, went back on this promise, having as always little regard for agreements made during his predecessor's reign, and he recommenced the former, although by no means universally approved, practice of arrogating them to himself. In her book on Henry II, J. R. Green says:

"Thomas had taken office pledged to defend ecclesiastical interests, and he was so far true to his pledge, that while he was chancellor he put an end to the abuse of keeping bishoprics and abbeys vacant."⁸

If he was pledged in this way, it seems that it can only have been a moral, as opposed to a formal obligation, and as such may, in view of what ensued, have existed in the minds of others, and perhaps not for the chancellor himself. As to the second statement, the evidence seems to suggest that Henry ceased to use the revenues

himself only in order to grant them to his chancellor, who did not view the practice with total aversion, although John of Salisbury does give both sides of the story when he writes to the chancellor in the latter part of Becket's chancellorship, probably about September 1160, over the matter of the election of the Bishop of Exeter, requiring Becket's help on behalf of Theobald to further the cause of Bartholomew:

"Fama est apud nos quod trium vacantium episcopatum redditus ad liberationem vestram vobis dominus rex concesserit, sed non ideo minus de patrocinio vestro in opere isto confidit. Multa quidem sunt quae in hac parte poteritis allegare, nec dubio de effectu, si ei operam dare placuerit. Nota est industria vestra, et quid Lincolnien(s)i, quid Eborac(ensi) et in aliis multis egeritis, neminem nostrum latet."⁹

The three sees in question were Coventry, Exeter and Worcester, and despite John of Salisbury's limited approbation of Becket's conduct, it is not possible to agree fully with J. R. Green's assessment, but rather to see that all the pomp and splendour of the chancellor's court and his entourage may have been sponsored by revenues which should rightly have been directed to other causes less secular and seemingly more worthy of such support.

Other accusations, besides this apparent malpractice concerning vacant sees, can be laid at the chancellor's door concerning his conduct towards the Church during his years of office. That Becket had a tendency as chancellor to put royal policy before considerations for the Church may be seen from the part he played in the controversy surrounding Battle Abbey.

Large abbeys or monasteries often became a good target for spoliation by either the territorial overlord or the regional bishop,

because of the considerable revenues which they enjoyed. A bishop could, for example, achieve this end by acting as absentee abbot and so absorb the revenues, he could abuse the hospitality of the abbey by using it for ordinations and synods, or he might even occupy the whole establishment and use it as a cathedral. In May 1157, the inner royal council, meeting at Colchester Abbey, heard the case of Hilary, Bishop of Chichester, who was claiming that he could enforce his right of visitation upon the abbot of Battle Abbey and compel him to attend his synods. The abbot, however, claimed that the abbey came into that category of churches which, for various reasons, had been granted exemption from such requirements. In the case of Battle Abbey, it was claimed that, when William the Conqueror had founded it in 1066 near the site of his victory, he had created it as a royal chapel, although it is improbable that a formal charter was issued to confirm the fact. Forged charters, however, were produced to support this claim for exemption from episcopal surveillance. Bishop Hilary, on the other hand, having obtained papal bulls from Eugenius III and Hadrian IV to enforce his case, attempted to have the abbot acknowledge his episcopal jurisdiction. The king naturally supported the abbot's side, whilst Theobald lent his support to Hilary. Hilary, replying to the opening speeches of the abbot, Walter, and his brother, the royal justiciar, Richard de Luci, who had tried to magnify the importance of the rôle of the king in issuing charters, argued that no layman had the right to confer ecclesiastical liberties unless they were confirmed by the authority of the pope. Hilary had already incurred the king's displeasure when, expounding the theme of the two swords, he had reminded Henry that no bishop could be deposed by the king, to which Henry had replied, "True, but he could be expelled." Now Hilary had infuriated

him, and Henry, accusing the bishop of combating the authority which God had given to the crown, called upon the Archbishop of Canterbury and the other bishops present to do justice. They failed to support Hilary now, perhaps rather surprisingly, as they failed to support Thomas Becket when he was Archbishop of Canterbury in 1164, in less favourable circumstances. Becket himself, for whom, as A. Saltman points out,¹⁰ it would have been easier to oppose the king on this first occasion in 1157, had he been so minded, than it was in 1164, joined in the argument forcefully on the king's side, drawing from Hilary only a weak defence and a statement at the duplicity of which the Archbishop of Canterbury was seen to be making the sign of the cross. Hilary rapidly withdrew his claims, before incurring a further portion of the king's displeasure, before this attack which saw the royal interpretation of the case vindicated with some help from the king's chancellor. Some eleven years later, Becket himself was to quote this affair as an instance of Henry's unreasonable attitude towards the Church in a letter to the pope. Whilst there may be some truth in Knowles' statement¹¹ that the state of affairs as regards the standing of canon law was less clear-cut and decisive in 1157 than it was in 1168, and that consequently it is not necessary to see this as an example of hypocrisy on Becket's part, the suggestion exists that there is an inconsistency on his part if we wish to see him as having any great regard for the interest of the Church during his period of chancellorship. He did remain, as we have seen, Archdeacon of Canterbury throughout this period, the highest position he could attain below that of a bishop in the Church. It is not difficult, therefore, to sympathise with those of his contemporaries who saw in his conduct at Colchester in 1157 a betrayal of his ecclesiastical background and allegiance.

Other examples of his conduct about this time seem to suggest that he did not oppose Hilary in the Battle Abbey case because he felt that he was interpreting in the correct fashion the meaning of canon law at that time, and was thus constrained to act as he did, whatever his personal inclinations to oppose the king and support the sacerdotium may have been, but because he had seen fit to take the king's part as his royal chancellor, even when he knew that in so doing his actions could be detrimental to the body to which he owed at least some allegiance. In 1156 a scutage was levied to help finance the king's campaign against his brother Geoffrey in Anjou, and much of the burden fell on the feudal estates of the Church. Although this was not the first time that such action had been taken, Theobald obviously felt strongly enough about it to complain, but his objections were overruled, and the chancellor accompanied his king on the campaign. A second, heavier scutage was levied in order to finance the Toulouse campaign three years later, and the tax fell more demandingly on the Church than elsewhere, and Becket's compliance in the levying of this tax earned him bitter reproaches in subsequent years from ecclesiastical colleagues, if not at the time. Even if we believe that the chancellor was not directly responsible for the initiative to levy the tax, it is difficult, as John of Salisbury later wrote, to exonerate him from blame for accepting and exploiting it. A little later Thomas proved himself very reluctant to forego the levying of a tax on the churches in the diocese of Canterbury, which he no doubt destined for the meeting of expenses incurred as chancellor. Theobald protested about this tax in a letter to his archdeacon, implying that he was doing a disservice to the sacerdotium as a whole, and telling him that he had taken measures to prevent such harm being done:

"Est autem quod tam de concilio religionis quam de proprio concepimus spiritu, ut omnes malas consuetudines quam nostris temporibus et per nos ortae sunt in archiepiscopatu emendemus ante exitum nostrum. Unde cum in extremis agere videremur, Deo vovimus inter cetera quod consuetudinem de secundis auxiliis, quam frater noster archidiaconus ecclesiis inposuit, destuemus, et ab ea relaxantes et liberantes ecclesias sub anathemate prohibuimus ne ulterius ab aliquo exigantur...Tu quoque, si salute, et nostram males animam liberari quam de peccatis et dampnatione nostra pecuniam et divitas infinitas acquirere, inde est quod te ad praesens in executione huius auxilii audire non possumus sine laesione voti et salutis nostrae periculo. Sed si Deus nobis utiam dederit et sanitatem quam nondum bene adepti sumus, speramus quod adhuc ita tibi per manum nostram Dominus providebit quod talibus non egebis auxiliis et gratias ages Deo quod a mala consuetudine suam temporibus nostras liberaverit ecclesiam."¹²

As has been already suggested, it is possible to see Becket's failure to resign as archdeacon as reprehensible on his part, and it leads to doubts concerning his motives for not so doing. The criticism which Knowles makes of Becket's refusal to heed the pleas of the dying archbishop for his archdeacon's return to Canterbury to see him for a last time is perhaps more of a personal criticism,¹³ one which possibly has done some harm to Becket's reputation, despite pleas that the king's business constantly precluded the possibility of his return, but the earlier complaints of Theobald for his return, not to see him, but to resume his neglected duties as archdeacon are valid enough, and may illustrate where, in fact, Becket's priorities during his chancellorship may have lain.

On 18 April 1161, Theobald of Bec, fifth Archbishop of Canterbury since the Norman Conquest, died. For more than a year the see remained vacant, during which time the revenues were administered by Thomas Becket. On 3 June 1162, the same man, after, if we accept the popular theories, grave doubts on his part and much joy and expectancy on the part of Henry II, became Archbishop of Canterbury himself. But we must now examine this development of the history of Thomas Becket carefully, and consider whether the issue is as simple as is sometimes believed, or whether there are other, less obvious motives and implications involved.

One theory, mentioned by Robertson, suggests, not only that it was a popular opinion of the time that Becket should succeed Theobald, but also that this was the latter's own wish.¹⁴ Such a surmise would require some indication that the old archbishop had not become fully disillusioned and disappointed with the behaviour of his former clerk, and not even the urgent pleas for Becket's speedy return when Theobald knew himself to be dying can of themselves justify such a conjecture. When Theobald himself writes of the matter of his successor, in his last letter to the king, it is difficult to interpret him as suggesting that Becket should naturally be the man to become the next archbishop, and indeed it is possible to construe his words to imply almost the reverse:

"Commendo vobis sanctam Cant(uariensem) ecclesiam de cuius manu per ministerium meum regni gubernaculum accepistis, ut eam, si placet, ab incursu pravorum hominum tueamini. Et michi, qui eam, licet indignus disponente Domino hactenus ut potui sciirexi, talem studeatis subrogare pastorem qui tanta sede non videatur indignus, cui religio placeat et qui virtutum meritis placere credatur Altissimo. Fidelis vester sum; vobis consilium debeo,

et ecce coram Deo et omnibus sanctis eius consilium do. Non quaeratis in hac re quae vestra sunt sed quae Dei, quia ego pro eo spondeo vobis quod, si causam eius fideliter procuraveritis, et ipse vestras utilissime promovebit."¹⁵

Thus if Theobald did wish for Thomas Becket to succeed him, he did not express this wish succinctly in writing to the king. But for some, the idea had long been in Henry's mind, for he had in view a plan which required for its successful execution, the election to the archbishopric of his companion, worthy servant, and loyal chancellor. J. R. Green gives expression to a popularly held view:

"To complete the king's schemes, however, one dignity yet remained to be conferred on Thomas. He was eager, in view of his proposed reconstruction of Church and State, to adopt the Imperial system of a chancellor-archbishop."¹⁶

It is probably true that Henry was well aware that Rainald of Dassel was simultaneously Archbishop of Cologne and chancellor to the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. Henry had good reason to be pleased with the service he had received from his chancellor, to whom he had naturally grown closer over the years, although it is not impossible that retrospect has 'heightened and strengthened' the relationship between the two men, with the result that the ensuing conflict is made all the more striking. The theory implies that Henry interpreted Becket's dedication as being to the man, to his king, rather than to the office; or that he had the measure of the chancellor, and would be capable of exercising a degree of control over his actions, as Knowles suggests:

"Henry, however, with a lack of insight equal, though diametrically opposite, to that of Theobald in 1154, held to his course, convinced that he could control an archbishop as he had controlled or charmed

a chancellor."¹⁷

This also implies that Henry may have been pleasantly surprised when he discovered that his chancellor was tolerably complacent with the king's wishes concerning dealings with the Church, and he himself may not have expected such service from one who, although not as yet ordained to the priesthood, had been within the body of the Church for a number of years before coming into his service, and whom he presumed to have shown the quarter in which his sympathies lay by his apparent 'conversion' to take the king's part. Rather than fearing or suspecting that Becket was capable of the changes which are visible to us some eight hundred years after the event, the king may have cared to interpret them as a true and conclusive indication of Becket's affinities; thus the accusation against the king that he showed a lack of insight could arguably be dismissed were we satisfied that he realized the need of the awareness and the natural initial suspicion which should accompany an apparent 'change of allegiance', as the king may have seen it.

Those historians who support this theory generally agree that Henry, hoping to reassert the royal authority largely and as far as was possible in the form in which it had existed in the time of his grandfather, Henry I, was not inclined to attempt to introduce his reforms with their full force whilst Theobald remained Archbishop of Canterbury, and was content to 'make the best' of the situation until the circumstances should alter. Z. N. Brooke gives us this picture of the early years of the king's reign and his general attitude towards the Church:

"His object was to rebuild the barriers again, and by excluding papal authority, to revive the royal in its old form, but he had to act with caution. He was indebted for the ease of his accession

to the pope and to Archbishop Theobald, and had to be careful not to antagonise them by too sudden a reaction. Relations with Rome remained for a time as they had been and there was no interference with appeals. But Henry began slowly to exert his influence on elections, to get a personnel amenable to him, and to insist on their doing homage to him before consecration; moreover, he also, with the aid of his chancellor, Thomas Becket, seized opportunities to employ ecclesiastical revenues to his own advantage. The Archbishop of Canterbury, however, mattered most, and when Theobald died in 1161 the opportunity for which he had been waiting seemed to have arrived."¹⁸

We have here some impression of the English king's intentions and policies towards the Church, which must have been growing more manifest to those parties interested in them, despite the implications that Henry felt obliged to hold them largely in check. This would therefore imply that he felt that his debt of gratitude persisted over the first six or so years of his reign, and that the pope inherited Henry's gratitude, for Eugenius III had died in July 1153, and his successor, Anastasius IV, died the following year, so that for the first five years of Henry's reign, the pope was the only Englishman ever to have been elected to this position, Adrian IV. Brooke, however, does suggest elsewhere that Henry's tactics at this time were dictated less by gratitude than by policy, as if he were reluctant to attempt to put his plans into practice whilst he might still fear the effective opposition of the archbishop:

"It is a signal testimony to the importance of Theobald that in the history of the English Church the date that matters is not the death of the king, Stephen, but the death of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Theobald...it was rather policy than gratitude

that caused (Henry) to bide his time until Theobald was dead."¹⁹

This is not to say that Henry was totally quiescent in the affairs of the Church at this stage, but that he moderated his ambitions until he knew that he could find a better way of achieving his ends. When the opportunity presented itself in 1161, he set about having his chancellor elected to, and accepted in, the now vacant see of Canterbury.

Such, then is the theory, in broad terms, adhered to by several of the historians who have tackled the problem of Henry's choice of his chancellor to become the next Archbishop of Canterbury, and his consequent attempts to have him elected.²⁰ We shall soon return to see how, following this interpretation of events, the chancellor saw the issue, and responded to it, but before we turn our attention to him when he was confronted with Henry's proposal to elevate him to the see of Canterbury, we must first examine a recent and substantially different theory relative to this proposal itself, a theory which takes us back to 1159 and the Toulouse campaign in which both king and chancellor were involved.²¹

W. L. Warren²² begins his theory by pointing out that Becket belongs to an early phase of Henry II's career, and that this phase is not typical of the whole. He goes on to doubt whether the influence which the chancellor exerted on the young king was a beneficial one:

"Yet it may be doubted whether Thomas Becket was altogether a good influence on young Henry. The obstinate insistence upon the unequivocal acknowledgment of rights, and the preference for grand gestures, which mark the whole of Becket's career, are peculiarly characteristic of Henry's activities in the early years while Becket directed his hand. The young Henry behaved as a man seemingly

convinced that the world would fall at his feet if he challenged it with determination enough, confident of the righteousness of his cause. Becket went his way even unto death with just such a conviction; but Henry learned that the world had to be wooed, not browbeaten. It may be that Henry's early love of Becket sprang from a shared temperament, but it was the archbishop who pursued intransigence to the meretricious glory of a martyr's crown, the king who learned to bend and manipulate, to concede with grace and recover by stealth, to persuade where he could not force, to defer before he was obliged to fight, to achieve his ends by clever compromise, circuitous routes, or, as many contemporaries seemed to have believed, by sleight of hand. The temperament of Henry, the very mode of his kingship, changed almost out of recognition; Becket, the older man by some fifteen years, was left behind, uncomprehending. There would have been a breach between them even if they had not found a quarrel over the liberties of the Church and the prerogatives of Canterbury: the memory of close friendship lingered on to embitter their enmity, but the mature king and the mature churchman had become incompatible. Becket was too rigid, too narrow, too simpliste in his methods, and probably too upright a man, to be boon companion to the complete statesman and exponent of real-politik that Henry became."²³

This, then, is the picture, not of a king who saw no termination to his relationship and understanding with the chancellor whose value he wished to increase to his own ends, but the picture of a king becoming more aware of the problems which he faced and the best means of overcoming them. At the same time, therefore, he must have been growing more aware of the fact that his chancellor would ultimately cease to fit into his plans, that the days of close

importance, and the king could retaliate by not appointing a successor at all, as if to demonstrate that the gesture had little significance. Henry, however, must have known that it held more import than he was prepared to admit, and that Becket's solemn warnings, before the election was held, as to what the consequences might be, should not have been taken as lightly as they were. Nevertheless, it was not Henry's intention, as has been suggested by other historians,²⁶ to begin a drastic transformation of the relationship which had existed between the regnum and the sacerdotium in the years 1154 to 1162; in fact, the king was tolerably satisfied with the way matters had been approached and resolved. What he now desired was a clearer definition of the relative positions of the two parties, and to dispense with the need for the largely ad hoc nature of the resolutions which characterized, to a certain extent, the way Henry and Theobald had co-operated. Dr. Warren suggests that Theobald's death in 1161, far from providing Henry with the opportunity for which he had allegedly been waiting in order to have his own will imposed, came at a most unfortunate time for the king, at a moment when, returning from his many preoccupations on the continent, the king was hoping to turn his attention to the problems which existed in England, and as far as the Church was concerned, this involved the employment of tact and the moderation which Theobald had displayed. Consequently, Becket becomes in Henry's eyes, not the man most likely to ensure that the king's will in all matters ecclesiastical was observed, but the man who seemed to resemble the previous archbishop more than any other, in that no one could be expected to be more ready to continue and expand Theobald's work. Moreover, Henry had not been deceived as to the true nature of Becket's feelings, and where his loyalties might lie:

"...even though Henry had reason to be gratified by Becket's zeal as chancellor, he could have no illusions about his deep-seated piety and his basic sympathy for the Church's highest claims."²⁷

There could be little doubt, in fact, that the training which Becket received in the household of the archbishop in earlier years left their mark permanently upon him, and he never shook off his training and readiness to defend God's law, although, whatever theories we follow here, there can be little room for doubt that at times, at least, the effects of that training were rather hard to trace between 1154 and 1161. Where Henry was much mistaken, according to Warren, was in assuming that the man he intended to have elected archbishop in 1162, a man of about forty-four, had the wisdom, the moderation, the willingness to compromise, the flexibility of the archbishop who had just died, a much older man to whom time and the experience of more than twenty years at Canterbury, many of them in the troubled times of the reign of King Stephen, had brought these qualities, qualities which Henry was not at that time to know were lacking in Thomas Becket. Thus we may see Henry's reasoning as double-edged, for the fulfilment of his plan would at one and the same time remove from the inner councils of the king an influence which he had come to deprecate, whilst giving the king an able, positive and basically favourable ally as Archbishop of Canterbury.²⁸

There are similarly two views of the election itself, although in this case those involved were aware of them, if not at the time, at least soon afterwards. The first is that considerable difficulties were encountered in persuading the monks of Canterbury as well as some of the English bishops to accept that Becket was a worthy and a suitable candidate, and that the delay of a year in the naming of a successor was due to the time taken to overcome this opposition.

companionship must come to an end. Warren sees that the events at Toulouse, if not exactly giving the king a pretext, made him finally aware that the eclipse of his chancellor was nigh, and that earlier days, and the ways that had gone with them, could no longer be borne in mind or serve the king in any useful political purpose:

"Becket belongs rather to the period of Henry's apprenticeship, fortifying by his counsel, and furthering by his zeal, a young man's fancy for simple solutions dressed up as grand adventures, and his faith that Jericho will fall to the sound of the trumpet. Toulouse was Henry's Jericho; but its walls did not fall as his trumpets blew and his armies marched and marched about. The expedition to Toulouse was the culmination of Becket's career as chancellor. It was he who was prominent in organising it, pledging the king's faith freely to raise money for it; it was he who was prominent in the conduct of it, leading a large force of mercenaries in the king's service and himself unhorsing a famous French knight; it was he who remained behind to besiege the castles of the Cahorsin, when the king returned, thwarted, to Normandy. The expedition, however, seems to have been a turning point for Henry, and the beginning of a quest for other methods of securing his ends. There were to be no more chivalrous chevauchées. New methods required new men. In moving his chancellor from the court to Canterbury Henry was, consciously or unconsciously, shaking off a tutelage he had outgrown."²⁴

Thus the election to Canterbury was, by this theory, very far from being the last honour and dignity to be conferred on Becket. This does not prevent Dr. Warren²⁵ from agreeing that the king was greatly surprised and distressed by Becket's decision to resign the chancellorship, even if it were in itself of relatively minor

Indeed, it is probable that Becket himself was taken by surprise and alarmed when the king revealed his plan to him, and that a degree of persuasion may have been necessary in this quarter also. This did not prevent the second view of the election being forwarded by the archbishop himself and his supporters, that his election had been unanimous, and that no one could claim to have opposed it. This view was given in a reply to Foliot, during the course of the conflict; the two accounts are not irreconcilable. It is possible, indeed even probable, that there was opposition to Becket when it first became known that his name was being mentioned as the next Archbishop of Canterbury, but that, when the election came to be held several months later, on 23 May 1162, the protesting voices had been persuaded to silence, although the other outstanding candidate, Gilbert Foliot, Bishop of Hereford, still did not give the king's nominee his active support. Hence it was possible in later years for Becket to make his claim, for in so doing he was using a certain economy of truth.²⁹

Thomas Becket became Archbishop of Canterbury on the third of June 1162, and the methods by which he set about fulfilling his new office, and the apparently radical change in his way of life, have caused many historians to seek for an explanation of such an unexpected and enigmatic volte-face or conversion. Various suggestions have been put forward in order to try and provide an acceptable answer. It is necessary now to pass on reviews of some of these theories which seem to modern historians best to account for Becket's actions and attitudes at this time.

One plausible theory, which has been supported by subsequent writers, has been put forward by Z. N. Brooke, and, as it throws light upon the career of Thomas Becket as a whole, and especially his years as Archbishop of Canterbury, will bear quotation at length:

"The only explanation of him that seems to me to fit the facts at all is that he was one of those men, who, exalting to the full the rôle they have to play, picture themselves as the perfect representatives of their office, visualizing a type and making themselves the living impersonation of it; actors playing a part, but unconscious actors. He was of a romantic turn of mind, with a vivid imagination and enough knowledge of the past to give his imagination scope. As chancellor, he was the perfect king's servant, a splendid companion as well as a splendid servant, subordinating everything to the king's will, indispensable to his master; and withal leading a perfectly moral life. When he was appointed archbishop, it needed no miraculous conversion; he pictured himself in the part at once, and warned the king of the consequences. He threw off the layman and became the complete archbishop. At first this was the extent of his rôle, but as events changed he developed. He pictured himself as one of the Church's heroes, patiently resisting the tyrant on behalf of the freedom of the Church, submitting to adversity and exile, enduring, nay welcoming martyrdom at the last; and though the natural man in him kept breaking out in violent outbursts and fierce denunciations of his opponents, this was also to some extent in keeping with his part. I do not for a moment suggest that he was insincere, or that he was merely playing a part. He was living a part, and it was absolutely real to him, so much so that his partisans saw him as he saw himself: no mere actor could have become the great martyr-saint of the English Church...Becket was one of the rare persons who could translate his dreams into realities. People have often commented on the great change in him when he turned from chancellor into archbishop; but this was really less violent a change than the

previous one from Theobald's clerk into chancellor. It was not after all so strange that he should easily become the great archbishop. He had lived in an archbishop's circle, and moved in higher circles still when he went with Theobald to the papal Council at Rheims; then he had seen Theobald defy King Stephen and vindicate the archiepiscopal rights. At Rheims he may have pictured himself as pope. He had certainly pictured himself as archbishop; he knew what he would be like, and he warned Henry of the consequences if he became archbishop. His dreams had been exalted dreams. He magnified to the full the office in which he saw himself. And unfortunately, he became obsessed with its importance, its rights and its privileges. His conception was essentially grandiose."³⁰

This interpretation, whilst admitting that Becket's background and training gave him a natural tendency to sympathize with the Church's interest, does not emphasise as much as other theories his own sense of devotion and vocation, which had not been granted full expression whilst he had been chancellor. Robertson³¹ points out that his austere and chaste personal life had remained private, secret, during these years, and that it was heightened when he became archbishop. He doubts that all the stories of Becket's piety and humility, and munificence as archbishop are all credible, but, like Brooke, he denies that Becket was being, or had previously been, insincere or hypocritical in his conduct. Barber³² states that Becket immediately realized that his becoming archbishop would herald the re-awakening of his true vocation, and warned Henry of the fact, and Knowles strengthens this picture of what Becket felt his true calling to be:

"He had great abilities, of which he must gradually have become aware. He had also a personality of great natural charm and great flexibility, which could take the colour of his surroundings and

imitate the manners and interests of those whom he admired or served without revealing his own deepest aspirations. Among the group of brilliant and acquisitive young and middle-aged men in Theobald's household he himself became ambitious and acquisitive; later, as chancellor, now the equal of great ones in Church and State, and the personal friend and companion of an unusually gifted young king, he deployed all his exceptional talents to please and satisfy his master. He was willing to go very far in helping the king to gain control over the Church. But in all this he remained fundamentally dissatisfied with himself. When the archbishopric became a possibility, he was divided in mind. He was sincerely apprehensive of his weakness and of the contest with the king that was bound to come. On the other hand, besides the inevitable challenge of such high office, and the knowledge that he alone knew what was in the king's mind, there was the attraction of a post in which for the first time in his life he could put spiritual claims firmly before worldly interests. When the fateful consent had been given, it was not a case of imitating a model or an imagined code of action for an archbishop, but of being for the first time free to follow the call which he had long heard and neglected. It was now his task to live the life of a priest and bishop as familiar to him from the Scriptures, the liturgy, and Christian sentiment, in which the monastic ideal was paramount. Thomas' life is, indeed, a striking example of the acceptance of a vocation by one who has long delayed in giving all to the service of Christ, and who has seemed to onlookers to be giving all to the world till the moment of resolve came. It is a shape of life far from uncommon; Thomas rendered it uncommon by the force and perseverance with which he drove himself along the new path, with

the sense of his long refusal always before him."³³

Warren, seeing the cause of the conflict to stem partly from Henry's failure to appreciate that Becket lacked archbishop Theobald's 'mature flexibility and his judicious assessment of the realities of power', goes on to agree that there may have been some vocational motive in Becket's actions, but suggests that this was not the only factor which must be taken into consideration:

"Thomas Becket was a man who strove to please, but striving to please was simply a reflection of his will to succeed; and success for him lay not in worldly prosperity or even in glory, for his austere inner self saw these as merely the trappings of success, but in proving to himself that nothing was beyond his competence. He was fundamentally a proud, self-centred man."³⁴

Such are the attempts of some historians to explain Becket's actions in the time which followed his election as Archbishop of Canterbury. Certainly Becket had no intention, from the outset, of granting the king what Mlle. Foreville calls 'une docilité parfaite à ses volontés'. He began, on receipt of the pallium from the pope, by resigning the chancellorship, thereby illustrating to the king that he had no wish to attempt to reconcile his two major offices and the divisive demands which they might place upon him.³⁵ But Thomas meant to do far more than make grand symbolic gestures to the king; having reviewed the state of his new see, the archbishop set about making good the losses which it had incurred under Theobald, losses for which Thomas had some responsibility as chancellor. He demanded that Roger de Clare, Earl of Hertford, should do homage for the castle and bailiwick of Tonbridge; he set about recovering Rochester Castle, and when he encountered difficulty and obstinacy on the part of William de Ros over the right of presentation to the

parish church of Eynsford, the archbishop saw fit to excommunicate the offender; the king protested that no tenant-in-chief of the king could be excommunicated without royal permission, and the archbishop gave way, albeit with bad grace. What is significant about Becket's actions here is not that he should wish to restore to his see those properties and estates which he believed rightfully to belong to it, which in itself was the natural reaction of any newly-elected prelate, but the drastic manner in which he went about recovering them. It betokens either an ignorance of the correct and formal procedures to be followed, which, given Becket's training, it is difficult to credit, or, more probably, a determination to illustrate his resolve to all, especially to the king, even if it meant acting in what must have seemed a high-handed manner, which, he knew, could not help the bettering of relations or understanding with the king. If this was so, its effect struck home with the king. When Becket had resigned the chancellorship, Henry had retaliated by insisting that the archbishop should resign also as Archdeacon of Canterbury, which, as we have already seen, Becket seemed reluctant to do. The king insisted on having Geoffrey Ridel installed as archdeacon in Becket's stead, as if to emphasise to him that he could do without his former chancellor in either of these offices - he did not even take the trouble to have Becket replaced as chancellor, although the bulk of the work seems to have devolved, significantly, upon the same man - Ridel, against whom Becket was in the course of time to develop a particular antipathy. We may see here the beginnings of the conflict developing between the king and his former chancellor, and whilst the issues remained of largely secondary importance, their actions seem to be more in the nature of defiant gestures to each other than serious challenges

or open hostility calculated to bring about a breach. Warren has pointed out that it was important, if Becket were to become an integral part of the king's scheme of reform after the fashion of the late archbishop, that his ex-chancellor should not be, or seem to be, a mere pawn, or a servant willing to display 'une docilité parfaite' in acquiescing in the king's arrangements, but that he should give evidence of being able to act independently of royal authority or interference, and that the king would not have been unduly disturbed, despite Becket's irritating actions such as his resignation of the chancellorship, whilst the issues being contended were not major ones; thus he hoped that when more vital questions were under review, the archbishop's approval would appear to all to be more demonstrably genuine to those who feared a degree of collusion between the king and his new archbishop. However, if this did still remain his hope after Becket's initial salvos, he was, as we shall see, to be gravely disappointed and angered. Actions which might be intended and interpreted as gestures of independence and authority were soon to give way to something far more serious and damaging.

Before this happened, however, there were two significant events of which mention should here be made. The first was the translation of Gilbert Foliot from the see of Hereford to that of London. Becket, who was probably already aware of Foliot's hostility towards him, still had the good grace, to all appearances, to recommend him highly for the archbishopric, commending him in letters to the pope. He could afford to be generous, having been elected to Canterbury in the face of such a worthy candidate, but his praise may still seem gratuitous.³⁶ Foliot refused to swear allegiance to Thomas as Archbishop of Canterbury, arguing, perhaps for the convenience of his own pride and principles, that he had already sworn such an allegiance to

Canterbury when he was Bishop of Hereford, although one may suspect that he had other reasons than those he gave.

The second event was the Council of Tours in May 1163. King Henry II proved himself more compliant to the wishes of the pope than had King Stephen when in 1148 the Council of Rheims was held, and Alexander III was not slow to recognize the king's good will in allowing a full attendance of the English bishops. This may be taken as indicative of Henry's wish for amicable relationships between the English state and the highest papal authority, although, as Warren points out,³⁷ it may be significant that, even at this relatively early stage, when it may be presumed that Becket still enjoyed a good measure of the king's trust and favour, the latter did not seek to have legatine authority conferred upon him, and thus establish the supremacy of Canterbury over York, a question of grave import, as we shall see. R. Foreville sees the Council of Tours as having other important consequences for the months and years that were to follow:

"Le concile de Tours acheva d'orienter Thomas Becket dans la dévotion aux intérêts de l'Église romaine et à ceux de l'église de Canterbury qui lui paraissaient solidaires. À son retour, il ne tardera pas à conformer son attitude aux prescriptions conciliaires, aux recommandations du pape et aux vues des cardinaux les plus attachés à la cause d'Alexandre III et aux droits de l'Église romaine."³⁸

Becket, already committed in his own mind to the defence of the rights of his own see, thus found at Tours the inspiration to help him rationalize his actions in terms of the Church of Rome, and indeed, we may trace in all his actions as Archbishop of Canterbury this desire to safeguard the interests of the Church as a whole, to the extent that it will be possible to accuse him of taking no

cognizance of the current climate and circumstances, and of being unwilling to moderate in any way the fierce and ardent strength of his actions, whether they were verbal outbursts against his adversaries or actual gestures which revealed his determination not to be beaten or to lose face.

The first serious and open confrontation which took place between the king and the archbishop occurred at Woodstock in July 1163, when Becket objected strongly to the king's declared intention of having a customary payment to the sheriffs, known as the 'sheriffs' aid', diverted from them and paid directly into the exchequer. Becket said that he would pay the aid only if he was satisfied that it was going into the hands of those for whom he believed it was intended; whilst it may be argued that it was no direct concern of the archbishop's where the money was destined, and that he would have legally had to pay it, it is possible to claim that to stand out against the king on what he believed to be an abuse showed a degree of moral courage and principle. On this occasion, the king, despite his vociferous declamations against the archbishop, gave way.

However, the conflict between the king and the archbishop which was inevitable if the king insisted on achieving a clearer definition of the relationship between the regnum and the sacerdotium by attempting to revert to the customs of his grandfather, Henry I, and if the archbishop persisted in his intransigence and unwillingness to compromise in any way over the rights and privileges of the Church, could only be delayed, not averted, and when the question of criminous clerks was raised, a confrontation became imminent. Whilst the question itself was not the cause or the heart of the dispute between Becket and King Henry, it became a focal point, a matter of principle which reflected the respective stands which they took and the

privileges which they sought to defend. Henry, as we have seen, was keen to achieve a clear and explicit definition of the extent of the royal authority, in ecclesiastical matters as well as in things secular. His guiding light in these matters was often the customs of the time of his grandfather Henry I, and he desired to restore rights and privileges to the positions as they had been then, which was not always as straightforward as he might have hoped, as circumstances not infrequently altered considerably between Henry's accession to the throne in 1100 and his death thirty-five years later. But Henry II was determined to give as little recognition to the events which had taken place in that 'time of unlaw', the reign of his predecessor King Stephen. Thus ecclesiastical claims based upon the authority of the concessions granted in King Stephen's charter of 1136³⁹ were likely to find little favour in the eyes of Henry II. Henry had hoped to work towards the solution of the problems concerning the regnum and the sacerdotium, with the co-operation of archbishop Theobald, according to Warren, and after his death, according to some other historians. When, on returning to England after lengthy absences abroad, Henry learnt of the extent of the offences committed by clerks in the time he had been away, he determined that the subject must, in accordance with his general desire to establish firmly law and order in his kingdom, be broached. The Church claimed clerical immunity from the king's jurisdiction, however, and the dispute, shelved or settled in the past by compromises, was now brought out into the open, and with it the question of the validity, recognition and interpretation of canon law, concerning clerical immunity. The issue is very far from being clear-cut, and has given rise to opinions and interpretations which differ greatly from one another, and it is necessary in discussing this important issue to look back briefly at

the development of the concept of clerical immunity and see how it was possible for such views to arise.

William the Conqueror had sanctioned the separation of ecclesiastical cases from lay proceedings, in accordance with what seems to have been the practice in earlier times, although there had been no formal declaration as to the delineation of jurisdiction. William was not attempting to deprive the Church of its privileges and powers so much as clarifying the situation as to which courts should be responsible for the administration of justice relating to various offences. The issue is complicated by the growing strength of canon law in the eyes of churchmen, much of it deriving from sources now known to be of dubious authority; the 'False Decretals' of the pseudo-Isidore purported to contain two passages relevant to the question of clerical immunity dating from the second and third centuries, but which are in fact ninth-century forgeries. These seem to have been reflected in Gratian's 'Decretum', which was probably written about 1140, and brought to England soon after the middle of the twelfth century. C. Duggan gives us the picture of how the theories relating to ecclesiastical privilege were achieved and defended:

"Starting from a period of meagre comment, even of doubt and uncertainty in some cases, the decretists had gradually worked out a satisfactory and comprehensive theory of clerical privilege, limited only by the discretion of the Church. The strict letter of the law could be neglected in certain circumstances if the interests of the Church were implicated, or when the guilty clerk had shown himself beyond control."⁴⁰

If there were to be secular involvement and jurisdiction in cases where clerical privilege had been claimed, it was only to be at the

instigation of the bishop, and not enforced by the secular courts. Gratian's texts on this matter do not mention the question of double punishments, but neither do they forbid them.

Henry II, alarmed at the number of crimes committed by the clergy,⁴¹ determined to take action to restore law and order effectively, by the imposition of a standard procedure; he learnt that there had been more than one hundred murders committed by clerks between 1154 and 1163, and the solutions of Becket, as instanced in the case of Philip de Brois, were no lasting remedy. Philip was a canon of Bedford who had been acquitted in the court of the Bishop of Lincoln on a charge of murdering a knight, and Becket only prevented the case from being re-opened in the royal court with great difficulty, having to resort to methods not sanctioned by canon law, and having Philip banished. The archbishop also sanctioned the branding of a clerk who had stolen a chalice, but such attempts to avoid the cases coming to the attention of the royal courts, who wished to try them, could be no more than short-term measures, and at length, on the first of October 1163, the royal council was convened at Westminster.

The king argued that the ecclesiastical punishments, which usually entailed degradation and the loss of all ecclesiastical rights and dignity, had for too long proved ineffectual, and that the Church had palpably failed to put its house in order on its own initiative. He therefore proposed a plan which he was advised would be more effective. It was in some respects a reflection of his plan for the reform of the secular courts and the administration of justice, and it fell into three parts; firstly, the accusation and plea of the clerk should be heard in the temporal court; secondly, the clerk should be tried in the ecclesiastical court, and if found guilty, convicted and degraded; and finally, the clerk was to be sentenced to a layman's punishment

in the temporal court. This was a solution which, appeared eminently fair and workable to the king and his supporters, but it did not have the full authority of canon law behind it, and Becket was quick to challenge the plan on two major counts. In the first place, he objected to the summoning of the clerk for the initial accusation and plea to be made; he objected to the suggestion that there should be the imposition of a secular punishment in the third part of Henry's plan, arguing that deposition was the punishment to be inflicted by the ecclesiastical court, and that nothing further should be exacted from the offender, for there was no justification for 'double punishments'. The first objection may be justified in that there had in the past been evidence to suggest that accusation and plea should take place outside the ecclesiastical courts, but it is possible to see that this was an attempt on the part of the king, not to encroach upon the jurisdiction of the Church, but to regularize the workings of the law of the land, to ensure that justice was done. Indeed, as F. W. Maitland points out,⁴² "Henry's repeated assertions that he is a restorer, not an innovator, meet with but the feeblest contradictions". Hence his proposal on this matter was not considered as vital to the issue.

He was, however, attempting a restoration under different circumstances from those under which the usages had formerly obtained, and he now had to contend, as we have seen, with the increasing influence and power of canon law. Neither side in the dispute could truthfully claim to have the full weight of canon law behind it, for there was one vital phrase which was often quoted from the canons which gave rise to as much ambiguity then as now. 'Mox depositus curiae tradatur et recipiat quod inique gesserit' was taken by the king and his advisors to mean that once sentenced by the ecclesiastical

powers, the convicted clerk was forthwith deposed and taken to the secular court for a second punishment to be inflicted. Becket, however, replying with his text '*Nec enim Deus iudicat bis in idipsum*', contended that the phrase meant no more than that, if the criminous clerk committed a second offence after his deposition, the Church ought no longer to defend him. If Henry's interpretation had some historical justification, it still remained subject to the approval of the bishop who had heard the case in the ecclesiastical court, and the '*traditio curiae*' was not, according to Duggan,⁴³ who on the whole rejects Maitland's assertions that the king had the better case, susceptible of invocation in every case. This is not what the king understood by the phrase, however, and not how he intended to apply it. The phrase itself makes no reference to difficult or exceptional cases, and does not actually seem to embody the justification for what may have in fact been in practice. Maitland⁴⁴ points out that Pope Innocent III was later to come down in favour of Henry's interpretation in his decretal '*Novimus expedire*' in 1209, but it could be argued that the fact that Pope Alexander III condemned the double punishment of clerks in his decretal '*Licet praeter*' of about 1178 is of greater significance, although Alexander may have been acting with Becket's stand and experience in mind. But as the phrasing of the '*Traditio curiae*' is in itself ambiguous, it is not perhaps surprising that it has given rise to so much controversy, both at the time and now; however, we can, as Knowles hints in giving his views on the dispute, be sure from this episode that Becket's loyalties became manifest to all in the course of it, however much our estimation may doubt his wisdom and justification:

"In short, both Henry and the archbishop had colourable canonical opinion behind their respective interpretations and attitudes, but

the tide was undoubtedly setting in favour of the clerks, and Gratian's judgment was nearer to that of Thomas than to that of Henry, whilst Gratian's commentators were to be in favour of Thomas' opinion. If therefore, we consider the archbishop as a canonist of the papalist allegiance, his interpretations of the canons can be fully justified. If we look to him for wise statesmanship, it may be that we should give another answer."⁴⁵

It seems that this message was not lost upon Henry, for he desisted from the arguments as to the interpretation of canon law, and, eager to establish the nature and extent of his authority, asked Becket and the other bishops present at Westminster whether they were prepared to abide by the 'customs' of England. The bishops withdrew to consider this request, and returned to tell the king that they had agreed that they could observe them 'salvo ordine suo'. The king angrily demanded an unconditional acceptance, and Becket pointed out that it was not feasible for a clerk in orders to swear to more than they would. Henry then drew an individual oath from each bishop, and all replied with the clause 'salvo ordine suo' attached, with the exception of Bishop, Hilary of Chichester, who attempted to devise his own solution to the impasse by substituting the words 'bona fide', which did little to please his colleagues who had agreed to present a united front, and much to increase the king's displeasure. He accused the bishops of a conspiracy, of employing poisonous sophistry to frustrate him, and angrily left the council without a further word to the bishops. Neither Becket nor the king had left any room for compromise by their attitudes, but, after one abortive meeting between the two men outside Northampton, the envoys of the pope, who had been informed of the conflict, persuaded Becket to adopt a more moderate approach, which in turn would induce Henry to

desist from the apparently militant position he had taken. Having failed to countenance the pleas of bishop Hilary to give way, the archbishop, without consulting his episcopal colleagues, was persuaded by the arguments of Philip, Abbot of L'Aumône, and Robert of Melun, formerly one of Becket's teachers at Paris, and shortly to become the successor to Gilbert Foliot in the see of Hereford. He nobly went to seek the king at Woodstock, and offered his submission to the king's will. But apologies of this nature were no longer sufficient. Despite drawing this notable submission from the proud and uncompromising archbishop, the king was not satisfied; the slight to his royal dignity which Becket had helped to inflict at Westminster must not only be erased, it must be seen that the archbishop and his colleagues were withdrawing their malicious insult to the king. As the offence had been committed in public, so must the recantation take place in public. To this end the great council of the realm was convened, and met at the royal palace of Clarendon in the middle of January 1164.

The bishops were quickly to learn that the king was demanding of them more than mere approval and ratification of Becket's declaration that he would keep the customs of the land in good faith; they found themselves, suddenly to their great surprise and dismay, required to acknowledge an explicit statement which defined the exact nature of those customs, and furthermore to set their seals on a document which set out sixteen of the customs—presumably those which King Henry felt to be most important or liable to create contention in the future. The bishops, sitting in a separate room from the king and his barons, were united in their opposition and refusal to accept what were to become known henceforth as the 'Constitutions of Clarendon'. Thomas Becket had good reason to feel aggrieved and deceived by the assurances he had received that his

public submission would see an end to the king's apparent aggression, and his bishops supported him in his stand. For three days, the bishops stood firm, refusing to be drawn into acceptance by either threats or pleas. At this stage, it is probable that no written account of the customs had been produced before the bishops; but suddenly, perhaps as a result of a private conference with the king who succeeded in eliciting the archbishop's consent, Becket gave way. He did so without giving prior warning to his colleagues, nor did he offer them any subsequent explanation as to why he should have conceded to the king. Whether his action was prompted by the extent of the threats, or whether the king had managed to locate a weak spot in Becket's armour, or whether, as Herbert of Bosham was later to suggest, it was a result and reflection of his curial training, in as much as a qualified theologian would not have been brought to act as the archbishop did, must remain largely a matter of speculation. What we can know is that once Becket had acceded to the king's proposals, Henry immediately ordered him to instruct his colleagues to follow his lead, and produced the written form of the customs for official approval. Becket was thoroughly alarmed, and must have regretted almost immediately his decision, for the Constitutions of Clarendon contained among its sixteen clauses six which in the eyes of churchmen seemed contrary to the rights of the Church, the first, third, fourth, seventh, eighth, and twelfth.⁴⁶ The clauses fall into three principal groups: those which define the means by which royal control over communication between the English Church and Rome (although the constitutions do not mention either Canterbury or Rome by name) was to be exercised, those which define the limitations to be set upon the extent of ecclesiastical censures, and a third group which governed the exercise of ecclesiastical

jurisdiction, defining where the spiritual court had jurisdiction and the temporal court should assume responsibility. There was also one clause (clause twelve) which defined the nature of elections and the oath of fealty which the beneficed clergy owed to the king, which was to include the phrase 'salvo ordine suo'.

As we have seen,⁴⁷ it was possible for Henry to claim that he was not in any way innovating, although it is not unlikely that he himself was not fully aware of the nature of the customs until some of them had been set down in writing, but the claim is in a sense disingenuous; even if the customs set down in writing at Clarendon were a faithful reproduction of those that had obtained in the time of Henry I, Henry II was embarking upon a new departure in having them written down and attempting to have the bishops set their seals upon them. The bishops may very well have been prepared to observe them in a spirit of helpful accommodation, but they were surely justified in entertaining real suspicions as to the king's motives, however much Henry might protest that he was being conservative, defensive in his proposals, rather than radically offensive against the interests of the Church. Such conservatism must have appeared to the bishops a dangerous kind of repressive, reactionary design. This is not to say that they approved wholeheartedly of the manner in which the Archbishop of Canterbury had conducted himself and the affairs of the Church in the king's presence, and the king knew that he could in future, at least, if not for the moment, count upon a measure of support from certain amongst them, notably Gilbert Foliot of London, Roger, Archbishop of York, and Hilary of Chichester.⁴⁸ The bishops as a whole were no doubt already aware of the dangerous fact that the king and the archbishop, by their dogmatic stands, forcing one another into situations where each felt constrained to

demand inflexible, unequivocal admissions of the other that his policy was just and correct, had forfeited all possibility of resolving their differences in a quiet and amicable manner, since neither could feel safe in subscribing to a compromise in which he might appear to lose face. Becket had driven the king by his earlier actions and especially by his conduct at Westminster in the autumn of 1163 to seek more extreme and uncompromising solutions that he might otherwise have felt to be necessary, but once Becket had had the good grace to yield ground in the subsequent months and agreed to accept Henry's proposals, the king went too far in demanding that the archbishop give written consent to the customs, for not only did this seem not unnaturally an oppressive measure to the archbishop and to belie his professed good-will and lack of designs detrimental to the interests of the Church, it seemed to go back on the king's own word. Furthermore, Becket's sudden and impulsive agreement to observe the customs at Clarendon can only have served to confirm in the king's mind that all the difficulties, which at that stage were considerable but not ultimately insoluble, were merely due to the wilful obstinacy of the archbishop, and that once this was overcome, all other problems would automatically lend themselves much more readily to solution. When they did not, the king blamed Becket and his intransigence, and became more convinced of the need to bring him to submission, or even to have him deposed, in order to resolve the problems with which he was confronted, which in turn could only deepen Becket's impression that the king's intentions were more harmful to the Church than they professed to be, and than he thought they originally were. As Thomas begged time to consider whether he should set his seal to the chirograph of the constitutions which had been given to him, and left the council without having done so and

already regretting his decision to appear to agree to them, the bishops had good reason to fear for the well-being of the English Church and its happy relationship with the king.

The king's attempts to have the Constitutions of Clarendon ratified by the pope proved unsuccessful, for the pope, while finding none of them good, condemned all except six of them, those six which concerned the execution of secular government rather than ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The pope did grant legatine powers to Archbishop Roger of York, but this contained so many conditions that the king, who was doubtless hoping to gain a useful weapon for his cause, returned the authority in disgust. Henry attributed his failures to gain satisfaction in these matters to Becket's interference in them, and it was true that Becket had written to the pope, but the pope, having learnt that Becket was repentant of his actions at Clarendon, was abstaining from saying mass, and was doing other penances, merely absolved him from his act of consent to the constitutions, and commended him to resume saying mass, telling the archbishop that involuntary evil should not be accounted as sin. Becket also had an abortive meeting with the king at Woodstock, having failed to gain admission to his presence on one previous occasion. Becket showed a disregard for the constitutions by making two attempts to leave the country without the king's permission, but both failed. We may suppose that the king was now more intent, whatever his previous protestations, on the resignation or dismissal of the archbishop than he was interested in the upholding of the customs of the land, for when he felt that he had compiled a good case against Becket, the archbishop was summoned to attend a hearing at the Curia Regis at Westminster on 14 September 1164. It is possible that the archbishop felt he had been improperly summoned, which may have

been a deliberate action on the part of the king and intended as a slight, and in retaliation he sent four knights with letters which were intended to explain the case to the king's satisfaction. The king's reaction was to summon Thomas Becket to appear before the royal council at Northampton in October 1164, on two charges, one of contempt of court, and the other concerning the case of John the Marshal.

John FitzGilbert, marshal of the royal household, had claimed land on the archiepiscopal manor of Pagenham in Sussex in the court of the archbishop. The case had been dismissed, and the marshal appealed to the royal court for justice to be done. That this case was little more than a pretext for summoning Becket to the royal court seems probable, for the case itself received scant attention once it had been presented, and the king now had more powerful charges to make against the archbishop, beginning with that contempt of court, over his non-appearance at Westminster, against which Becket had little effective defence, and on which charge he was duly found guilty. The sentence was inordinately harsh; he was condemned to forfeit all his movables and his goods at the king's mercy - a punishment which would have been severe had he failed to answer three summonses rather than one. Neither the barons nor the bishops were eager to pass sentence on the archbishop, but at length, the Bishop of Winchester did so, reluctantly, on the king's orders. Becket protested that no archbishop should be sentenced by his fellow bishops, but it quickly became evident that it was the king's intention to try if he could to bring about Becket's downfall. Henry went on to accuse the archbishop of misappropriation of revenues when he had been chancellor. Charges concerning the castles of Eye and Berkhamsted, a loan of £500 from the Jews on the king's behalf,

and £500 which he had borrowed in order to help finance the Toulouse campaign in 1159. He was also required to produce accounts of all the vacant abbacies and sees which he had held during his chancellorship. Although some of the bishops offered sureties for the archbishop, his anxiety could not be allayed, and he did not reply to the charges, answering quite fairly that he had not been summoned on such counts. A delay was granted, and worried discussions took place as to how Becket might best escape the worst of the king's wrath. The archbishop fell ill, no doubt as a result of the severe mental strain and pressure. Some of the bishops thought that he should resign, others advised that this would be to give way to the king's demand and be of more harm to the Church's cause than the disruption which resistance might bring. On the morning of Tuesday, 12 October, Becket celebrated the votive mass of St. Stephen, with its introit 'Princes also did sit and speak against me; but thy servant is occupied in thy statutes'. It was only with great difficulty that Becket was dissuaded from going to the castle for the resumption of the hearing in full mass vestments. He could not, however, be dissuaded from bearing his archiepiscopal cross before him into the hall of the castle, much to the regret and disapproval of the Bishop of London. The archbishop and the king did not come face to face, for whilst the archbishop sat below bearing his archiepiscopal cross, messengers passed back and forth between the hall and the room above where Henry remained.

Henry had wished to reopen the matter of the criminous clerks, but was advised that this was likely to renew the unity between Becket and his bishops, and he was informed that the archbishop had appealed to Rome, which was a breach of the Constitutions of Clarendon, and that he had forbidden the bishops to pass judgment upon him on

the criminal charge of embezzlement.⁴⁹ This was tantamount to treason, but the bishops, fearing suspension from office by Becket's order, requested the king to exempt them from passing judgment upon Becket. The bishops must have felt very little good will towards Becket by now for bringing them into this position in which they could effectively please no one and seemed doomed to act either against the king's commands or the instructions of their archbishop. They devised a compromise, which by its nature suggested that their sympathies did not lie with the archbishop, and this they put to the king: if he would excuse them from sitting in judgment upon the archbishop in this case, they would appeal to Rome accusing him of perjury and forcing them to break their oath, and in this way seek his deposition by the pope. Henry agreed to this proposal, and the remainder of the royal council passed judgment on Thomas Becket in the upper room, whilst he still waited below. Then they descended, and with much hesitation and reluctance, one and then another of the barons tried to announce the verdict. Becket, however, refused to hear them, stating that he was their spiritual father and that they had no right to pass sentence upon him. He pushed his way out of the hall, still bearing his cross before him, one of his supporters hurriedly found the right key to let them out of the castle at the first attempt, and with his small band of attendants he sped on horseback to the church of St. Andrew's leaving a largely angry and hostile crowd behind him.

Henry II did little to convince us at Northampton that his intentions were fair and honest, and much to suggest that he was bent upon the downfall of his archbishop, caring little whether this was achieved with decency and regard for the law. Becket, unable, as Warren suggests,⁵⁰ to withstand so much as the indignity and humiliation

of being put on trial, let alone found guilty, did now what he was to refuse to do six years later, and turned his back on his oppressors. That evening he applied for a safe-conduct from the king for his return to Canterbury. The king replied that he would give answer the following morning. Becket, fearing perhaps that there was some vestige of truth in the current rumours concerning the threat of violence against him, decided not to wait. At midnight, in a fierce autumn gale, he rode out of the unguarded north gate of the town, in disguise and with only three companions. Taking a slow and circuitous route, travelling via Grantham, Lincoln, the Fenland, and ultimately to Eastry, a Canterbury manor near the coast of Thanet, and using the name of Brother Christian or Brother Derman, he escaped the capture which he feared in England, and on the evening of 2 November 1164, he left the English shore and landed in Flanders, near Gravelines, the following morning, to begin an exile which was to last almost exactly six years. He made his way to the Cistercian Abbey of Clair-Marais, near St. Omer, where he met his clerk Herbert of Bosham, before going on to the Abbey of St. Bertin, where he was well received.

Becket was well received by King Louis VII of France, who promised him aid and protection for as long as the archbishop should require it, despite the attempts of Henry to prevent this. Henry also sent a powerful deputation to the pope at Sens - also as a result of the good offices, and possibly the political awareness, of the French king - in an attempt to have Becket deposed, or if difficulties arose at the papal curia, to have a legate appointed to try the case in England. Henry's delegation included Gilbert Foliot, Roger of York, Hilary of Chichester, Bartholomew of Exeter, Roger of Worcester, and a group of lay magnates led by the Earl of Arundel and including two clerks who were to become important figures as a result

of their support for and service to the king throughout the struggle, John of Oxford and Richard of Ilchester. However, the delegation fared badly in the presence of the pope and his assembled cardinals, and only a moderate speech by the Earl of Arundel went some way towards repairing the damage which seems to have been done by Foliot's recriminations and Hilary's indifferent Latin. The pope refused to be drawn into the appointment of a legate who would have powers to decide the matter without further reference to papal authority, and stated that no decision would be made until the archbishop himself had been heard. A few days later this happened, and Becket, melodramatically throwing himself at the pope's feet and offering not the customary gift, but the copy of the Constitutions of Clarendon, wept and pronounced that his election had not followed all the legal forms, and therefore his troubles might have been anticipated.⁵¹ So saying, he handed over his archiepiscopal ring to the pope. If some of the cardinals, influenced perhaps by accounts they had heard in private from the members of Henry's deputation of the difficulties which he had caused, were in favour of accepting this resignation of office, they were speedily disappointed, for Alexander III, denouncing for a second time the Constitutions of Clarendon, restored Becket to the archbishopric, and thus erased the possibility of any future charges that Becket held office irregularly. Thus encouraged by this measure of the pope's support, Thomas Becket retired to the Cistercian Abbey at Pontigny at the end of November 1164, where he was to spend the first two of the six long years in which a solution to the conflict was sought.

Pope Alexander III has frequently been accused of not giving to the Archbishop of Canterbury in the years which followed the support which he deserved in view of the fact that the archbishop was pledged

to the defence of the cause of the Church; Becket, indeed, equated the interests of the English Church with those of the Church of Rome, and was moreover unwilling to accept that political circumstances could or should dictate tactics. However, Alexander III, who had been elected pope in 1159 on the death of Pope Adrian IV, was faced with very grave difficulties in the earlier part of his papacy, which in all lasted twenty-two years, as the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (1152-1190) consistently supported the claims of the anti-pope, firstly Victor IV, and, when he died in 1164, Paschal III. Alexander III was driven from Rome, and in 1163 took refuge in Sens. In 1165 he returned to Rome or its environs, but he was only saved from further harassment in 1167 when an outbreak of malaria destroyed the strength of Frederick's army of invasion, including the chancellor and Archbishop of Cologne, Rainald of Dassel. Thus he needed the important support of King Henry of England and King Louis of France, who had only declared in his favour after some hesitation following his election in 1159, and the pope had reason to be alarmed when Henry threatened to support the schismatic faction, as he did in 1165, 1166 and 1169, when it seemed that this might offer him a solution to the conflict created with Becket. Becket's difficulties and exile, therefore, must have been an even greater burden and inconvenience to Alexander than they were to Henry who, be it remembered, had throughout the conflict to continue the government of his vast and unwieldy empire with its many problems of organisation, law and order. Hence if we judge Roland Bandinelli as a weak and vacillating pope, we may not be taking into account the political considerations concerning the greater good of the Church which could never have been too far removed from his mind during these years. Warren perhaps gives us a very fair picture of his attitude and

activities during the six years of Becket's exile, and the inevitable difficulties he was to encounter:

"The pope strove for a reconciliation which would allow the archbishop to return to England; but Becket would agree to no form of reconciliation which did not thoroughly vindicate him by public abasement of Henry: and the king, protesting that the archbishop had never been sentenced to exile and was free to return whenever he wished, would agree to the imposition of no conditions.

The pope patiently negotiated year after year by letters and envoys, restraining and even interdicting the archbishop from such extreme measures as the excommunication of the king, and on the other hand cajoling Henry and hinting that he might himself apply an interdict, but all the time looking for an opening created by shifting circumstances, or, less hopefully, for a change of heart. His efforts were punctuated by attempts by Henry or Becket to break the deadlock by more drastic means."⁵²

Whilst Becket was taking up a life of even greater austerity at Pontigny, Henry began to make the first move towards changing his allegiance to the anti-pope, or at least gave all the appearance of so doing. Two of his envoys, John of Oxford and Richard of Ilchester, accompanied Rainald of Dassel back to the emperor's court at Würzburg in May 1165 after the Archbishop of Cologne had led a powerful contingent of German noblemen to see King Henry in Normandy, probably about a marriage alliance between Matilda, one of Henry's daughters, and Henry the Lion, one of Frederick's sons. But the two envoys extended their brief, probably not to the English king's displeasure, and it was made known that oaths of allegiance had been taken against Alexander III. Henry had to deny such allegations strenuously, but the pope took the precaution of forbidding Becket to take any violent

action against the king or his servants, commending to the archbishop temperance and discretion, ordering him not to do anything inconsistent with the interests of the Church, and hoping that he would find the means to restore himself to the king's favour and goodwill. It was not until Easter 1166 that Becket was confirmed by the pope in the office of papal legate for England. Becket, convinced that the threat of excommunication was the weapon most likely to induce Henry to give way to his archbishop, proceeded to Vézelay, where from the pulpit of the abbey he attempted to achieve by more forceful action what his letters to the king had failed to achieve.⁵³ He excommunicated on 12 June 1166 John of Oxford and Richard of Ilchester for consorting with schismatics, the justiciar Richard de Lucy and Jocelin de Balliol for the part they played in the drafting of the Constitutions of Clarendon, and other lesser barons in the king's service, including Randolph de Broc. He condemned and annulled the Constitutions of Clarendon as depravities. He had intended to excommunicate the king himself, and was only deflected from this purpose by the recent news of Henry's serious illness, but the threat of anathema was left hanging over Henry should he fail to give satisfaction for the wrongs which he had committed against the Church, including allowing his barons to lay hands on the property of the see of Canterbury.

Henry sent an embassy to appeal to the pope, letting it be known once again that he was entertaining thoughts of withdrawing his allegiance from Alexander III and granting it to the imperial anti-pope. Alexander, alarmed and threatened by the German army marching into Italy, accepted the appeal, thus undermining the effects of Becket's censures, forbade the archbishop to dispense any further anathemas, and announced his intention to appoint papal legates to try the case in England. Becket was bitterly disappointed, and Henry

exulted that the legation was going to depose the archbishop, but they were not granted the absolute powers which the king had anticipated. The legates, cardinals William of Pavia and Otto of Ostia, were despatched on the 1 January 1167.

Meanwhile, Henry had taken action himself calculated to increase the difficulties of the archbishop. Having previously exiled many of Becket's people, and having drawn up stringent new constitutions at Clarendon, he threatened vengeance for the Vézelay excommunications against the Cistercians in England should their Order continue to shelter Thomas Becket. When he heard this news, Becket of his own volition decided to leave Pontigny to save the Cistercians from the embarrassment of the consequences of his remaining there. So he left Pontigny, where besides his austere personal régime and his habit of occupying himself with the many menial tasks which an ordinary monk in a monastery might expect to perform, he busied himself with the study of the canons, and had recorded by his clerks all the records they could find of privileges granted at any time to Canterbury; John of Salisbury exhorted the archbishop to turn his thoughts less to canon law and more to his devotion to God, but Becket persisted, as if eager to build up the authority of the defence of his case. Beryl Smalley points out that Thomas employed Herbert of Bosham as theologian and publicist, and states that:

"It was a fatal choice. Herbert held extreme views on the relations between regnum and sacerdotium. He had learnt them at Paris, though not from the cautious Lombard; they were 'in the air'. He may have put them into storage for the time being when he entered into royal service, probably before 1157. They came out fresh when there was a chance to impress them on Becket. As a publicist, Herbert let his tongue and his pen run away with him."⁵⁴

We may trace from Herbert of Bosham some of Becket's intransigence in the face of the opposition of the king, and see how his influence, perhaps more powerful than that of the more moderate John of Salisbury, did little to facilitate the arrangement of a reconciliation.

Becket took up the offer of King Louis of hospitality in any abbey of France, and he chose St. Colombe at Sens, where he was to remain for the next four years. One of his first actions on his arrival there was, on the advice of John of Salisbury, to summon some of the English bishops to visit him. This put Foliot, among others, in a difficult situation, for there were letters from the king prohibiting such a visit, but the pope released him from his dilemma by seconding the king's order. The cardinal legates were also forbidden by the pope to enter England until a peace settlement had been reached between the king and the Archbishop of Canterbury. On 18 November 1167, William and Otto arranged a meeting with Thomas at a place between Gisors and Trie, near the famous tree of conference which Henry II later had cut down. Becket, initially mistrusting the legates, knowing one of them, William of Pavia, to be hostile to him, demanded, as a preliminary to any reconciliation, the restoration of all the properties and goods of Canterbury to the see. Asked whether he would observe the customs of England, he replied that he would only do so, with the proviso 'saving the honour of God, the liberty of the Church, fair treatment for himself and restitution of the confiscated lands of Canterbury'. Nor would he agree to pass over the Constitutions of Clarendon in silence, stating that 'silence implies consent'. Disappointed at the outcome of their talk with the archbishop, the legates proceeded to Argentan where they met the king a week later. Their first interview with Henry was so

unproductive and futile in the king's eyes that he left it in anger, declaring that he hoped never to see another cardinal; on the second occasion when they met, Henry protested that Becket's obstinacy was the root cause of the conflict, and his insistence on hasty and wilful excommunications. He demanded as a preliminary to peace agreements 44,000 marks of silver which he claimed the archbishop had had as chancellor, and for which he had never subsequently given account. Henry, in tears, ended the meeting by begging the cardinals to intercede with the pope to have Becket deposed. Clearly, the legation was doomed to failure.

A further commission was set in motion by the pope in May 1168, notwithstanding an appeal by certain of the English bishops against the possible actions, such as sudden excommunications, which the archbishop might feel disposed to take against them. The new legation consisted of Simon, Prior of Mont-Dieu, Engelbert, Prior of Val S. Pierre, and Bernard de la Coudre, a monk of Grammont. It seems that the pope, having recently restrained the Archbishop of Canterbury from taking violent action against king, servant or bishop, and feeling perhaps somewhat more secure following the failure of Frederick Barbarossa's ill-starred attempt to oust him, was disposed to take a firmer line with the English king. No doubt he felt also that the dispute, which had lasted now four years, had continued for too long and was becoming harmful to the English Church, despite Thomas Becket's attempts to guide and control affairs from Sens, and that there was a danger of greater harm accruing to the body of the Church as a whole. Accordingly, he instructed his legates to approach Henry with letters which contained warnings that, if a peaceful settlement with the archbishop were not achieved, the king might expect serious consequences. The legates seem to have experienced

some difficulty in arranging any sort of a meeting, to judge by the time they took, but eventually, early in January 1169, the archbishop, Henry II, and King Louis of France were all in the neighbourhood of Montmirail. Henry had a motive for wishing to have Becket reconciled and restored to Canterbury, for he was now eager to have his eldest surviving legitimate son, Henry, crowned king of England, and the privilege of coronation, although it had been waived in certain special circumstances in the past, belonged to Canterbury; Henry in fact, had received papal permission, probably in June 1161, when Alexander III still felt gratitude for Henry's recognition of him as pope, and when the see of Canterbury was still vacant following Theobald's death in April of the same year, to have his son crowned by whomsoever Henry chose. Becket appealed against yet another infringement upon the rights of Canterbury, and in 1166 the pope forbade the bishops to injure the ancient rights of Canterbury. He does not seem to have revoked the letter to Henry II which granted him permission to have his son crowned by the bishop of his choice. King Louis of France, to whose daughter Margaret Prince Henry was married, also had reason to wish for a settlement, as well as for a political settlement with the English king of their differences concerning Henry's territories which bordered on Louis' kingdom.

Becket came before the two kings, and kneeling before them, threw himself on Henry's mercy. But then to everyone's amazement the archbishop added his fateful clause, 'saving the honour of my God'. He insisted that he would only abide by the customs saving his order, and would not be deflected from this stand, in spite of the king's great anger, and the entreaties of King Louis and Becket's own supporters to give way. Obviously the incentive to overcome the difficulties concerning the coronation of Prince Henry was not great

enough to persuade Henry II to accede to the phrase, and it became evident that neither the archbishop nor the king was prepared to give ground and run the risk which may have still been alive in their minds of seeming to have lost, or to have lost face. Henry left the meeting in anger, and Louis in great impatience with the stubborn attitude which the archbishop had taken. Few people indeed seemed to have any sympathy with Thomas Becket for his conduct at Montmirail, which seemed to have ruined the fair prospects of peace.

The pope, learning of the failure of this legation, did not hesitate long in appointing a further one. The legates this time were to be Gratian, a friend to Thomas Becket, and Vivian, who was perhaps more inclined towards taking the king's part. They experienced considerable difficulty in making any progress during the course of 1169, for the king was evasive in stating what he might agree to, and Becket remained firm in his insistence on the clause which had caused the failure of the previous legation. Furthermore, the legates had to work against a background in which both the archbishop and the king had begun to take decisive action designed to damage the prospects of the other party.

Despite the appeals lodged by the two bishops in an attempt to pre-empt the excommunication they feared from the archbishop, Gilbert Foliot, Bishop of London, and Jocelin, Bishop of Salisbury, were placed under anathema by Becket on Palm Sunday 1169, when the archbishop was at Clairvaux. Becket also excommunicated several of the king's 'familiares'; however, the pope showed no desire to confirm Becket's excommunications, and we may suspect that he was again displeased that the archbishop had once more resorted to such high-handed tactics. Henry also took certain measures not designed to aid the cause of the Church, when the archbishop in autumn of the

same year gave him reason to fear excommunication for himself and an interdict on his lands. The king had the ports sealed off, forbade any communication with the Archbishop of Canterbury or with the pope, threatened to expel from the kingdom anyone who observed any interdict which might be placed on the king's lands, ordered the clergy currently out of the country to return from abroad, threatening them with the loss of their revenues should they fail to obey, and threatened to seize the property of anyone who showed inclination to support the archbishop's cause. Henry instructed his sheriffs to obtain oaths of obedience to these decrees from everyone over the age of fifteen. These harsh measures were another reflection of Henry's desire to wreak vengeance upon the archbishop for his resistance, as he had after Becket had stood out against the king at Clarendon, when, in the following months, Henry expelled all the archbishop's relations, friends, sympathisers and clerks, who were made to suffer the exile of the archbishop himself. The harshness of the king's new measures in 1169 was reflected by the attempts, largely successful, of the English bishops to avoid giving their approval to them. Even Roger of York, it seems, whose hostility to Becket had not waned during the course of the conflict and who was not unwilling, as he was to demonstrate the following year, to strike a blow at Canterbury to further the claims of his own see, refused in this instance to take the oath. The refusal of the pope, on the one hand, to sanction Becket's excommunications, and the English bishops, on the other, to support the new decrees of the king, may suggest that those who had the opportunity to view these actions more dispassionately than those who performed them, felt that they were too extreme and unlikely to further the cause of either peace or prestige. Equally, both sides may have feared that the king, by giving evidence of his

dissatisfaction and anger with the conduct of the primate, was again contemplating the possibility of embracing the cause of the anti-pope supported by Frederick Barbarossa, and the majority of the English bishops favoured Alexander III.

At length, the legates Vivian and Gratian arranged a meeting to take place at Montmartre in November 1169. This meeting was largely due to the initiative of Vivian, for his colleague had returned to Rome to report his distrust of Henry and his many promises. Despite its inauspicious genesis, progress was actually made towards a reconciliation, the king yielding to Becket's requirements concerning the restoration of the property of the see of Canterbury, and all mention of the customs of the land being studiously avoided. Henry must have known that such restoration would inevitably form an integral part of any peace settlement, and thus had no grounds for rejecting Becket's claims. Becket for his part was prepared to accept the king's act of restoration as sufficient proof of his good faith in making the agreement, provided that the king would seal his promise with the kiss of peace. Henry refused: he had once taken an oath never to grant the archbishop the kiss of peace, and he could not and would not go back on it. The archbishop was equally firm. If there were to be no kiss of peace, he would not allow that the king was acting in good faith and would not consent to the settlement of their differences. So the meeting broke up in failure, Vivian declaring that Henry was the most mendacious man he had ever set eyes on, and it being said that this oath, if Henry's claim was true, was the only oath he never did break in his life.

The pope determined to set up yet another legation; on 19 January 1170, he commissioned Archbishop Rotrou of Rouen and Bernard, Bishop of Nevers, to bring about a conclusion to the rift between

Henry and Thomas Becket. Henry was to receive the archbishop back into England with the restoration to which the king had agreed at Montmatre, and Becket was to offer full submission, saving the liberty of the Church. The legates were to report to the pope should they fail to obtain what he ordained, and the likely result of such a failure would be the placing of Henry's lands under an interdict. Absolution of those excommunicated by Becket the previous year was to be conditional upon the success of the legation. Foliot was to be excluded from this general absolution, and was to be instructed to seek it from Rotrou at Rouen, which he did at Easter 1170, much to the displeasure of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

All these plans were rendered ineffectual by the decision of Henry II in the early months of 1170 to have his son, Prince Henry, crowned by Archbishop Roger of York. A rumour was spread that the papal curia had granted to an embassy sent by the English king the renewal of the commission to the bishops to crown young Henry. On hearing this rumour, Becket protested very forcibly to the pope, who immediately scotched the rumour by prohibiting any of the bishops, on pain of suspension or even deposition, from performing the coronation, which was the inalienable right of Canterbury, and which Henry had destined for the Archbishop of York, almost certainly with the intention of raising the pretensions of that see to the primacy, and thus adding insult to the injury done to Becket and Canterbury. It is not possible to be certain whether the strictures applied by Henry II in 1169, concerning the sealing off of the ports and the prohibition concerning the carrying of papal letters and the supporting of the cause of the pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury, were successful in preventing the letters despatched by the pope forbidding the bishops to participate in any coronation from reaching them

before the ceremony took place, but they gave Henry and those bishops eager to support him at least a superficial excuse of ignorance of the existence of the letters; it is far from likely that they were unaware that they had been sent and of their content, even if we allow that the bishops had not actually received them.⁵⁵ At all events, the ceremony took place on 14 June 1170 in Westminster Abbey, with the Archbishop of York officiating, and Gilbert Foliot and Jocelin of Salisbury assisting, and no one present to contest the regularity of their actions.

The coronation caused the protagonists in the action to change their policies, and set in motion the succession of events which was to bring to an end not only the exile but also the archbishopric of Thomas Becket a few months later.

Becket felt the injury done to his rights as Archbishop of Canterbury very keenly, realizing that he had allowed a terrible precedent to be set to the grave detriment of the see of Canterbury, and that the monks of the cathedral would hold him personally responsible for these recent developments, and that he had allowed the claims of the see of York to be strengthened as regards the contest between Canterbury and York for the primacy of the English Church. He was consequently very eager to have the means to return to Canterbury open to him, so that he could attempt to defend the rights of Canterbury more effectively.

The pope, for his part, could no longer temporise. The incentive of having his son crowned was obviously no longer of any effect in the attempt to bring Henry to a more moderate and concessionary attitude towards the Church. The pope was forced to support Becket and condemn those who had taken part in the coronation ceremony. He authorized Becket to suspend those bishops who had taken the oath to

observe the constitutions, and to excommunicate those who had taken part in the coronation ceremony. He was also empowered to lay an interdict on England, and he could employ these powers as and when he felt they would be most helpful in bringing about a reconciliation.

Henry, however, had probably anticipated these reactions, and he was already prepared for the eventuality. Almost immediately after the coronation, he announced that he was ready to make peace with the archbishop. After a few days of initial negotiations the king met the archbishop at Fréteval in July 1170. The basis of the peace which was rapidly concluded remained the same as that which had been offered at Montmartre in November 1169; Henry offered to restore all the property belonging to the see of Canterbury, and the archbishop would then return in peace to Canterbury; he was also to be granted the right to recrown young Henry, this time with his wife Margaret, who had not been present at the first ceremony, and the affront to King Louis and his daughter must have provided a convenient reason to hold the ceremony a second time, as the slight would thus be erased. Thus Becket would be able to claim that the insult to Canterbury was at least partially accounted for, and Becket intended to use the powers granted to him after the first ceremony to ensure that the offenders did not go unpunished. The king and the archbishop seemed outwardly very cordial and friendly, as if the events of the previous six years had been but a trifling disagreement of the briefest duration. No mention was made of the customs, of whether the archbishop would adhere to them, nor was any kiss of peace requested or offered, although the pope had freed Henry from his oath not to give it, and Becket had insisted before the meeting that the king must give it. The honour of both men was satisfied, and both could leave the meeting claiming victory. But it was not

long before signs began to appear that matters were not as simple to resolve as the attitude of the king and the archbishop had suggested at Fréteval.

Neither Becket nor Henry took any direct part in seeing that reparation and restoration was effected. Becket was not prepared to return to England until full restoration had been achieved, and Henry was compelled by other commitments to leave more of the work to his agents than he wished or than he may have originally intended. Nor could the effects of the archbishop's absence of six years be swept away in a moment. Men such as Randolph de Broc, who had benefited greatly from the archbishop's prolonged absence, were ill-prepared for his return, and ill-disposed to yield the property and repay the revenues which they had enjoyed. There were delays, excuses, evasions. Becket met Henry for the last time at Chaumont, near Tours, when Thomas complained of the delays and told the king, according to one source, that they would not meet again. Becket was determined, now that the peace settlement had been agreed upon, not to flinch, but to return to England, despite his forebodings, despite the inauspicious news concerning his properties at Canterbury, and even when the king, whom he was supposed to meet at Rouen in order that they might return to England together, pleaded illness and was unable to accompany him; he set off, having as companion in the king's stead John of Oxford; it has been suggested that this was a deliberate slight on the part of the king, as John of Oxford had been one of Becket's firmest enemies, whom the archbishop had excommunicated when he spoke at Vézelay in 1166, and that he could do little to further any claims the king might make as to his own good will. Warren, however, suggests the reverse, arguing that in sending John of Oxford, Henry was attempting to demonstrate the full extent of

the reconciliation between the two parties;⁵⁶ certainly, John's good offices were required when the archbishop landed near Sandwich on the 1 December 1170, for although he received a rapturous welcome from the poor people, who formed a procession to accompany him when he travelled on to Canterbury, a more hostile reception was awaiting him from those who stood to lose by his return, and it was only due to the intercession of John of Oxford that the possibility of violence to the archbishop's person was averted.

Immediately before he set sail for England, however, Becket had chosen to pronounce the excommunications of Archbishop Roger of York, and the Bishops of London and Salisbury for their parts in the coronation of young Henry. This was calculated to heighten the victorious nature of his return by humbling his opponents, but it was also timed to arouse maximum anger on the part of those punished. The bishops sent an envoy to the archbishop at Canterbury immediately on receipt of the news, and whilst Becket declared himself to be willing to grant absolution to Gilbert and Jocelin, he stated that the pope had reserved judgment of the case of Roger for himself, and it was not in the archbishop's power to act in his case. The Archbishop of York, on learning the news, persuaded his colleagues that a unified front was necessary in their defence, and together they made common cause, taking their grievances to the king, who was at Bures to celebrate Christmas.

Their report corroborated and strengthened those which were being brought to Henry of the archbishop's proud and uncompromising actions in England, where he was said to be marching about the country with an armed band of followers, threatening insurrections and disturbances of the king's peace. Such stories were doubtless grave exaggerations, for the archbishop had taken with him merely a small

band of knights to protect himself from the violence which had been threatened against him, and had in fact encountered certain rebuffs; the recently crowned young Henry refused to meet him at Windsor. The archbishop was also insulted by the behaviour of Randolph de Broc and others towards him, who refused to give up the properties of Canterbury which they had appropriated or been given during his long absence, and there were reports of several relatively petty affronts to the archbishop or his servants. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to see how the archbishop's conduct came to appear to the king as high-handed and stubborn as ever, and how, by his violent actions and his repeated excommunications, he was determined to destroy all possibility of lasting peace and co-operation between the regnum and the sacerdotium. When Henry II heard these accounts of Becket's behaviour, he fell into one of the fits of anger to which he was occasionally prone, and incited by suggestions that whilst the archbishop lived the king would never enjoy peace in his lands, Henry was moved to pronounce words which led four of his knights to take him seriously and leave the court in secret to carry out the wish which the king had seemed to imply. It is not possible to be sure whether Henry actually did pronounce words, roughly translated as "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest", but Henry did later admit that, whilst not wishing and certainly not ordering the archbishop's murder, he had said words which had caused some in his presence to depart to carry out what they mistakenly took to be the king's will.

At Henry's violent fit of anger and hasty words, four of his knights, Hugh de Moreville, Reginald FitzUrse, William de Tracy and Richard le Breton, left the court, and travelling by separate routes to avoid detection and recall, and hurrying on ahead of Henry's official party to take much more moderate precautions against the

archbishop's actions, and ahead of the messengers sent to recall them when they were missed, the four knights arrived almost simultaneously at Saltwood Castle, which was held by Randolph de Broc. There, on the evening of 28 December 1170, they discussed their plans for the following day. It is not clear that they were sure in their own minds as to what their actions were to be when they embarked on the next day, and it is quite possible that they had no more than a rudimentary understanding of the issues involved and what the causes of contention and strife were. But they did know that Becket was a severe embarrassment and hindrance to their master, and such grounds were sufficient justification for their taking action. They may have intended to do no more than arrest and detain the archbishop until the king should choose to deal with him, but when he resisted, and their anger and impatience grew, they were thrown back upon their instincts as men of arms.

Having left the castle of Saltwood, in the company of Randolph's nephew, Robert de Broc, and stopped off to visit Clarendald, the Abbot of St. Augustine's, a great enemy of Becket's, they entered the archbishop's palace about four in the afternoon. They sat for some time in silence in the archbishop's presence whilst he sat, eating and talking with his clerks and monks. At length Becket noticed them, and enquired of their purpose. They began to order him to rescind the excommunications which he had pronounced earlier in the month and confirmed on Christmas Day. Becket reaffirmed his resolution to despatch his duties to the best of his ability, and could not perform what they asked. Angrily, with charges that the archbishop should not be allowed to escape, the knights left the hall hurriedly to arm themselves, for they had left their weapons outside - perhaps an indication that their original intentions did not encompass

bloodshed. On their return, there followed a rather desperate and undignified chase through the cloisters into the cathedral proper, with the servants of the archbishop bearing him along, as he struggled and protested that he should not flee. Once the monks had got Thomas safely, as they imagined, into the body of the cathedral, the doors were bolted against the entrance of the knights, but Becket himself returned to open them, protesting that the Church of God was not to become a fortress. He had plenty of opportunity to hide in the dark corners and recesses which the cathedral contained, as most of his monks in terror did, but with a dignity which he had not possessed or wished to display at Northampton six years earlier, he nobly and bravely turned to face his pursuers. He calmly refuted that he was a traitor to his king, but his moderate reasoning only served to exacerbate the situation. The knights became more angry and impatient, and attempted to drag the archbishop out of the cathedral. He resisted, and in the struggle which ensued, and was possibly more undignified than many accounts allow, words of anger gave way to blows. One of the knights drew blood with a blow to Becket's head, and the archbishop, knowing now that the fate of which he had had premonitions and fears was now upon him, commended his spirit to God as the blows of the knights cut off his scalp and dashed out his brain. Late on the dark afternoon of 29 December 1170 Henry was rid of his turbulent priest.

We have little reason to doubt the grief of Henry when he learnt the news of Becket's death, nor the sincerity of his sorrow. He succeeded only with the greatest of difficulty in escaping from the worst strictures which the pope could impose upon him, and the envoys the king sent to the papal court had to vouch that the king would do more in the way of penances and concessions than he had originally

given them leave to concede. Henry did avoid some of the difficulties which he might have feared to encounter, either intentionally or by chance, by crossing for a period of several months to attempt to settle the problems in Ireland, but he hurried back when he knew that the papal legates were ready to meet him to discuss the terms of peace on which Henry could be allowed back into the Church. At Avranches on 21 May 1172, the king agreed to the terms of settlement composed by the papal legates Theodwin and Albert. There were six major clauses; firstly, he had to provide two hundred men for the defence of Palestine for one year; secondly, he was to take the cross himself within three and a half years. This promise was later commuted to the foundation of three religious houses, and Henry was not over-zealous in this fulfilment, to say the least; thirdly, he was to restore all the possessions and lands of Canterbury, as they were a year before Becket's exile, and similarly to restore and recompense those who had suffered for the archbishop's cause; fourthly, he would make no obstacles to appeals to Rome in cases of ecclesiastical jurisdiction; fifthly, he promised to abrogate all customs established in his reign, and would absolve the bishops from their oaths to observe the customs, and not demand it of them in future; and sixthly, he was to undergo numerous stringent private penances, fasts, and acts of piety. It will be seen, then, that Henry was now forced to accede to several of the demands which Becket had made obstinately in his lifetime, and to which by his death he gained the king's consent, although, of course, the approval he gave to the Concordat of Avranches in 1172 was not necessarily very much more lasting or less susceptible of being broken by the king than so many of the promises which he gave readily and broke with equal facility, but Becket had gained a temporary victory in death, at least, which was

perhaps little less than he might have hoped to achieve, and probably very much more than he actually did achieve in life.⁵⁷

Soon after Becket's death, within a matter of days, accounts of miracles began to be heard, and very soon, Becket to the popular mind was a martyr and a saint, and should be recognised as such. However, as E. R. Kemp points out,⁵⁸ the pope approached the question of canonization with the utmost caution, and only once in his letters does he reveal any inclination to regard the murdered archbishop as a martyr.⁵⁹

"Cantuariae archiepiscopus, cujus anima Deo, sicut credimus, pretioso martyrio dedicata in coelis cum sanctis habitat'. Normally he says: 'Sanctae recordationis Thomas, quondam Cantuariensis archiepiscopus', and the archbishop's death is treated as an ordinary piece of violence."

Despite the fact that the pope's long deliberation and reluctance to pronounce on the matter which was a great trial of patience for the English people, Becket was canonized on 21 February 1173, which was a swift canonization by comparison with most others. The influence of the fervour and veneration of the crowds that already came to Canterbury cannot be discounted, and to many, Becket's sanctity was proved when the king, after doing public penance at the shrine of the martyr on 12 July 1174, found his political fortunes take a sudden and most unexpected turn for the better, for King William of Scotland, one of his enemies, fell into his hands immediately afterwards, and Henry II was able to reassert himself against his opponents who seemed about to overcome him.

Neither the difficulties which beset those who would attempt to evaluate the canon law of the period, nor the personal aspects of the conflict between Henry II and Thomas Becket make it an easy task

even for a modern historian to achieve a view which he may be justified in feeling to be balanced and fair, for the first problem concerns almost insoluble questions of interpretation, and the second features of human nature which the individual, in spite of himself, may find more or less appealing. Thus it is that we are likely to find views which are occasionally harsh to one party whilst seeming almost to exonerate the other. Robertson⁶⁰ may be correct in stating that "...Becket could only see in the relations of Church and State an 'incurable duality'". It is more difficult to subscribe to his view that Becket set what amounts to a bad 'example', and that all his dealings with King Henry can be condemned on the basis of his total failure to see the value of expediency and the need for co-operation and compromise.⁶¹ Faced with such a view, one naturally feels inclined to support Hutton's view that, on the whole, it is easier to exonerate Becket from blame rather than accept the less attractive picture of the king which he gives.⁶² It is not impossible, if we follow Warren's assessment, to conclude that the problem is not susceptible of solution:⁶³

"Given Becket's developed theological views, a real reconciliation with so masterful a ruler as Henry II was quite impossible. Yet it was the manner of Becket's opposition rather than its ideological content which caused the implacable hostility of the king. Henry resolutely refused to be drawn into ideological debate. He did not answer Becket's letters. For him the conflict remained, as it had begun, a conflict of personalities set on a collision course from which neither could retreat without an unthinkable loss of prestige. The story of Henry II and Thomas Becket is indeed a classic tragedy - the story of heroic men with remarkable qualities, undone by equally great flaws of character, flaws of passion and of pride."

Where we may find some greater measure of agreement is in the

discussion of the nature and immediate significance of his death. If Thomas Becket is a martyr, he is a martyr for the discipline rather than for the faith of the Church, and this, by the nature of the stand it requires a man to make, can readily make him seem a less attractive and sympathetic figure. But few seek to deny that Becket, when with dignity and resolution and courage he turned to face those whom he had every reason to suspect of requiring his life of him, was defending a cause which he truly felt to be right, and that he died for the freedom of the spiritual authority of the Church, as he knew he might have to die for it. It was a calling for which he had often declared himself ready when the moment should come, and he died willing to sacrifice his life for the cause in which he believed. But beyond this in unity it seems we cannot go. As soon as the historians begin to discuss the value and more lasting significance of Becket's martyrdom, they naturally begin to differ.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DATING AND THE SOURCES OF GUERNES' POEM

The news of Thomas Becket's murder spread not only across England, but also across the continent, and the horror and the upsurge of religious feeling which it created prompted English writers to begin accounts of the archbishop's life, and also of the miracles which very soon were reported and attributed to his virtue; these were written in Latin but they were not the only lives written at this time; some lives of the archbishop were produced in French, and the earliest of these which has survived to us is that written by Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence.

Pont-Sainte-Maxence is a small town in the departement of Oise, lying in the valley of the river Oise seven miles north of Senlis and just over thirty miles from Paris. As regards the name of the poet, there is not complete unanimity among the six manuscripts of the poem which have survived; in one of them, the Paris manuscript followed in his edition of the poem by M. C. Hippeau, the poet tells us that he is:

Guarniers lieclerc, del Punt sainte mescence nez,

(Line 5782)¹

However, the reading in the majority of the manuscripts is Guernes, as the only other variant is the reading in the manuscript of the British Museum, (Cotton, Domitian XI), where a misreading of Gerues for Gernes has led to the obviously incorrect Gervais. In the manuscript of Welbeck Abbey, (Library of the Duke of Portland), the name originally given has been erased, and the spelling Guernes

supplied by the corrector of the text, and the confusion as to the poet's name seems to have continued into the present century. It was not until the third edition of the poem, that of M. E. Walberg, had appeared in 1922², that the name Guernes was generally adopted in preference to Garnier, to which most earlier commentators and editors had adhered.³ M. Walberg regards the manuscript which gives the reading Gervais as "très défectueuse", and of little value in the question of establishing a critical text.⁴ In the present study, the name Guernes has been adopted, as this is the form attested in the predominant number of the manuscripts, where we find it twice in the subject-case:

Pur go qu'or tart nus est novals martyrs donez,
 Guernes li Clercs, del Punt Sainte Mesence nez,
 Vus volt faire del tens del martyre acertez:

(Lines 5876-78)⁵

Guernes li Clercs del Punt fine iciesun sermun
 Del martir saint Thomas e de sa passiu.

(Lines 6156-57)

It is not possible to formulate, from the rare and indirect indications which the poem offers us, a very clear or detailed picture of the poet and his life. He tells us, as we have seen, that he is a clerk from Pont-Sainte-Maxence. He tells us, whilst describing his own poem as he brings it to a conclusion;:

Mis languages est bons, car en France fui nez.

(line 6165)

However, it is difficult to deduce a great deal more than this about the poet, although it is possible, on the evidence of his own words, to make one or two remarks about the life he led.

When Becket was Henry's chancellor, Guernes reports that he saw

the future archbishop on his travels in France, as he served his king in wars in France:

E jeol vi sur Franceis plusurs feiz chevalchier.

(Line 359)

This seems to suggest that Guernes himself used to travel, at least to a certain extent, and perhaps more than might be expected of a clerk, although it was not uncommon for clerks to travel about the country. This impression is strengthened, when, later in the poem, he states:

Jo ving en plusurs lius que li reis out saisiz:

N'i esteit nuls des hostes ne povres recueilliz;

Jo fui defors la porte del portier escundiz;

Carité n'i fu pas, c'entendi a ses diz.

Li reis prist tut fors tant dunt li lius ert furniz.

(Lines 2491-2495)

Once Guernes had made up his mind to travel to Canterbury in order to achieve a greater degree of veracity in his work, he does not seem to have encountered any difficulty in carrying out this plan:

Primes traitai d'ole, e suvent i menti.

A Cantorbire alai, la verité oi;

Des amis saint Thomas la verité cuilli,

E de ces ki l'aveient des enfance servi.

D'oster e de remettre le travail ensuffri.

(Lines 146-150)

The Paris manuscript contains, immediately after the text of the poem itself, a short poem of twenty-two lines, which seems to be by the author of the Vie himself,⁶ in which the poet talks of the help and rewards which he has received from Becket's sister in recognition.

of his Vie. In this poem also he refers to the ease with which he is able to travel, although, on this occasion, his statement is evidently a boastful exaggeration:

Se nuls me dit: "Guarniers, ou vas?" tuz li munz est miens environ.

(Line 14)

He concludes, equally poetically:

Quel part que seit mis curs, e de long e de lé,

A els est mi returs, tut pur lur grant bunté;

Kar unc ne vi meillurs en la crestienté.

(Lines 20-22)

Although we must treat these last two statements with a degree of suspicion, when we are talking of Guernes' travels, they, together with the evidence of the earlier statements, give us a picture of a clerk to whom travel was both familiar and pleasant. It is, indeed, quite probable that Guernes was a clericus vagans, or clerc vagant, a clerk who used to travel from one monastery to another, without necessarily being firmly attached to any.

From the poem, it is evident that, in keeping with his profession, he had a good knowledge of the scriptures, and, necessarily, of Latin. But of his manner of life it is not possible to adduce anything more, nor can we discover anything of his age at the time he was writing, nor the date of his death.

When we come to consider the date of the poem, Guernes tries to be quite explicit as to when it was written, but unfortunately, his statements do not at first seem to be wholly reconcilable with each other, and they have led to discrepancies among the critics who have attempted to give an exact dating of the work. Almost all of them have come to the conclusion that the work took the author four, or almost four, years to complete; however, M. V. Le Clerc⁷ suggests

1173-1177, Mr. E.A. Abbott⁸ 1171-1175, M.A. Mebes⁹, M.E. Magnússon¹⁰, M.L. Halphen¹¹ and M.T. Carlé¹² all suggest 1172-1176; M.G. Paris¹³ states that the work was completed in 1173, whilst M.E. Étienne¹⁴ at first states that the poem was composed "Entre les années 1171 et 1175" and then seems to narrow this down by stating that it was "terminé vers la fin de 1174."¹⁵ It is quite clear from these varying projected dates that Guernes' statements have not definitively placed his work in time for us. This is despite the fact that the poet attempts, as we shall see, on more than one occasion to give his audience a date. Early in the poem he tells us :

Si volez esculter la vie al saint martyr,
 Ci la purrez par mei plenièrément oïr;
 N'i voil rien trespasser, ne rien n'i voil mentir.
 Quatre ans i ai pres mis al feire e al furnir;
 D'oster e de remettre poi la peine souffrir.

(Lines 141-145)

This is a quite unequivocal statement that his work took almost four years.¹⁶ Yet this statement seems to be strangely contradicted at the end of Guernes' poem, when he tells us :

L'an secund que li sainz fu en s'iglise ocis,
 Comenchai cest romanz, e mult m'en entremis.
 Des privez saint Thomas la verité apris:
 Mainte feiz en ostai ço que jo ainz escriis,
 Pur oster la mençoige. Al quart an fin i mis.

(Lines 6166-6170)

These two statements are on the surface irreconcilable.

Let us begin by establishing what Guernes considers to be the year of Becket's death - for there were different methods of computing the beginning of the year in different countries, and even within different areas within the same country; in the twelfth century, and in England, for example, the system of dating for documents changed about the beginning of the reign of Henry II, and the year was counted from 25th March instead of from 1st January, whilst in France, in various areas, the year might be dated from Christmas Day, Easter Eve, or 25th March, until the practice was standardised in 1564.¹⁷ However, Guernes does not leave us in doubt, because he gives us two instances by which we may verify his method. In the first he states :

L'an secunt que li ber icel eissil suffri,
 E qu'il out pres dous anz esté a Punteigni,
 Li reis, qui mult le het, ne l'ad mis en obli,
 Ses briés a cel abé ad tramis, dunt vus di;
 Manda lui qu'il retint sun mortel enemi.

(Lines 3686-3690)

We saw in the previous chapter that Becket went into exile at Pontigny at the end of 1164, and that he left the Cistercian abbey there, when Henry threatened action against members of that order in his own kingdom, two years later in 1166. Thus, by analogy, l'an secund que li sainz fu en s'iglise (Line 6166) ocis would correspondingly be 1172. Secondly, at the end of

the poem, we find evidence that Guernes is consistent when, in what must necessarily be a later addition to his poem, he is precise about the date when King Henry came to Canterbury, to the tomb of Thomas Becket. Twice Guernes refers to al quart an; the second reference is very specific :

Al quart an qu'ot suffert li martyrs passium,
 Al setme meis de l'an - juiet l'apele l'un, -
 E al duzime jur, un vendredi par nun,
 Vint li reis al martir a satisfactiun.

(Lines 5916 - 5919)

Other sources confirm that this event took place on 12 July 1174; if this happened al quart an qu'ot suffert li
 (Line 5916)
martyrs passium, then it is safe for us to accept that al quart
 (Line 6170)
an fin is mis, equally refers to 1174: this reference is carried by those manuscripts which do not bear the account of the king's penitence.

Therefore, we have apparently, two completely conflicting statements; one that the work took from 1172 to 1174, and one that it took him four years.

We cannot demonstrate, moreover, that Guernes was being inconsistent in his method of dating, by suggesting that al quart an fin i mis,
 (Line 6170)
 might mean not four years after Becket's death - which is what it is most likely to mean, given the statement only four lines earlier l'an secund que li sainz fu en
 (Line 6166)
s'iglise ocis, but four years after the poet began work on his poem. We have already mentioned King Henry's pilgrimage to

Canterbury on 12th July 1174; Guernes deals with this incident late in his poem, in what in all probability is a late addition to his poem. Guernes does not mention a second visit made by Henry II, in the company of his eldest surviving son, to Becket's tomb, which took place on 28th May 1175. We may presume that Guernes would have made some reference to such a visit, for, even at the risk of repetition, it would be a powerful prop in his argument, and such a reference need only be brief. That no mention is made suggests that Guernes was very close to the end of his composition at the time of his first visit in 1174, and had completed it before the second visit to Canterbury took place. Moreover, the short poem, to which reference has already been made in this chapter, which follows the main work in the Paris manuscript, offers further corroborative evidence to support such a theory. In this poem, Guernes, who seems to suggest that he is about to go on his travels again, mentions both l'abeesse suer saint Thomas,^(Line 1) and Oede li buens priurs de Seinte Terneté.^(Line 16) From other chroniclers we can learn that Becket's sister Mary became abbess of Barking in April 1173,¹⁸ and that Eudes left Holy Trinity, Canterbury, where he had been since 1167, on 8th July 1175, when he became abbot of Saint Martin's of Battle, Hastings;¹⁹ consequently this poem was written between April 1173 and July 1175. In the poem, Guernes refers to his passiun, saying that he is pleased that it is complete, and that he had grown weary when he was composing it; thus the Vie was clearly completed before the short poem was composed.

Thus it seems that Guernes is quite adamant and consistent in his statements that the poem was completed in the fourth year after the archbishop's murder. What we must now investigate is the question whether the poem took him two years to compose, as Lines 6166 - 6170 seem to insist, or four years, as Lines 144 - 145 state. The problem is not perhaps so difficult of resolution as might appear from the apparently conflicting statements. Indeed, the evidence will suggest a clear and convincing solution to the problem of how long the poet took to compose his poem.

What we must bear in mind when we consider these difficulties concerning the discrepancies over the dating of the poem is Guernes' claim that what we are reading now constitutes the second version of the poem :

Primes traitai d'oïe, e suvent i menti.
 A Cantorbire alai, la verité oï;
 Des amis saint Thomas la verité cuilli,
 E de ces ki l'aveient des enfance servi.
 D'oster e de remettre le travail ensuffri.
 Mes cel premier romanz m'unt escrivein emblé,
 Anceis que je l'ousse parfet e amendé
 E l'amer e le dulz adulci e tempéré;
 E la u j'oi trop mis, ne l'oi uncore osté,
 Ne le plus ne le mains n'érés ne ajusté.
 Par lius est mençungiers e senz pleneireté;
 E nepurquant i a le plus de verité.
 E meint riche umme l'unt cunquis e achaté;
 Mes cil un deivent estre, ki l'emblèrent, blasme.
 Mes cestui ai del tut amendé e fine.

(Lines 146 - 160)

Guernes claims in fact that, realising that his first poem was inaccurate in many respects, he decided to go to Canterbury to learn the truth of the matter, instead of relying so much on distant and therefore possibly unreliable oral sources. Whilst, however, he was embarking upon this task, the first version of his poem was stolen from him by scribes. This happened before he had the opportunity to correct many of the mistakes which he now discovered in his first draft of the poem. Having lost the first draft of his poem, we might expect the poet to claim that his second version, the one which he had in his hands and which has survived in its entirety, was much more accurate and authoritative than the first, lost version, just as he claims that all the other accounts of Becket's life cannot compare with his own in veracity and accuracy. He claims that he himself had completed his revisions this time and that he will not stray from the truth pur perdre u pur murir. We might be tempted to reflect that the poet is making little more than a hackneyed defence of his new poem were it not for the fact that two fragments of this first draft of the poem, long presumed lost, have been discovered and have recently been published.²⁰ These fragments, as we shall see in later chapters, illustrate the truth of Guernes' claim that he had radically modified his work. Although the fragments are not long, they do reveal considerable differences from the second, complete version of

the poem. In particular, as we shall see, the poet seems to have modified quite considerably his opinion of the role of King Henry at the crucial time of Becket's return to England and the outbursts of anger against him. This suggests that Guernes' did in fact, discover material and information at Canterbury to cause him to alter his first draft in the manner which we have just observed. It may of course be dangerous to surmise too much on the admittedly limited evidence of the two fragments, but it is fair to presume that if Guernes altered his view so radically on the part which King Henry played in provoking the murder of Thomas Becket, he must have given an appreciably different picture of the king at certain points in the first version of his poem from that which has survived in its entirety in the second version.

There is, in fact, in the form of these two surviving fragments, evidence to support Guernes' claim that his first poem was in need, in his eyes at least, of serious and considerable modification. Their very existence proves the validity of the poet's claim that he had written a first version, and that it had been his intention and desire to amend that version when it was stolen from him by the copyists. It adds substance to the evidence which his journey to Canterbury offers. In these fragments, we also find, perhaps, the answer to the question of how Guernes' apparently conflicting statements about the length of time which it took him to

compose his work. We should note that Guernes does not tell us exactly when he went to Canterbury, but it was probably about the time that he was deciding that his first version required revision; he does not tell us that his first version was abandoned, but that it required considerable revision, and that whilst this work was in progress the copyist stole it; not before, however, he had sold several copies of it to meint riche umme^(Line 159). He was, he tells us, in the process of d'oster e de remettre le travail ensuffri^(Line 150) when it was stolen.

But in the lines immediately preceding the ones which we have just been studying, the poet has told us quatre anz i ai pres mis al feire e al furnir^(Line 144). The i refers back to la vie al saint martyr^(Line 141), and the poet seems to be referring to all the work which he has put into his poem, including in his calculations the time which he spent working on the first draft, which was obviously not entirely wasted, and was evidently much on his mind at the time that he was composing these lines, as he reflects on the injustice of events. It might be natural for him to stress, as he tries to assert the superiority of the second version, all the time which he has spent upon it, including some of the time which was spent fruitlessly on the first lost, or stolen, version. This inclusion of this first work and the time which it took may not have even been a conscious one, as the two were evidently so closely linked in the poet's mind at this stage. Equally, the poet might be reluctant to emphasise the fact he had initially produced a work which had proved so inaccurate and misleading

as to require considerable reworking; although he does mention to his audience that this was his purpose in travelling to Canterbury, he does so in such a way that it reflects to the credit of his second draft and his methodical search for truth, rather than drawing attention to the poet's initial shortcomings. He is keen to emphasise to his audience that this second draft is now the most authoritative version, and is aware that he faces some stern competition in this field as he concludes his opening remarks :

Tut cil autre romanz ke unt fait del martyr
 Clerc u lai, maïne u dame, mult les oï mentir,
 Ne le veir ne le plain nes i oï furnir.
 Mes ci purrez le veir e tut le plain oïr;
 N'istrai de verité pur perdre u pur murir.

(Lines 161-165)

These romanz are now lost to us; Guernes is to mention them again at the conclusion of his poem, this time along with some Latin lives, again for the purpose of denigrating them. Let us now consider what Guernes has to say at the end of his poem in connection with the length of time his composition took him :

L'an secund que li sainz fu en s'iglise ocis
 Comenchai cest romanz, e mult m'en entremis.
 Des privez saint Thomas la verité apris :
 Mainte feiz en ostai ço que jo ainz escriis,
 Pur oster la mençoenge. Al quart an fin i mis.

(Lines 6166 - 6170)

In this instance, Guernes is referring specifically to cest romanz. He is thinking only now of the second version, not the time which was necessary to compose both the first and the second versions. Indeed, when he refers to corrections which he has made to what he had ainz escriis, he seems to be clear in his own mind between the two versions, wishing to keep the veracity of the second untainted by the mençonge of the first. Although he expressed similar sentiments at the beginning of the poem, his line of approach and his train of thought were different. Thus we may fairly conclude that this second version was begun in 1172 and completed in 1174: that the first version was begun very shortly after Becket's death, that, as the second was begun in 1172, the first must have been lost in the same year, when it was nearing completion, but when it still required some considerable revision; the need for this revision doubtless came as a result of Guernes' decision to go to Canterbury, where he discovered the fallibility of his first version. Whilst attempting to make good its deficiencies it was stolen. We may fairly deduce that Guernes travelled to Canterbury in 1172, although we cannot finally prove that he did not go there earlier even than that, in 1171.

The dating of the poem is of importance when we come to consider what lies behind Guernes' statement concerning the manner of composition of his second version :

Primes traitai d'ocie, e suvent i menti.
 A Cantorbire alai, la verité oï;
 Des amis saint Thomas la verité cuilli,
 E de ces ki l'aveient des enfance servi.
 D'oster e de remettre le travail ensuffri.

(Lines 146 - 150)

(Line 6169)

As was the case with ainz escriu above, we cannot
 (Line 146)
 finally be certain whether, when Guernes writes primes traitaia,
 he means us to understand in the first, stolen version
 of the poem, or in the early work on the second version.
 Perhaps, indeed, the poet wishes to be deliberately ambiguous
 on this point; but the inescapable fact, as he presents the
 facts to us, is that Guernes went to Canterbury and heard at first
 hand many stories and details about the archbishop which he
 had not previously known about. Indeed, in the early years
 of the eleven seventies, what has come to be known as the
 oral tradition must have been very strong at Canterbury.
 That is to say, there must have been very many people in and
 around Canterbury who were friends or acquaintances of the
 archbishop, or had merely some comparatively minor anecdote
 to pass on; given the proliferation of miracles which were
 claimed and attributed to Becket, and the immense interest and
 veneration aroused by his death, information about the
 archbishop must have spread very rapidly and anecdotes must
 quickly have become common knowledge in and around Canterbury.
 Guernes, arriving in Canterbury, could not fail to discover
 much material and information through these oral sources which
 had previously been unknown to him; his debt to them must be
 considerable and he must have felt that his decision to travel
 to Canterbury was justified. We shall return to the
 question of the oral sources of Guernes' poem shortly, for,
 as we shall see, their exact importance to his work has been

the cause of some discussion and disagreement.

However, we can easily see that the poet had another very great debt concerning the composition of his poem, a debt which, if he acknowledges it at all, he acknowledges only in the most vague and indirect of terms. When Guernes states that he learnt the truth from des amis saint Thomas (Line 148) and from those ki l'aveient des enfance servi (Line 149), he is in fact concealing the nature of his second debt. Whilst admitting his debt to the oral sources, and whilst asserting the truthfulness and validity of his own version, he gives a clear warning that where other authors differ from him, it is they who are untruthful:

E ço sacent tuit cil qui ceste vie orrunt
 Que pure verité par tut oïr purrunt .
 E ço sacent tuit cil qui del saint traitié unt,
 U romanz u latin, e cest chemin ne vunt:
 U el dient que jo, contre verité sunt.

(Lines 6171-6175)

Guernes reveals here the critical spirit of his approach to the problem of collecting and presenting only that which is true, and, in asserting the accuracy and authority of his own version, he at the same time reminds his audience that there may exist versions which differ from his, and that these do not therefore give truthful or reliable accounts of events. What Guernes skilfully omits to mention is that there exists more than one written account, parts of which bear striking resemblances to his own work.

Guernes, by emphasising that those whose accounts differ from his do not tread the path of truth, is able nimbly to pass on without further reference to, or consideration of, versions which do not differ from his but correspond closely, in some places, as we shall see, very closely, to his own. It is evident when we compare the works of Edward Grim and Guernes that, despite the fact that one is in Latin prose and the other in French verse, the two correspond closely in many points along their course. This is not to say that this is the only interrelation between the biographers, for evidently this is not the case and we have just implied as much, but it is the biography of Edward Grim which we should consider first and foremost.

It is not my purpose to discuss in great detail all the possible interrelations between the various biographers, as such a study, rewarding as it might be, would not be warranted in terms of my looking closely at the way in which one biographer, Guernes, has used the material at his disposal. Several critics have already discussed Guernes' position, and the question as to whether he served as a source for other writers or used their works as a source for his own; most notably, M.E. Walberg²¹ again seems to have persuaded other writers, although not all, who might previously have held opposing and contradictory theories, to the value of his own.²² In his consideration of the interrelationships between the biographers, with special reference to Guernes, M. Walberg discusses and often dismisses, with justification in my opinion, earlier theories, before presenting his own conclusion. Without discussing the problem in the detail to which M. Walberg's fine exposition

lends itself, I intend to state the salient points of the argument necessary to show what Guernes' position is, and shall confine myself to adding to M. Walberg's argument such comments as seem necessary or appropriate to this purpose.²³

M. Walberg did not have the benefit of the fragments of the first draft of the poem which have recently been published, but, as we shall see, these need not materially affect the veracity of M. Walberg's findings, although they do give grounds for further speculation, and add, in certain instances, support for M. Walberg's theories.

We have just noted that the writer whose account of Becket's life resembles most closely that of Guernes is Edward Grim. There can be no certainty about how long Grim had been in close proximity to the archbishop, since one source seems to state that he had been in Becket's service for some time, whilst another suggests that he had only come to see him following the return from exile at the beginning of 1170. However, we can see that Grim did, for however brief a period, come into close personal contact with Becket, and was the last man to attempt to protect him, having his own arm severely injured by the first of the blows which fell upon the archbishop as he did so. We have seen that Guernes admits to having seen Becket en passant, but nowhere does the poet claim to have been in close contact with him, as he would surely have done had he the grounds for so doing. It is at least improbable that Edward Grim therefore should feel inclined or obliged to consult the work of a French poet who had seen the archbishop only intermittently and at a

distance. M. Walberg also points out that Guernes is occasionally more explicit than Grim, as is sometimes the case with placenames or the names of persons in the story, and we must agree that whilst it is not impossible for the writer to desire to abridge his source from time to time, he is unlikely deliberately to omit such relatively important and brief information. There is little internal evidence to help us accurately to date Edward Grim's work, but he does in chapter 75²⁴ exonerate Henry directly from blame for Becket's murder. This is an important piece of evidence, from several points.

Firstly, it leads M. Walberg to the conclusion that Grim had not completed his work in its final form before 21st May 1172, which was the date on which King Henry reached an agreement with the papal envoys at Avranches. This leads M. Walberg to suggest that Grim completed his work later that year. As we have seen it was very probably in 1172 that Guernes travelled to Canterbury; thus we may deduce that Grim had done much of the work on his biography by the time Guernes arrived at Canterbury, having himself already done much work on his first draft. Grim would have had little enough reason or opportunity to study or consult this first draft. Logic dictates that Guernes could scarcely have completed his second draft so rapidly as to permit Grim to consult it in the first instance - and the information which Guernes gives us as to the dating of his own poem, confusing as it may be in parts, precludes this. As is



the case with Guernes, however, Grim made a later addition to his text, describing Henry II's visit to Canterbury in 1174, besides one in which he recounts the reconciliation of the king with prior Benedict, or Benoit; for those sections of Guernes' poem and the corresponding passages of Grim's Latin account which discuss the king's journey to Canterbury, M. Walberg²⁵ is prepared to entertain the possibility, although he carefully refuses to commit himself to an acceptance of such a theory, that under these specific circumstances Guernes may have been the source for Grim's information. Chronology does not in this instance preclude the possibility that for this relatively short section at the conclusions of the two works, the roles of source and borrower which have obtained until this point may have been reversed. Perhaps however, we should recall the vital importance of the oral tradition at Canterbury at the time when we consider the validity of such a theory.

Secondly, Chapter 75 of Edward Grim's work finds a strong echo in the first version of Guernes' poem, for when we come to study the first fragment of the first draft of the poem, we shall discover that in it Guernes appears to have followed material from Grim's work quite closely. Guernes does not include the passage in the second draft of the poem; this suggests that Guernes had access to the work of Edward Grim whilst he was composing his first draft, but that he knowingly chose to ignore material in Grim's account, material which he had already borrowed once himself, as a result of a growing belief that the king,

despite protestations to the contrary, was implicated in some way in Becket's murder. It is not possible to deduce how much of Guernes' first draft was influenced by Edward Grim's account - clearly, we are dealing here with an episode close to the conclusion of the poem, where he would be most likely to include such material, if we believe that his poem was composed logically and in chronological order - but it becomes clear that Guernes was prepared to reject material from his written sources, even when, on his own guarded admission, information at Canterbury led to an improvement in his own veracity, material which, moreover, he had once decided to include in his work.

We should do well to remember the evidence of Guernes' treatment of the degree of involvement of the king in Becket's death in his two works, for although we will find a very large number of undoubted borrowings from the work of Edward Grim in Guernes' poem, we must concede that Guernes rejects material which he found in his written sources in favour of an interpretation which may be original or which may owe something to the oral sources prevalent at Canterbury at the time. This evidence, moreover, adds to the theory that Guernes was still working on his first draft in 1172, during which year, as we have seen, he claims, with justification, to have begun work on his second draft.

Roger of Pontigny has been considered by some commentators to be another source used by Guernes, but M. Walberg disproves this theory by showing that Roger refers to the prior of Christchurch, Canterbury, as Benedict, later abbot of Peterborough and himself

a writer on Becket's death and miracles associated with it; Benedict succeeded Eudes as prior in July 1175, which strongly suggests that Roger's work must have been completed after this date; Guernes, on the other hand, had completed his work whilst Eudes was still prior of Christchurch, that is to say before 8th July 1175, for he refers to Oede li buens priurs de Seinte Terneté in the little poem which follows the main body of the poem in the Paris manuscript, and this poem was evidently composed after the main work itself had been completed. Thus we can safely assert that the resemblances which exist between the two works can be explained by the fact that Roger of Pontigny used Guernes as a source, and used also - although this is incidental to our main purpose - the work of Edward Grim.

Moreover, as Ian Short has pointed out²⁶, it rapidly becomes clear that when we compare the surviving fragments of the first draft with the work of Roger of Pontigny we shall discover that Roger had access not to the second draft of Guernes' poem, as naturally and necessarily envisaged by M. Walberg, but to the first draft. The similarities between the fragments of the first poem and Roger's work are greater than those to be found between the second poem and the Latin text, and although this cannot be taken as absolute proof that Roger did not have access to the second draft, or that he had not in fact access to both, both these hypotheses appear extremely unlikely in the face of this evidence. Indeed it would be an interesting, although largely speculative task, and one outside the bounds of

this enquiry, to investigate the work of Roger of Pontigny, in the light of the fragments of Guernes' first draft and the use which Roger appears to have made of them, in order to postulate the possible content and nature of those sections of Guernes' first draft still missing - the vast bulk of his poem - by a close study of those sections of Roger's poem which appear to have no other written source. It is a tantalising prospect, but one which encompasses too much speculation and hopeful theorising to be of anything other than the most suspect and untrustworthy validity. We might speculate that in places we should discover grounds to presume exact parallels between the two texts - certainly M. Walberg, in all his close investigation of the subject, never felt cause to doubt that Roger had access to the second version, but used it irregularly, spasmodically and with no great system of fidelity, and yet this in itself now seems to us, with the benefit of our greater knowledge, reason in itself to suspect a certain degree of divergence, and the evidence of the surviving fragments of the first draft add substance to this theory. But beyond such remarks it is not safe to make suppositions or generalisations, for the ground is quite simply not safe beneath our feet.

Let us now leave Roger of Pontigny and the many tantalising questions which his work presents to us, and pass to a consideration of Guernes' poem and its relationship to the work of William of Canterbury, whose work M. Walberg dates in 1173 or early 1174, although it must be admitted that he is working partially, at least, from the dates which he has established

for Guernes' poem. Nevertheless, M. Walberg claims, quite reasonably, that Guernes consulted William's Latin work. On some of the occasions when Guernes consulted William's account, he appears to have done so when material necessary to the logic and continuity of the plot was deficient in Edward Grim's account. Certain of Guernes' borrowings can be proved by showing that the poet misunderstood or misread the Latin text. On one occasion, for example, he speaks of the Bishop of Ely at a time when that see was vacant; the poet has interpreted Helmaniensis as (H)eliensis, and thus confused Norwich with Ely. (Line 5472)

On another occasion, Guernes speaks of quatre altre chevalier to which no other biographer makes reference at the critical stage in the cathedral as the four knights pursue the archbishop; Guernes here has misunderstood the force of William's quatuor aliis, since we are intended to understand not that four more knights have arrived, but that "while Huges was engaged in scattering the brains of the archbishop on the floor of the cathedral, the four others" Guernes must indeed have been aware of some discrepancy here, for he has made an attempt to resolve the problem by introducing the four "other" knights into his account at a point earlier than William of Canterbury's original supposed reference to them; obviously the poet was conscious that to introduce these four knights for the first time after the murder has taken place, as the poet must have presumed to be William's intention, would have seemed very illogical. Thus the poet compounds his error in his attempt to improve upon the Latin

original. Thus although we cannot date William of Canterbury's account without reference to Guernes in this instance, the evidence suggests that Guernes occasionally felt the need to borrow from the prior's account. This evidence is supported by logic - it would be improbable that William, like Edward Grim a witness of the murder and himself resident at Canterbury, where he was engaged in compiling a book of miracles concerning the archbishop, would wish to consult a work written by a newcomer and a relative stranger to Canterbury.

Benedict of Canterbury, also known later as Benedict of Peterborough, wrote a passio of the archbishop, which has survived to us in fragmented form. At one time it was supposed that he had written a complete life of Becket, of which only the last few pages had survived, and which, in its full form, served as one of the major sources for some of the Latin biographers, and also for Guernes' poem. However, Benedict's account may have been intended to do no more than serve as an introduction to the compilation of miracles which he was making as testimony to the saintliness of the archbishop. M. Walberg finds rare instances where, at the conclusion of his poem, Guernes has followed Benedict's passio closely. By its fragmented nature, it would be impossible to prove conclusively exactly how much more extensive was the work which Guernes was able to consult, but in all probability it covered only the ground most closely dealing with the archbishop's murder in the cathedral. What remains to us of Benedict's work begins by relating the entrance of the four

knights into the archbishop's palace as Becket sat with his monks at table, and follows developments through until after his death and hasty burial.²⁷ We cannot without new evidence know how long or how brief this passio originally was, and its influence must similarly remain largely unknown to us. The probability, and it is not possible to be more categorical than this, is that its influence and its sphere of influence were restricted.

M. Walberg also mentions the possibility that Guernes occasionally borrowed from the work of William FitzStephen, whose work was probably completed, according to M. Walberg, between the spring of 1173 and the autumn of 1174. But, as he points out, the resemblances are both rare and mediocre in nature. As M. Walberg recognises, any resemblances, especially rather distant ones, may be the result not of copying but of differing interpretations and emphasis placed upon material gained from a common oral source. Indeed the absence of one single striking instance where we could see that Guernes had undoubtedly borrowed directly from FitzStephen, it is not safe to state that he did borrow. We must stress once again the importance of the oral sources, and the common currency of language, phraseology and information prevalent at Canterbury in these years. We shall return shortly to a further discussion of these sources, but we must recognise not only their existence, but also their vital importance to writers who were hurrying to complete their works and vie with their competitors, and who as we have seen, all

succeeded in producing their works within a few years of each other. Oral sources would prove not only less laborious, but also more accessible to the individual writer as he composed his account.

These, then, are briefly the findings of M. Walberg, with whom I concur, except in the matter of Roger of Pontigny, who must have borrowed from Guernes' first draft, and in the question of borrowings from William FitzStephen, where, although it is not possible to be categorical, I prefer the theory of a common oral source to that of direct borrowing: the most important Latin source for the poem of Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence is the work of Edward Grim: Roger of Pontigny did not serve as a source for Guernes, but rather the reverse; William of Canterbury was the second important written source for Guernes poem, but borrowings from this author are appreciably fewer than those from Edward Grim's work, and may have been made in order to supply information lacking in the poet's primary written source. Towards the end of his poem, the poet made a small number of borrowings from the short, fragmentary passio of Benedict of Peterborough (formerly of Canterbury). In addition to M. Walberg's findings, it is possible to show that Guernes had access to Grim's account whilst he was compiling his first account, and that he was not afraid to reject material found in Grim if he discovered superior information.

We must now return to the question of the oral sources,

which, as we have already seen, had a very important part to play in the transmission of the history of Thomas Becket.

I think that the preceding pages have indicated in some degree the extent of Guernes' debt to the written sources, but one critic, Miss Claudine I. Wilson, in a review of M. Walberg's edition of Guernes' poem, has sought to stress the importance and the claims of the oral tradition even further, to the point of wishing to deny all but the most incontrovertible evidence for written sources.²⁸ She is undoubtedly right to wish to emphasise the great importance of the oral tradition at Canterbury, and is surely correct in wishing to insist that it played an exceptional part in the propagation of knowledge, and also of rumour, concerning the archbishop, and in leading to the creation of both historical and legendary accounts of events in his life, or his life as a whole. But she goes on to challenge certain of M. Walberg's arguments, attacking in particular his lack of discretion in attributing to the various alleged sources of Guernes' poem the place and the preeminent role which he gives to them. While it is true that, in the case of one of Miss Wilson's misgivings, chronology does not rule out the possibility that Guernes' first draft was not unknown and therefore not without influence upon those biographers from whom he would appear to have borrowed in his second version, logic does. There would be little reason for eye-witnesses to take great account of a work partially at least invalidated by its own author, who must, however, despite his claims to the contrary,

have failed to produce a radically improved version at the second attempt, since, whatever the final relationship between this and certain Latin lives of the archbishop, the textual similarities are undeniable on numerous occasions, and if the Latin texts reflect the first French version, they equally and on very many occasions reflect, or are reflected in, the second. Moreover the evidence of the surviving fragments of the first draft disprove such a theory; indeed, we see Guernes borrowing material from Grim for the first draft of his poem which he came later to reject in his second version. But in any case, such a theory seems to fly in the face of Miss Wilson's major thesis, it seems to me, for she is very careful and insistent when she warns us of the exceptional circumstances at Canterbury, and the importance of remembering the possibility of interaction, or even joint action, on the part of authors working on lives of Becket there, and sets down rigorous stipulations which must be fulfilled, before anything other than oral transmission may be adduced:

" For these Becket lives, prose and verse, Latin and French, which we now see as so many individual productions, are merely the remains of a great collective creation, the legend of Becket, the vibrations that stirred the air of Canterbury and England and Christendom, pulsing out from the central horror of the murder on the steps of the sanctuary. In that atmosphere, echoing with the crime and the struggle that

preceded it, among the friends and followers of the martyr, oral transmission, discussion, exchange of anecdotes, sermons, miracles attested, must have bulked as large as - possibly larger than - the written word, more permanent, but less pliant. To estimate with precision the actions and reactions of the manifold elements of this 'ambiance' is no easy task: one may indeed ask whether it is a possible one. In the circumstances nothing short of textual resemblances, so striking as to exclude the possibility of any other hypothesis than that of direct borrowing, can be accepted as proof positive of dependence of one author upon another: even textual resemblances which elsewhere would be convincing may here become suspect. One has but to think of the stereotyped recitative which guides the modern pilgrim-tourist over the scene of the saint's murder, to imagine the similar repetitions in unvarying words which must have edified all but the very earliest pilgrims to the spot. Two writers utilising a tale known to both in its conventional oral form might well show coincidences in expression, such as to suggest plagiarism where there is none. This caution may appear excessive, but lack of it leads M. Walberg to draw his conclusions with a rigour unwarranted by the nature of his materials. He notes in passing (pp. xiii and xiv) the widespread interest and activity aroused by Becket's murder, but without sufficient regard to their implication. "

Miss Wilson is quite justified in demanding that such conditions be fulfilled before we may presume direct written borrowings. But she is not justified when, on the basis of a small number of 'random' inspections, she claims to cast serious doubt upon M. Walberg's theory of sources. She may be correct in suggesting that sometimes what M. Walberg terms in the table of sources for Guernes' poem (see op. cit., introduction, ch. IV pp. lxxv-xxix) a 'ressemblance médiocre', may not be a direct textual borrowing at all, but may be due to just such circumstances as we have seen her describe. However, with this necessary caution in mind, I cannot help agreeing with M. Walberg that many of the passages which he quotes in his table of sources as being textual borrowings from one or another of the Latin biographers are shown to be so by a careful comparison of the two relevant passages in any one instance. Here is not the place to illustrate this point, especially since M. Walberg has taken the trouble to do so at length himself in an article.²⁹ Here M. Walberg shows, to my satisfaction in almost every case, the validity of his theory. I would accept Miss Wilson's theory in respect of William FitzStephen, where even the apparently close resemblance cited by Ian Short and which we considered earlier in this chapter could be explained by oral transmission, especially in view of the nature of the incident concerned (Becket is predicting his own martyrdom to his monks at Canterbury) and where we find no counter-balancing evidence of undoubted textual borrowings.

But such is not the case in respect of Guernes' other written sources discussed earlier in this chapter, and I concur with M. Walberg's statements, which are reinforced now by the additional evidence of the fragments of the first draft.

M. Walberg also answers fully and convincingly several other criticisms made by Miss Wilson as to the dating and the completion of the poem, so that I may refer to the two relevant articles for a discussion of the various arguments, but without comment, since to comment would be to reiterate much of M. Walberg's own reasoned defence, which he seems to have conducted with an element of acrimony, as well as much logic. Guernes obviously may owe much to the oral tradition at Canterbury, as we may discover in subsequent chapters, and he may indeed have had discussions with other writers at the scene of the murder, but M. Walberg has demonstrated satisfactorily that the poet also owes much to his written sources, and we may say that in very many instances the textual resemblances are indeed 'so striking as to exclude the possibility of any other hypothesis than that of direct borrowing.' As to certain other objections raised by Miss Wilson, it is unnecessary to consider them again as they are countered effectively, and with much evident pleasure, by M. Walberg in the article to which I have already referred. I think that it is fair to state, in conclusion, in answer to Miss Wilson's criticisms, that M. Walberg neither greatly underestimates the importance

of the oral tradition at Canterbury, nor forgets the importance of the first, lost version of the French poem. Nothing that has come to light in the last fifty years adds weight to Miss Wilson's arguments, whereas M. Walberg's views gain credence from the recent evidence of the fragments of the first draft. I accept that there is no incontrovertible evidence in the case of William FitzStephen to suggest that he was a written source for Guernes, and would therefore prefer to err on the side of caution in stating that he was not; for the other biographers discussed by M. Walberg, I consider their cases proven by his arguments; but like him, I shall try to allot both to the oral tradition at Canterbury and to the first version of the poem, of which I have appreciably more knowledge than was accessible to him, the consideration and importance which they may deserve.

CHAPTER THREE

THE INTENTION OF THE POET

There are many thousands of saints whose names are known; in the case of many of them, we know little more than their status, perhaps bishop, missionary or martyr, their place of death, feast day and the period at which they were alive. The lives of saints have long been a source for authors, and as such present us with considerable problems. Some accounts were written long after the life of the man or woman involved, so that the true story may be lost, distorted or embellished. When they were written relatively soon after the events which they depict took place, or were reported to have taken place, a writer may have approached his task in a credulous, unscrupulous or uncritical spirit; where material for a particular life, or part of a life, was missing, a writer might invent the necessary details for himself, or borrow them from the account of a life of another saint. In the first centuries of Christianity, writers on saints were concerned almost exclusively with the directly religious aspects of their subjects' lives, and very often the long details of miracles, constant tortures or physical deprivations far exceed the bounds of credibility. Indeed, the early stages of hagiographical literature are, in general, characterised by a lack of great authenticity and historical interest, and an excess of myth, legend, invention, imagination and romantic and edifying fiction. We must bear in mind that for many

centuries the most important purpose in the writing of the lives of the saints was to edify and gratify the reader or hearer. Of these, we may suppose that edification may have been paramount, but in that the author could usually rely upon a very sympathetic audience eager for his account, the two aspects are demonstrably closely linked, even if they are not entirely synonymous. Of much less importance for such audiences in the early centuries of Christianity were considerations of historical accuracy and veracity. The lives of the saints, written in this spirit, were popular enough to achieve an accepted and recognisable form in literature, in which the audience might be encouraged to honour the saint, to exalt his virtues, and live a life enriched and instructed by the saint's example. The popularity of the lives of the saints presented in this form is attested by the existence of accounts not only in the official language of the Church, Latin, but, from a very early time, in the vernacular also. The very number of the lives of the saints precludes the possibility of the establishment of a very rigid pattern or style to which all might conform, but we might expect to find a number of characteristics common to most of them.

Let us consider what made the lives of the saints such popular sources for author and audience alike. We have already seen and noted the exemplary, edifying nature of the material greatly influenced its choice. The popularity of pilgrimages, although the motives which prompted them may not always have been as pious as we are sometimes led to believe, reflects the extent to which saints, their

relics and the hope which they offered of miraculous cure figured in life and grew in importance in the first ten centuries of Christianity. The increasing attraction of a shrine or the scene of a martyrdom in this period meant that the numbers of those seeking cure, inspiration and edification were swollen by those who travelled on pilgrimage out of curiosity or in search of inspiration or escape.¹ The written accounts of the lives of the saints, often recited at the shrine or along the pilgrim path, are evidently part of the phenomenon and process of veneration and worship, of edification and entertainment which grew steadily as the early Christian eras advanced into what we now term loosely the middle ages. The saints represented for a considerable section of the people the favourite heroes and heroines, whose lives were beyond reproach, and who often died with exemplary stoicism for their beliefs. That the lives of the saints were interpreted, related and remembered in this way testifies to the desire for such material and the willingness to overlook, ignore and forget historical accuracy and sometimes the promptings of probability.

Let us now consider some of the evidence which is specifically French, for as we have seen, hagiographers have been at work since well before the evolution of French as a separate language delineated from Latin. One of the earliest extant texts in French, the Séquence de Sainte Eulalie, dating from the second half of the ninth century, had, as its title suggests, the life of a saint as its theme. In the second half of the tenth century La Vie de Saint Léger and in the eleventh century La Vie de Saint Alexis bear testimony to the

continuation of the lives of the saints as sources of inspiration for French writers. By the middle of the twelfth century, there was a proliferation of saints' lives written in French, as well as in Latin, and in this respect, our poet Guernes is very far from breaking new ground.

Whatever the differences and peculiarities of the Séquence de Sainte Eulalie, La Vie de Saint Léger and La Vie de Saint Alexis, we know that they were composed to be recited or sung near or in churches and shrines for the benefit of those who did not understand Latin. Gaston Paris, seeking clues to the identity of the author of the Vie de Saint Alexis, thought that the work might be attributable to a canon who was noted for having 'translated from their Latinity the lives of several saints, which he turned into the common tongue with some degree of eloquence, and made from them pleasant songs with a kind of tinkling rhythm'.² This confirms that a work such as this, written in verse, was designed to divert and entertain the audience through its form and therefore its attraction, as well as to edify and instruct by virtue of its content.

A further characteristic common to many of the lives of the saints, certainly of the three mentioned above, is that they were translations, frequently very faithful translations, of existing Latin works. As we have just seen, there was a desire on the part of the authors, or translators, to popularise accounts which would otherwise remain inaccessible to a large section of the populace. No doubt with the passage of time such authors also became conscious of the merits of such works in terms of prestige and reward. An element of competition, both artistic and pecuniary, must have

entered into consideration where a number of accounts of the life of one saint existed, as was very frequently the case. This would account, to some degree, for the extension of the accounts as the genre developed; initially a concentration upon the passion of a saint might be regarded as usual, but gradually the whole life of the saint might be encompassed.

This development introduced certain difficulties; the passion of any particular saint might be well known and widely attested, but even where this was so - and we have seen that this was by no means always the case - the details of his or her earlier life might be entirely lacking; in some cases this was undoubtedly overcome by that spirit of invention which we have already observed, which served to provide material which, if not complete fabrication on the part of the author, might have its basis in the most dubious and imaginative legend. The desire to augment, to expand, grew with the desire to provide instruction and entertainment, and authentic material might not be readily to hand to supply such a need. By the time we reach the twelfth century, the taste for martyrdom, if we may thus term the predilection of audience, may still have focussed interest on the moment of death, but it brought with it a concomitant requirement for further information, for background detail to enhance and to lend substance to the essential facts.

But growing in conjunction with the desire for greater information was a desire which in a sense ran counter to the imaginative spirit which might furbish details of doubtful authenticity, yet which was a product of the same spirit of enquiry - the desire for greater

accuracy, for veracity, for verification. David Farmer

describes this spirit in the following way:

"In the lives written in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, an effort was made to provide a vivid personal portrait of the saint rather than to show him as just a provider of supernatural power through miracles, visions and prophecies, as in earlier lives such as that of Columba by Adomnan. Although these elements could not be omitted, and miracles were demanded both by popular devotion and by the official procedure for canonization ... a number of writers presented the known historical facts of the saint's life and the way he acted as material for human portraiture as well as edification. Such lives are those of Margaret by Turgot, of Anselm by Eadmer, of Wolstan by William of Malmesbury, of Godric by Reginald of Durham, and of Hugh of Lincoln by Adam of Eynsham. The lives of Richard of Chichester and of Wulfric of Haselbury share similar characteristics. Those of Thomas Becket and Edmund of Canterbury, however, tend to present their subject as an example of a persecuted defender of the Church's rights rather than as an individual to be portrayed 'warts and all'. "³

If we were to accept this statement as true in its assertions concerning the lives of Thomas Becket, we could doubtless find many reasons why matters should be so - the fame of the dispute between Becket and his king, the way in which the archbishop himself saw his position, the spontaneity of popular feeling which his death provoked, the popular demand for a simplified and digestible version of what was

a complicated and involved history, the need to emphasise the validity and inviolability of Becket's interpretation and stance. It will be my main aim to establish what the intentions of Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence were in composing his poem, to establish in fact whether his work merits such a judgment as that given above, or perhaps some other, to discover how successful he has been in carrying out his avowed aims. We have established that there was already a firm and recognisable tradition of hagiography at the time at which Guernes was writing, but we must investigate the particular circumstances of his account of the life of Thomas Becket in order to discover to what extent this poem fits into the pattern and tradition of hagiography.

The attractions of the history and the dramatic climax of the struggle between Becket and Henry II have continued to strike men's minds, hearts and imaginations throughout the eight hundred years since the events took place; this fact has been reflected in some of the literature which has been inspired by these events, but however contemporary the themes of the dispute may appear, it is inevitable that some of the immediacy, the intensity of feeling have been lost; whether the sentiments be of shame, horror, indignation, despair, relief, justice or injustice, they may not burn as fiercely in later centuries as was the case in the late twelfth century. In this sense, we would be wise to make a distinction between writers who lived during the period of the dispute, its conclusion and its aftermath, and who subsequently treated it in their works, and those who may look back from some considerable distance in time and discuss the material and the problems afresh.

Nevertheless, we may question whether the feelings described above, those which were most likely to be most keenly felt at the time of Becket's murder, were sufficient not only to move a man to write at length on the subject, as many no doubt felt tempted, and perhaps tried, but also to sustain him through many hours of work, and possibly much research; indeed we may suspect that other motives led him to complete his efforts. It is possible that behind a largely biographical approach lies some other motive; this may be purely devotional or coldly factual in dealing with the case of one who has been popularly, if not yet officially by the Church, canonized; or there may be further ramifications, as the writer may obviously desire to take account of wider issues, and dwell extensively on how the subject of his biography has furthered the cause of the religious bodies, or affected the body politic. His account may take in one or more of these elements, to which he may choose to lend varying degrees of emphasis. We must now attempt to consider Guernes' Vie de Saint Thomas Becket in the light of these observations, in order to attempt to discover which of these or other possible motives led the poet to undertake his work, a decision which involved a positive, considerable and lasting change in his life.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Guernes does tell us something of the composition of his poem in the introductory passage which prefaces the main body of the work, and he adds a little to this as he brings it to a conclusion. Before we begin to examine the main body of the poem, we should look at these two passages to discover what they may tell us of the poet's motives. In the opening lines

of the poem, Guernes tells us that he is concerned with the problem of imparting to us that which is best, and avoiding that which is of lesser value. His concern, he gives us to understand, will be to bien dire. What does the poet mean by this expression? Let us look at the passage:

Tuit li fysicien ne sunt adès bon mire;
 Tuit clerc ne sevent pas bien chanter ne bien lire;
 Asquanz des troveurs faillent tost a bien dire;
 Tel choisist le nualz ki le mielz quide eslire,
 E tel quide estre mielre des autres, est li pire.
 Si nuls voelt contruver u traitier u escrire,
 De bien dire se peint, que nuls n'en puisse rire
 U par aucune rien souveraine descumfire;
 Mette le sen avant, e li mels seit a dire:
 Del bien amende l'um e nuls huem n'en empire.

(Lines 1-10)

This opening injunction to the aspiring writer to avoid ridicule might suggest to us that Guernes is eager for the work to be above all accurate and veracious. This is by no means a misleading impression, and although, as we shall shortly see, it draws further qualification from its author, we may accept the concern which Guernes shows here. But before we pursue Guernes' line of thought here, we must pause to consider the source of these opening lines. We see in the previous chapter that Guernes relied for much of the basic material for his poem on the works of certain other authors who had already completed their versions of the saint's life before Guernes

completed his own endeavours. If we compare Guernes' version with the opening passage of the account of Edward Grim, we shall not fail to notice an initial striking resemblance:

"Professores artium saeculi proprios singuli conatus habent, quibus ad altiora concendant, et quid emolumenti ferat perfectio disciplinae, quam professi sunt, infatigabili perpendentes intuitu, dum ex finis proventu conatus sui leniunt in-clementiam, quasi quodam animati compendio viae robustius ad proposita consurgunt."

(Edward Grim, prologus, p.353)

If we can see the similarities between this passage and the opening lines of Guernes' poem, then we should also be aware that there are differences, and in this we should perhaps note an important and significant strand in Guernes' approach. This passage, in fact, constitutes the first of many instances where Guernes has taken his lead from the Latin biography. But we must be aware that in many cases Guernes is doing that and no more; admittedly, Guernes frequently borrows many incidents from Grim's account, and also follows to a considerable extent the chronological order of Grim in the presentation of events; admittedly, he also puts the biography of William of Canterbury to similar use, although on fewer occasions, and has recourse to the account of Benedict of Canterbury; we shall see that on many occasions we may surmise that Guernes uses the oral sources which must have been at his disposal in and around Canterbury at the time he went and worked there. In this respect, it is possible to agree with M. E. Étienne when he speaks of the work of Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence as 'une compilation.'⁴ M. Étienne is quick

to point out that this is in no sense a derogation of the poet's work, for he is a skilful and accomplished poet, not given merely to simple or servile imitation and translation of the works of other biographers:

"Il contrôle leurs récits, les complète au moyen des diverses relations qui paraissent chaque jour, ou même par des renseignements empruntés à des témoins oculaires. C'est ainsi qu'il a fait d'une compilation une oeuvre originale infiniment supérieure aux biographies qu'il a suivies."⁵

Guernes' poem is indeed more than a compilation; but whilst agreeing with M. Étienne's statement that this is due to the poet's method, perhaps we may feel that it is able to earn our respect and attention for further reasons, and we shall lose sight of these if we forget that the poet had set himself a task far greater and more difficult than simple translation or imitation. Had such a sterile and limited aim been the limit of Guernes' ambitions, we should have observed far greater correspondence between the two opening passages which we have already considered. Nor would he have shown the concern, which we noted in the previous chapter, to collate his material from so many different sources; nor indeed would he have been concerned to revise his first draft, even if he had, as would have been unlikely, found it inadequate.

Let us return to what Guernes himself has to say, as he pursues the theme of his opening lines. We have already noted his concern bien dire, and the suggestion that this implies a desire for accuracy and veracity. But he also implies that a work, and by implication his own, should have some morally constructive force. He continues:

Pur ceo l'ai comencie' ke jeo voldrai descrire,
 Se Jesu Crist le sueffre, ki de nus tuz est sire,
 La vie saint Thomas, celui de Cantorbire,
 Ki pur sa mere iglise fu ocis par matyre.
 Or est halz sainz el ciel, nul nel pot contredire.

(Lines 11-15)

The poet has, in these few lines, led us to believe that his work will be morally edifying, that he feels the need to include this element in his poem. The lines which follow serve to emphasise this point:

De mult divers curages e de diverse vie
 Sunt en cest siecle gent, n'est nul hom kil desdie.
 Plusurs unt povrete', li alquant menantie;
 Alquant aiment le sen e plusur la folie;
 Li alquant aiment Deu, Sathan les plusurs guie.
 Seignurs, pur amur Deu e pur salvatiun,
 Leissiez la vanite', entendez al sermun.
 N'i ad celui de vus ki n'entende raisun.
 Leissiez del tut ester le conseil al felun:
 Malveis est li guaainz ki turne a dampneisun.

(Lines 16-25)

The theme of the poor of the world, one which we shall observe to be close to Guernes' heart, and one to which he will return with some frequency, leads the poet skilfully into a discussion which embraces the struggle between the Church and the State, the dispute

which gave rise to the bitter and long disagreement between Becket and King Henry II:

E Deu e seinte iglise e les clers honurez;
 Les povres herbergiez e peissiez e vestez,
 E voz dismes del tut dreituralment dunez;
 Des pechiez criminals, de trestuz, vus gardeez:
 Veirement le vus di que Dammedeu avrez.

(Lines 26-30)

Guernes enters into a discussion of the struggle between the two men with a directness and forthrightness in which some of the piety which we found in Lines 11-15 tends to be overlooked; he does not scruple to enter into the field of politics and the affairs of the Church, and, a clerk himself, does not surprise us in the defence of their cause. He has linked, with a simple dexterity, the salvation of the individual soul, which requires quite naturally the unquestioning worship and service of God, with the necessity to honour and protect the Church from those who are by profession or vocation actively involved in and committed to its affairs. The stress no longer lies so heavily on pious appeals, but gradually shifts to an almost political exposition of the plight of the servants of the Church and the justice of their cause:

Mult par fu seint'iglise de primes defulee
 E del conseil le rei a grant tort demenee.
 Deus en seit merciez, ki or l'a reguardee!
 Par cestui resera trestute relevee
 Ki en suffri de mort, de sun gré, la colee.

Faire soleit li reis as clers e force e tort.
 S'a forfait fussent pris, ja n'i eüst resort
 K'il nes feüst jugier as lais a lur acort.
 Cist Thomas les maintint; n'orent altre confort.
 Pur els se combati tant k'en suffri la mort.

(Lines 31-40)

To this point, Guernes has, arguably, been informing his audience of the essential details of the struggle, of the part played above all by Becket; but we sense that he is straying wilfully on to the grounds of the dispute, and having once set his foot there, he is in no hurry to return to ground on which he opened his poem:

Se li clerke mesfunt rien, laissez lei Deu vengier.
 Il sunt vostre prelat; nes avez a jugier.
 E tant reçoent il oriblement pechchier
 Ke les ordres perdrunt; nes poëz plus charger.
 S'a mesfait sunt puis pris, purrez les justisier.
 C'otreia saint Thomas, senz decret e senz lei,
 Pur le rei refrener d'iré e de desreie.
 Mes nul des sainz nel volt, ne jeo pas ne l'otrei:
 Cument eveskes puise a clerke tolir ne vei
 Le sacrement k'il ad del celestien rei.

(Lines 41-50)

(Line 14)

Guernes has already told us that Becket died pur sa mere iglise; now he enlarges on this, prefacing his remarks with the bald statement that the king is wholly in the wrong. Becket died for the Church, but Guernes, after his observations on the quasi-political struggle

which had existed between the two men, now has to make sure that we also see that Becket was indeed a pious man of God, and he again links the themes of saintliness and the salvation of the soul with the defence of the clergy, lest the argument seem to revolve around the latter to the eclipse or the exclusion of the former:

Mult poëz bien veer mal conseil ot li reis.
 Il ne deit fere a clerc n'a iglise defeis
 Ne tolir rien del lur, mes mettre i pot acreis.
 De l'iglise prent il la corone e les leis.
 Mes Deus l'ament, ki est uns en persones treis!
 Bien est aparissant saint Thomas aveit dreit,
 Ki pur les clers surpris einsi se combateit.
 Pur amour Deu le fist, si cum feire deveit.
 Deu li ad bien rendu, ki nullui ne deceit;
 Desdire nel pot muls, car tut li munz le veit.

(Lines 56-65)

So far we have had, apart from references to Christ, only one biblical allusion or comparison, to la preiere Helie; ^(Line 61) otherwise Guernes has adhered strictly to the case of Thomas Becket, albeit from a variety of angles; he now goes on to emphasise Becket's saintliness by adducing the help which people come to seek from him, and, briefly, some of the miracles which he has performed - the healing of lepers, the curing of the blind, the deaf and the dumb, and even the raising of the dead. But Guernes does not dwell on these miracles. We may be surprised at this, for this would surely be a most opportune and apposite moment to do so. Perhaps this is an early warning of a trait which Guernes displays again before his poem

is greatly advanced - a wariness in the reporting of miracles. He limits himself to a brief report of them, in fact, as if he were suspicious of their truthfulness. Perhaps he is indeed more concerned, as is Edward Grim at the corresponding point in his account, to tell his audience of the life of the archbishop and his struggles and successes in this world rather than what he may have achieved once he has departed it.

Thus it is that Guernes returns to the theme of the poor and unfortunate and low-born of the world, a theme which we may suspect is associated less in his mind with Thomas Becket - for he goes on to tell us that Becket came of a good family - than with the oppressed state of the clergy. But, just as he worked from the pious towards the legal or the political, so, by means of the biblical examples of Saul and David, and of the humble disciples who left their nets to follow Jesus, he returns to the theme of humility, and gives the impression that in undertaking his account of the glorious martyr's life, his main, if not his only, concern is to exhort us to lead better, more humble and more righteous lives. This is not to imply that Guernes is attempting to deceive us, or to blind us to a true purpose which he does not wish as yet to reveal, but nevertheless we should note that he has placed some stress on the cause of the poor. This is quite laudable and justifiable, especially as Becket did on many occasions during his lifetime offer help and relief to them, and linked their humble status with a concomitant humility of heart; moreover, we should note, in the following passage, how this implied humility is closely associated

not only with the Church, but also with the clergy, and Guernes mentions those who love the Church, the clergy and the poor of this world in the same breath as being beloved of God:

Fols est ki en pechié volt lungement gesir:
 Mes a Deu crit merci, ne s'i lest endormir!
 Bien pot l'um par pechié sa vie davancier;
 E meint est si surpris ne pot la buche ovrir
 N'a pruveire parler, quant il vient al morir.
 Les umles aime Deus, les povres ensement,
 Car de lur travail vivent, tutdis sunt en turment;
 E aiment seint'iglise e clers e povre gent,
 E dreites dismes donent e vivent nettement:
 Itels eshalcerø Deus parmanablement.
 E Pieres e Andreus furent frere frarur;
 A batel e a reiz esteient pescheür,
 Quant Deus les apela de cel povre labur;
 Puis furent mis en croiz e mort pur sue amur:
 Apostre sunt el ciel e gloriüs seignur.
 Pur ceo vus començai a traier cest sermon
 Del martyr saint Thomas, cel gloriüs baron
 Ki tuit li munz requiert a la seinte maison
 De Seinte Ternité, u suffri passion,
 Par ceo que il maintint verité e raison.

(Lines 101-120)

In this respect Guernes does differ considerably from his primary source Edward Grim; as we have noted, Guernes obviously wishes to lay more stress on the poor and their virtuous humility, and is more concerned than the Latin biographer with material difficulties and social discrepancies. Grim, on the other hand, concentrates more on the theme of moral and spiritual improvement, and the piety which the blessed example of Thomas Becket can offer as a light in our darkness:

"Auctor igitur humanæ salutis, dum, multorum refrigescente caritate et abundante malitia, quasi minus curasse creditur temporalia, sicut semel assumptæ humanitatis exhibitione visitavit et fecit redemptione plebis suae, sic per suos invisibilis operatione majestatis quos redemit ad meliora incessanter invitat. Ac ne tanti muneris exors videatur hic noster dies, novus in medium procedat Christi miles et martyr egregius, beatus Thomas sanctitatis spectaculum, justitiæ norma, incentivum patientiæ, virtutis exemplar, assertor invictissimus veritatis. Sed quid mihi, inquis, cum martyrio? Quid cum miraculis, quæ non humanæ viribus efficaciam tribuenda sunt, sed Deo? Bene: nec nos tibi martyrium, nec miracula proponimus imitanda; sed vitam considera martyrio plenam, contemplare mores, mirare hominem, inter omnes mundi divitias, et quicquid pretiosum aestimatio habet humana, tantam animi tenuisse constantiam, ut nec prospera illum ad amorem mundi mollescerent, nec adversa quævis ab amore Conditoris, ut primum sensibus ejus cognitio

sese veritatis infudit, aliquantenus retardarent."

(Edward Grim, prologus, p.354-355)

Grim does go on to enumerate the trials and tribulations which the archbishop underwent, and creates a picture of the sufferings and intransigent virtue of a pious and a noble figure, but without the undertones to be found in the early part of Guernes' poem of the wider issues, or the explanatory references to those on whose behalf the archbishop was fighting. Grim does state that he intends to treat the whole life, that it is his intention to contemplare mores and mirare hominem, and we certainly cannot accuse him of concentrating his or our attention on the martyrdom; his introduction at this juncture suggests an author who is more deeply immersed in an awe and admiration of the martyr than is the French poet; at this stage, it is Guernes, with a greater regard for what we might term the wider issues of the case, who seems the more likely to carry out Grim's own stated intentions. Grim begins at the opening of his work to build up an account which shows the audience the sanctity and piety of Thomas Becket.

Let us pause for a moment from our consideration of the accounts of Guernes and Grim, and look at the prologue of William of Canterbury, in which we find many points of comparison and similarity between Jesus Christ and Saint Thomas, notably between their respective passions:

"Causa principalis Dominus est, et martyr qui Domino similis est in passione. Nam sicut Dominus imminente passione sua loco passionis appropinquavit, ita Thomas sciens futurorum ad locum quo pateretur accessit. Sicut Jesum, ita Thomas quaerebant

apprehendere, sed nemo misit in eum manum, quia nondum
 venerat hora ejus. Dominus triumphavit ante passionem
 suam: Thomas ante suam. Dominus passus est post coenam;
 Thomas passus est et post coenam."

(William of Canterbury, prologus pp1-2)

Although Guernes himself is not averse to the use of comparisons, he does not, as does William here, draw out similarities such as these, designed to establish in the reader's mind the archbishop's sanctity. In neither of the two Latin biographers therefore, whose work, as we have seen, played a prominent part in the composition of Guernes' poem, do we find the concern with the vexed issue of the privilege of the clergy, with the part played by poverty and humility in the working out of God's plan, or the rewards which they may bring. The Latin accounts also lack the intensity of feeling to which Guernes gives spontaneous expression in his poem, and they lack, in their early stages at least, the bitter conviction that Becket was right in terms of ecclesiastical policy as well as the confirmation that he was a glorious martyr and a worthy saint. Guernes does not stress as forcefully as does William of Canterbury this latter aspect of the archbishop's life and death, but, having affirmed it more succinctly in his own terms, he remains eager to reinforce the strength of Becket's position by his conviction that the course which the archbishop followed was entirely justified:

Ohi, mal eüre! Pur quei l'avez ocis,
 Cel seintisme arceveske? N'i avez rien conquis.
 Il n'aveit rien mesfet; trop i avez mespris.
 Car vus repentez tost; volez en estre pris?

A amender avez, se viviez tuzdis.
 Pur le pudlent de cors l'anme perdre volez,
 Ainz que mot en saciez, qui ert mort e alez.
 La glorie d'icest mund n'est pas fiu n'eritez;
 U vus voliez u nun, tute la guerpirez.
 Vers Deu ne vus guarra chastel ne fermetez.
 Li pius Deus e li veir ot saint Thomas mult chier.
 Ocis fu en bel liu e en un saint mustier,
 Si l'ocistrent baron e vassal chevalier.
 La perdirent lur pris. N'i poent repairier?
 Bien se poent vers Deu, s'il volent, amaisier.

(Lines 121-135)

We may be surprised to discover the poet offering the possibility of reconciliation to God to the assassins of cel seintisme arceveske, when he seems scarcely to have embarked upon his poem, scarcely to have established the figure of Becket deeply in the minds of his audience. Whilst there can be little doubt of the opprobrium in which the assassins are held by the poet, Guernes does in fact reveal here that the four knights will not simply be treated and dismissed as black agents of a heinous crime; they are condemned, both here and later in the poem, but not without thought.

Although we have not quite reached that point at which Guernes begins his account of the life of Thomas Becket, this is perhaps a suitable juncture at which to consider the evidence which the poet has laid before us to this point. He began by stating his intention to bien dire; from there he quickly passed on to say

that his work would, he hoped, have a morally constructive force, because Thomas Becket died for the Church and became a saint. We should, we are advised, leave vanité and all bad counsel, and listen to the sermun. We should not, perhaps, attempt to read too much moral force into the word sermun here, for we could never finally establish the force which the poet might have wished to give it in this instance: we are, however, to be edified by what we hear; almost in the same breath, the poet exhorts us to honour God, the Church and the clergy, and to care for the poor in all their needs; we need to be thus encouraged, apparently because King Henry, receiving bad advice rather than good, did great damage to the Church and to the clergy, so much so that Thomas Becket, and he alone, was forced to struggle and eventually die for their cause. With this, the poet launches into a defence of Becket's interpretation and stance, repeating the affirmation that Becket died for the clers; after mentioning, relatively briefly, the help afforded by Becket to all manner of men after his death, and the miracles proclaimed in his name; the poet returns to the theme of the renunciation of sin, to the theme of God's forgiveness of repentant sinners, and finally, stating that God loves the humble, and exalted simple men such as Peter and Andrew, and loves equally his own holy Church and those who serve it, draws his audience's attention to the fact that this account will deal with just such another as the apostre ... en ciel e gloriu seignur.

(Line 115)

From this reappraisal of the opening hundred and twenty or so lines of Guernes' poem, we can see that he does not express one single dominant reason, or give emphasis to one particular aspect of Thomas Becket's life which has led him, before any other, to write his life. Rather, he moves quickly from one good reason to another. We should not be surprised at this; indeed, the rapid transfer from one good reason to another, with no very strong logical link between them, may accurately reflect the poet's state of mind as he began his work; he could find many excellent reasons for undertaking his work, and would feel no great need or desire carefully to delineate one from another, nor to emphasise one to the exclusion or detriment of others. We may suspect that neither Guernes nor his audience would perceive as we, a modern audience, perceive the shifts in emphasis and focus, as the poet seems to switch or modify his stated reasons for writing. Yet from these early lines we can learn a good deal of the poet's state of mind, and of his intentions as he set about composing his work. Certainly the desire for moral edification is present, if less strongly than we saw to be the case with the Latin biographers Edward Grim and William of Canterbury. But the intention to edify is an element in Guernes' poem nonetheless, and the poet has told us as much; edification was a sine qua non of the composition of the life of a saint for Guernes as it has been for centuries of hagiographers before him. This was known to author and audience alike, both anticipating this element in the life; in this respect we might pertinently enquire how far Guernes was paying lip-service to the

tradition, were we not persuaded of the sincerity of his remarks in this opening section. Yet, if he were not sincere in his statement of intent in this respect - the tone of his lines on the theme of the moral example which Becket offers to us all suggests that his views are deep and firmly held - he would surely have imposed upon himself a most tedious and onerous task. That he believes in the moral value of his work cannot therefore be a matter for serious doubt.

Nor can we doubt the sincerity of the poet's expressions on the cause of the poor, the Church, and the clergy; his fervour, first made known in these opening lines of the poem, is to find expression on numerous occasions later in the work. That Becket was a champion of all three may have formed an irresistible attraction; the edification offered by the example of Becket's life may well have persuaded Guernes to write his poem in any case; the evidence which his support for the Church and the poor offered to a member of the clergy would have proved conclusive had he required further persuasion. This ranked higher in Guernes' appraisal than the claims of miracles, to which he devotes relatively little, surprisingly little time. Certainly he devotes less time to the consideration of miracles than do his two major written sources. Guernes was clearly not concerned to achieve a compilation; evidently he was heavily dependent on written sources, but the opportunity was there for him to rely exclusively upon them, and he rejected it.

There is a very important aspect of the composition of Guernes' poem which we have not yet considered. Having discussed issues which

were not immediately apparent when the poet first introduced his theme, he returns to the precise subject of his poem in the following way:

Si volez esculter la vie al saint martyr,
 Ci la purrez par mei plenierement oïr;
 N'i voil rien trespasser, ne rien n'i voil mentir.
 Quatre anz i ai pres mis al feire al furnir;
 D'oster e de remettre poi la peine souffrir.

(Lines 141-145)

We saw in the previous chapter that it was quite natural for a writer to assert the pre-eminence of his own work, claiming that his account was authoritative, the truth where others failed to supply it. Claims that the author will not deviate an inch from the truth are not uncommon, and Guernes was certainly not alone among the biographers of Thomas Becket to make such an assertion. Guernes indeed tells us:

Tut cil autre romanz ke unt fait del martyr
 Clerc u lai, muine u dame, mult les oï mentir,
 Ne le veir ne le plain nes i oï furnir.
 Mes ci purrez le veir e tut le plain oïr;
 N'istrai de verité pur perdre u pur murir.

(Lines 161-165)

This claim can be seen in better perspective when compared with Edward Grim's account:

"Pie igitur perere cupientes quorundam devotioni, qui gesta martyris pretiosi plenius nosse solliciti sunt, quae ad nostram pervenere notitiam, illorum scilicet relatu, qui viventi familiaris adhaeserunt, vel nos ipsi perspeximus, ipsius de quo loquimur patrocinantibus meritis stilo perstringere satagemus, praemonentes lectorem, minime consonare veritati quicquid hinc alii vel scripserunt vel scripturi sunt, quod huic narrationi nostrae probetur esse contrarium... Nostrae igitur devotioni lineas rectitudinis nusquam in scribendo excedere, per beati patris nostri merita gloriosa, Spiritus veritatis inspiret, ut pura ac fide plena prosequatur oratio quod pia aggredimur intentione."

(Edward Grim, prologus p.355-356)

This passage may modify our initial or uninformed appraisal of Guernes' claim. Indeed, we might be tempted to dismiss it as a mere literary device, which would in any event be less than it deserved, were it not for an impressive piece of information which the poet now imparts to his audience:

Primes traitai d'oe, e suvent i menti.
 A Cantorbire alai, la verité oi,
 Des amis saint Thomas la verité cuilli,
 E de ces ki l'aveient des enfance servi.
 D'oster e de remettre le travail ensuffri.

(Lines 146-150)

There seems to be more than convention in these lines;

Guernes himself obviously felt that he could not do justice to the facts whilst he stayed away from Canterbury, where he might find many who had known the archbishop, where he might expect already to find a strong oral tradition in the locality. Once he arrived there, he must have realized that much more revision was necessary than he had envisaged to his first draft, and he tells us more than once of the care and trouble which went into this revision, and of the time which it took. He no doubt felt that he had achieved something much closer to the truth, and besides the other intentions which he had in composing the poem, it seems clear that he had no little desire for historical accuracy in his work, and that he felt that the work as originally cast, presumably in France, at a good distance from the scene of many of the important events which he would wish to include, did not deal accurately enough with many of the incidents.⁶

Moreover, as we saw in the previous chapter, a further complication meant that Guernes was involved in more than a mere revision of an inaccurate first draft. He is fortunate enough to be able to stress the truthfulness of his present work, by virtue of the paradox that, as he claims, the first revised draft of which he has been speaking, and on which he had expended so much effort, was stolen from him by scribes. He was therefore, as we saw in the previous chapter, obliged to begin a second version, over which he took equal care, editing and amending it where he judged it necessary, either to create a better balance in the work, or perhaps in the light of subsequent revelations concerning the archbishop's life,

to correct a false impression. Having once told his audience that his first, partially revised version had cost him much time and effort, the poet now stresses that by comparison with the second, extant version which he is now reciting, the first was inaccurate and unpolished:

Mes cel premier romenz m'unt escrivein emblé,
 Anceis que je l'ouisse parfet e amendé
 E l'amer e le dulz adulci e tempré;
 E la u j'oi trop mis, ne l'oi uncore osté,
 Ne le plus ne le mains n'erés ne ajusté.
 Par lius est mençungiers e sens pleneireté;
 E nepurquant i a le plus de verité.
 E maint riche umme l'unt cunquis e achaté;
 Mes cil en deivent estre, ki l'emblèrent, blasmé.
 Mes cestui ai del tut amendé e finé.

(Lines 151-160)

Guernes is thus able to have the best of both worlds, asserting the authority and accuracy of the new version, as against the first draft, whilst defending the first draft despite its admitted shortcomings. He might indeed be wary of invalidating a work which he had previously sold to maint riche umme,^(Line 158) Nor would he wish to admit himself to be capable of producing a work of very inferior or mediocre quality. The primacy of the second version is clearly established, however, in the poet's and the audience's mind; his great concern here is to convince his present audience, reader or

listener, of the superiority of the more recent attempt; no doubt one of his motives here was commercial, and we shall shortly be returning to consider this point.

It might once again be tempting to dismiss Guernes' claims here without studying their validity too closely, but we should be at fault if we did not consider certain particular aspects of the poet's case. Firstly, we do know that he did travel to Canterbury, presumably from the continent, in order to gather material for his work. This in itself suggests a desire for historical accuracy which runs counter to the belief or the suspicion that the poet is doing no more than repeating an empty and conventional formula.

This in itself might be enough to make us think that there was some justification in the poet's claim, and in the statement that by comparison with the second draft the earlier, stolen version was inaccurate and incorrect in places; this impression has, however, been greatly strengthened by the recent discovery of extracts from the first version of the poem, presumed lost for ever for so long. The two fragments of this first draft which survive, to which reference was made in the previous chapter and will be made again in subsequent chapters, tell us much about the poet's intentions, for all their brevity and despite the fact that they contain no direct or even indirect reference to the poet's aims. Both extracts, whilst resembling the final version closely enough for the passages in it which correspond approximately to the fragments

to be readily identified, contain many differences, in the form of words and rhymes, in the nature of their content, in the attitude of the poet to characters portrayed in them and the manner in which he presents them to his public. Indeed, when we consider the first fragment from the first draft, we shall find that only nine of its thirty-nine lines are common to both versions of the poem; the second extract shows rather more similarities, but there are still about a dozen of the forty-one lines which bear no resemblance to the final version. Quite apart from any consideration as to why Guernes might have decided to alter his text, we should consider the fact that he should do so at all; it could not simply be the case that he was unable to recall or reproduce the material which he had used in his first poem, for the tenor of the material is, as we shall see, very appreciably changed and he has modified in a notable way his view of characters and events. We must therefore deduce that he felt his second version was a distinct improvement upon the first, and that the modifications which he made were necessary. This suggests a care and a concern for historical accuracy which might otherwise have remained unknown to us had not these fragments been discovered, despite all the poet's earnest protestations that his account was the only one to guarantee truth and fullness in its treatment of the material. This most fortunate discovery enables us to affirm what Guernes' own statements had encouraged us to believe, that, in addition to his professed intention of offering his audience, in the shape of his poem, a chance to see how we can

come to a moral and spiritual improvement through the example of Thomas Becket, and in addition also to the unexpressed, but scarcely suppressed desire to discuss more varied religious and political matters, and to persuade us to his point of view and interpretation, there will be in his work an attention to, and an aspiration towards, historical accuracy, achieved at some personal cost in terms of effort, time and inconvenience, and we may see this as the third of his major intentions as he begins to compose his poem.

It is this third aspect which the poet chooses to emphasize at its conclusion, and the fact that he may feel that he has given us sufficient convincing evidence to accept the validity of his other proclaimed intentions and his efficiency in carrying these different intentions in the main body of his poem, for this remains now to be investigated. Bringing his account to an end, the poet tells us:

Guernes li Clers del Punt fine ici sun sermun
 Del martir saint Thomas e de sa passiun.
 E mainte feiz le list a la tumber al barun.
 Ci n'a mis un sul mot se la verité nun.
 De ses mesfaiz li face li plus Deus veir pardun!
 Ainc mais si bons romanz ne fu faiz ne trovez.
 A Cantorbire fu e faiz e amendez;
 N'i ad mis un sul mot qui ne seit veritez.
 Li vers est d'une rime en cinc clauses cuplez.

Mis languages est bons, car en France fui nez.

L'an secund que li sainz fu en s'iglise ocis,

Comenchai cest romanz, e mult m'en entremis.

Des privez saint Thomas la verité apris:

Mainte feiz en ostai ço que jo ainz escriis,

Pur oster la mençoŋge. Al quart an fin i mis.

E ço sacent tuit cil qui ceste vie orrunt

Que pure verité par tut corumpurrunt.

E ço sacent tuit cil qui del saint traitié unt,

U romanz u latin, e cest chemin ne vunt:

U el dient que jo, contre verité sunt.

(Lines 6156-6175)

We must acknowledge that the poet has motives other than purely historical ones for making his claim, and acknowledge that this passage owes not a little to that which we have already considered from the prologue of Edward Grim; we must allow that Guernes can justifiably claim that he has made strenuous efforts to improve the accuracy of his work; we must believe him when he tells us that the quality of his work is a result of his meticulous revision, his careful editing, a product of a spirit which has shown a keen desire for the facts of the case. The evidence of the remaining fragments of the first draft of the poem demonstrate this clearly. In compiling both versions of his poem Guernes had access to some at least of the same written sources, notably his principal written source, Edward Grim; equally in both versions we find different pieces of information -

far more in the complete version of the poem, evidently - which have no apparent written source, and may therefore be attributable to oral sources. Thus it cannot safely be said that Guernes did simply reject his first version on arrival in Canterbury in order to follow slavishly a new and better written source, unless we suppose that all trace of such a source has been utterly lost. This is far from probable, and we should rather believe Guernes' own statements in this matter, despite the fact that they do owe their tone, if not in this instance the whole of their content, to a literary convention.

Before we pass on to study the main part of the text, to investigate how Guernes treats the material which he has at his disposal, and evaluate how this treatment corresponds to what we have been told or have discovered in the poet's opening remarks, it is necessary to consider the public for which Guernes intended his work. Doubtless he would have wished the poem to survive in the form and in the way in which it has, but it was nevertheless also intended to be something more than a lasting testimony, a permanent record, a timeless lesson. It was written in French, which must suggest to us that the poet intended it for a somewhat wider reception than it would have received had it been written in Latin, which was an option evidently available to Guernes. He was responding to what was no doubt a very popular demand for information about the life and death of the martyr, and was aware that by writing in the vernacular he could attract

the attention of very many people who would flock to hear the story of the archbishop told in such accounts - Guernes himself tells us that there were a number of these, although his alone, in its full and now in its earlier, fragmentary versions, has survived to us of those written in the years immediately after the death of the archbishop. They would listen to such vernacular accounts because they could not with ease, or even with effort, read or understand the Latin biographies. Thus we may regard part of the poet's role in this instance as a popularizer of the archbishop's history. This should be borne in mind when we come to consider Guernes' treatment of some of the material, and may have a direct bearing on some of his statements - his reflections on the fate, virtues and expectations of the poor and the oppressed might be a ready example. We must not imply that he wrote his poem to please and entertain one section of the public only, and he himself tells us that meint riche unme l'unt cunquis e achate,^(Line 158) but the tone of his opening remarks suggests that his own sympathies lie genuinely with the poor, and consciously or unconsciously, this may affect the poet's interpretation and presentation of events. We may deduce that his poem had a spontaneous and lively popular appeal and success among those pilgrims who came to the archbishop's tomb in the cathedral at Canterbury and stayed to hear his account, for he tells us as he brings it to a conclusion e mainte feiz le list a la tumbe al barun.^(Line 6158)

There can be little doubt that the fact that the pilgrims were listening to a poem would also add greatly to the popular appeal of the work, for an audience would hear this more readily, with its natural divisions and regular pattern, than a prose account which, to a listener, would seem to lack the form, regularity, vivacity and dramatic presentation which would be assets which the poet, if he were skilful enough, would be able to use to advantage and striking effect in his composition. Thus the need to sustain and heighten the interest of his audience would never be too far from the poet's mind; it may prove to have some influence upon the ordering, presentation and balance of the material in his poem, indeed it may influence the selection or rejection of the material itself. There can be little doubt that popular appeal was much in the mind of the poet; popular appeal is in the mind of the majority of writers, whatever the writer's subject, whenever he writes, but we can fairly say that Guernes seems to have been more conscious of this than some of the Latin biographers writing on the same subject. Although we should scarcely expect Guernes openly to state that popularity was to be sought in his work, in the way in which edification, for example, has been sought, we can judge by the tenor of his remarks and by his scarcely concealed pleasure at the rapid success won by his poem, that the issue was a conscious one for him. It is one which potentially runs counter to certain of his overt and stated intentions, notably to historical accuracy and completeness, and, to a lesser extent, to moral edification.

It is fair to reflect that his poem was often heard or read in part, in episodic or extracted form, but the same aims as influence the work as a whole still apply to each section, and once the poet has ceased to interest and attract his audience, he runs the risk of being unable to instruct them either factually, morally or politically, for the simple expediences of closing one's eyes or one's ears and walking away were always open to his audience.

We should not overlook the possibility that our poet may be a skilful poet, capable of manipulating his material in such a way as to preserve all his cherished aims and intentions, capable of avoiding the gross sacrifice of one goal to the demands of another. We have quoted, from Guernes' introductory section, one passage, Lines 116-135, which exemplifies how the poet uses his material to attract the interest and attention of his audience; having told us why he is undertaking his poem, and having most recently emphasised the theme of the poor, and then the triumph of Thomas Becket, the defender of truth and reason, the poet launches into a passionate and bitterly rhetorical outburst against the murderers, handing them a vivid and a striking warning, which would not fail to make a deep, lasting and dramatic impression upon his audience: he begins with a cry of impotent despair Oh, mal euré!
(Lines 121-122)
pur quei l'avez ocis, cel seintisme arceveske? N'i avez rien conquis: he goes on to make a dramatic impact with the bold and unequivocal claim Il n'aveit rien mesfet;
(Line 123) after which, still ostensibly addressing the murderers, which gives an exciting immediacy to his words, he tells them and us, and it is an understatement, trop i avez

(Line 123)
mespris. We can readily see the effectiveness of such an approach,
 and can note its popularising tendencies. One of our tasks
 will be to evaluate whether the poet ever allows such an approach
 to detract from his stated intentions to give us a moral example
 and to give us the truth. A statement such as il n'aveit rien
 (Line 123)
mesfet may be an exemplary model for us, a popularising
 simplification, or it may be the literal and historical truth
 as Guernes sees it. We should remember at all times that
 no-one who was not deeply and implicitly in sympathy with the
 cause of Thomas Becket would be likely to undertake a biography
 of the man. This simple statement, which apparently strikes at
 the heart of all objectivity, is an expression of a problem which
 afflicts many intending historians, past and present, to a greater
 or a lesser degree. This does not necessarily invalidate the
 writer's work, and it does not prevent our discovery of his vision
 or interpretation of the truth, or our investigation of how the
 author handled, edited and presented his material to achieve what
 he sought to achieve.

We have now considered what intentions, implicit or explicit,
 are to be found in the poet's own introduction, and having discussed
 some of the influences which may act upon his treatment of the
 material and some of the dangers which may await him and those who
 follow him, we shall now pass to the main part of the poem to find
 how the French clerk handles his material, whether his intentions
 are faithfully reflected and put into practice there; to see where,

if at all, his work fits into the general hagiographical tradition and into that of Thomas Becket in particular; to see, indeed, whether Guernes' work is one of those in which "an effort was made to provide a vivid personal portrait of the saint, rather than to show him as just a provider of supernatural power through miracles, visions and prophecies", or whether his is, as we have seen David Hugh Farmer already claim in this chapter biographies of Thomas Becket are, among those which "tend to present their subject as an example of a persecuted defender of the Church's rights rather than as an individual to be portrayed 'warts and all'".

CHAPTER FOUR

BECKET BEFORE HIS CONSECRATION

The period of Thomas Becket's life up to and including the time when he became Archbishop of Canterbury contains certain difficult problems for any medieval biographer. For those writing in the years immediately after Becket's murder, the temptation to dwell upon the sanctity and virtue of the man, and to neglect or ignore that which did not contribute to this picture of him, must have been very great. Moreover, the manner of Becket's death lent to his history that peculiar virtue of justification, or at least atonement, for all that had gone before, including those aspects of his life, character and behaviour which might not in themselves seem laudable. He became a saint in the minds of many people before his canonization in February 1173, and this official recognition of what was already popularly established was in itself relatively rapid. Within a matter of days, and throughout the following months, miracles began to be acclaimed, and as the imaginations of many people were aroused, legends, some of them quite divorced from any possibility of the truth, began to grow up;¹ the historical evidence was in danger of becoming merged with unsubstantiated stories. In such a climate, it might not be difficult to gloss over everything that did not seem to add to the saintly image of Becket which was being created. But the early biographers did not fall prey to this temptation, and Guernes, like certain of the others, does cover in some detail the early period of Becket's life up to his election to the see of Canterbury. We have seen that Edward Grim has told us:

"... nec nos tibi martyrium, nec miracula proponimus imitanda; sed vitam considera martyrio plenam, contemplare mores, mirare hominem, inter omnes mundi divitias ..." ²

Accordingly, he begins his account by telling us about Thomas' parents at the time of his birth, his mother's dreams and reported visions during her pregnancy, his early youth, his education, his adolescent adventures, his first positions of employment, and his elevation in the world until he becomes the king's chancellor and, ultimately, Archbishop of Canterbury. Guernes, in the section of his poem corresponding to this part of Grim's account, follows the course of his source closely, but as we shall see, not exclusively.

Guernes opens the main part of his poem by telling us, in very brief terms, who Thomas Becket's parents were, and a little of their social position:

Saint Thomas l'arceveske, dunt preecher m'oez,
 En Lundres la cité fu pur veir engendrez,
 Des barons de la cit estraiz e alevéz;
 E Gilebert Beket fu sis pere apelez,
 E sa mere, Mahalt; de nette gent fu nez.

(Lines 166-170)

Guernes has found this information at the beginning of Grim's account, but he conveys it much more briefly and succinctly than does the Latin author, and he omits certain observations which are in the latter's opening chapter:

"Electus igitur ante mundi constitutionem in Christo sanctus
 Thomas ortu suo felici Britanniarum caput Londonias illustravit.
 Pater ejus Gillebertus, cognomento Beket, mater vero Matildis
 fuit; ambo generis ac divitiarum splendore suis nequaquam
 concivibus inferiores, quibus e regione morum ingenuitate et

pie conversationis innocentia longe excellentius præminebant. Justitiæ siquidem actionibus insistentes, sine crimine et querela, ut traditur, conversati sunt, ut ex iis tanquam Zacharia et Elizabeth novum se lætetur Anglia suscepisse Johannem."

(Grim, ch.1, p. 356)

Already Grim is drawing parallels, evoking the similarities between the birth of Becket and that of John the Baptist, which in turn, though more remotely, recalls the births of Samson and of Samuel in the Old Testament. Grim wished to convince us of the piety and goodness of Becket's parents, and his words may remind us of the Gospel of Saint Luke; where Zacharia and Elisabeth are described as "both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."³ The comparison, aimed at elevating Becket's parents in the minds of the reader, is not reflected in Guernes' version, where they are simply referred to as barons de la cit^(Line 168) and nette gent^(Line 170).

Guernes does follow Grim when the latter records the reported visions of Becket's mother, which also have distant biblical parallels. Both accounts tell us of four such occurrences, (Grim speaks of visio and somnus, Guernes of sunge) three before the birth of the child, one during infancy, and there is little sensible difference in the interpretations which the authors give of them. Guernes seems rather sceptical concerning the first vision:

Quant la dame conqut primes l'enfant, sunga
 Ke l'eve de Tamise tut' en sun sain entra.
 Uns mestres li espunst a cui el le mastra:
 "Mult pueples, fist li il, cist eirs guvernera".
 Sulunc mei, vives eves en sun ventre porta.

(Lines 171-175)

But even this is a reflection of Grim's account, although Guernes omits to tell us, as the Latin version does, that there is a biblical reference; it is from Saint John's gospel, ch.7, v.38, and Grim quotes it for us. There is nothing very surprising or unnatural in the contents of these occurrences; they are quite acceptable as the dreams a woman might possibly have during a pregnancy, or whilst her child was still very young. It is rather their interpretation, professing to portend the eminence and sanctity which will come to the child in later life, which adds to them and lends them the status of visions. With the exception of the first dream, which Becket's mother is said to have had explained to her by a certain wise man, and to which the authors both add their own observations, as we have just seen, the interpretations seem to be those of the writers, with the benefit of hindsight; Grim indeed tells us that the woman herself could not understand the meaning of one, and of that of another she had only the vaguest of notions: Unde mulier magnifice confortata perpendit magnum quiddam de nascituro hac visione figurari. We may wonder about the transmission of these events, but as we know that Becket's mother died some twenty years later, we may presume that they had impressed her forcefully enough for her to tell them to Becket or his family at a later date. But it seems clear that both Grim and Guernes, who is the briefer of the two on this matter, accepted that they had actually taken place, and were justified in recording them as true, whilst adding by their interpretations a little to the picture of Becket's saintly destiny; as the visions look forward, perhaps so may the authors at this stage. As has been suggested, Grim tends to lend more weight to the visions than does Guernes.

Further evidence that Guernes may be more discriminating than

Grim in terms of what may be accepted as historically accurate is to be found by considering the Latin account, in which the following passage comes after that telling us of the visions:

"Tradunt propinqui quod die qua ad has mundi natus est tenebras hic noster parvulus, egressus ignis de domo paterna partem plurimam civitatis incendit. Et tu sane, si diligenter advertas, a die qua ingressum meruit aeterni luminis martyr noster, quanta in aedificandis seu restaurandis ecclesiis, vestiendis altaribus, ferveret devotio, quam liberalis in pauperes, quam prompta operibus injustitiae renunciare, punire peccata per poenitentiam, quam denique prona ad omne opus pietatis exemplo martyris informata exstiterit, accensam de illo fateberis et tu non solum Londoniarum urbem, sed universam plane civitatem Dei quacunque nomen illius auditum est. Jamque lucerna super candelabrum posita est, ut qui ingrediuntur lumen videant. Jam quod a Salvatore promittitur electis, in isto cernimus adimpletum; Qui vicerit sicut ego vici, faciam illum columnam ignis in templo meo." Et jam, gratias supernae providentiae, columnam tenemus; intueamur lucernam; qua ivit ingrediamur, ne forte offendamus ad lapidem pedem nostrum, quia qui ambulat in tenebris, nescit quo vadat. Sed jam nunc ad ordinem historiae revertamur."

(Grim, ch.6 p.358-9)

From the way in which Grim introduces this reference to a great fire which began in Gilbert Becket's house and spread across a great part of London, and from also the final sentence, with which he leaves the subject, we may suspect that he was not convinced of the truth of the story; by telling us that it is members of Becket's own family who make this claim, he is not so much informing us of his source as passing the responsibility for veracity of the passage on to them. But he does not hesitate to give us a full explanation of the meaning

of this event in terms of the holy ministration of the future archbishop, drawing scriptural parallels to strengthen the saintly picture of the martyr which he wishes to build up even from the day of his birth. Guernes seems less eager than Grim to lend credence to this somewhat improbable story, which may be an embellishment of the fact that the Becket household did, at a much later date, suffer as the result of one or more better attested fires, and evidently has no desire to incorporate into his poem at this stage the sort of lengthy and pious interpretation which Grim gives us. Grim eventually tells us that we are now to return to the story proper; Guernes does not choose to leave it here in the first place.

He goes on instead to tell us about Becket's early education; we would have been surprised indeed if we had not been told that he was a good schoolboy:

A escole fu mis asez de juefne éé,
 E après a gramaire, quant saltier ot finé,
 E enaprès as arz, quant alkes ot chanté.
 Durement aperneit e mult s'aveit pené;
 Mes n'aveit pas lung tens les escoles hanté.

(Lines 201-205)

But this is mild praise compared with the approval and admiration contained in Grim's account; Guernes does not suggest that there is anything very exceptional in the youth's progress, which seems to be commensurate with hard work and an able mind; the impression which we get from this very brief sketch is that of, precisely, a good schoolboy. Grim almost seems to imply that he is exceptional, and by dint of more than just hard work:

"Ubi tenera admisit aetas, litterarum primordiis puer traditur
 imbuendus. Quibus decursis, ad artes missus multa in brevi

comprehendisse memoratur. Quam docilis, quantaque fuerit etiam in teneris annis industriae ac vivacitatis, aetas fortior comprobavit; quin jam factus vir uberes messuit sapientiae fructus, in quibus adhuc junior desudavit. Sed nequaquam diu scholis intendere sinebat variatio rerum."

(Grim, ch.7, p.359)

Both authors at this juncture cut short their accounts of Becket's development; Grim in order to tell us of the fires which crippled Becket's family financially, and then of the death of Becket's parents. Guernes, however, interrupts his account to tell us of Becket's association with Richer de Laigle, and the accident which happened when the two were out riding one day. Guernes thus reverses the order of these two events, for we find them both in Grim, where the accident comes after the fires and the deaths. (Guernes never actually tells us of the death of either of Becket's parents.) If this reversal in the order is conscious on the part of Guernes, two reasons suggest themselves. The first is that Grim tells us that Becket met Richer when the latter came to Gilbert Becket's house, implying that Richer was in the first place an acquaintance of Gilbert, before he knew Thomas. Thus it would be natural to place this incident before the fires reduced the circumstances of the Becket household, and certainly before the death of Becket's father. Secondly, the account of Thomas' exploits with Richer is a marked contrast to the studies he has been shown to be engaged in, and Guernes perhaps felt the need for some variety in his poem, for at this stage, Grim's account frequently returns at length to the development of Becket's prowess and many virtues, an emphasis which Guernes avoids by showing the youth to be naturally interested in other pursuits. No doubt he was aware too of the dangers of placing continual and

perhaps excessive importance on the virtues to which Grim so often refers, at this early stage in his poem. At all events, some mention of the young man's pleasures would certainly divert his audience, even if it does little to create a picture of piety:

En la maisun son pere se soleit osteler
 Richier de Legle. Od lui soleit Thomas aler
 En bois e en riviere e od li converser
 Bien demi an ensemble, si cum j'of cunter.
 Dunc cumença mult chiens e oisals a amer.

(Lines 206-210)

Guernes omits to mention any beneficial effects that this association with Richer may have on Becket's character, but emphasizes how much time the two spent together, apparently in the pleasures of conversation, hunting and hawking. Their friendship leads to an outing one day during which an accident occurs, and it is interesting to note how this incident is treated by the two authors. Let us look first of all at Guernes' version:

Od lui ala un jur li enfes en riviere;
 Des oiseals volt aprendre les gez e la maniere.
 Vindrent a un grant duit; n'i ot punt ne charriere
 K'une planche, u passa cele gent pouiniere.
 Li ber ala devant e li enfes deriere.
 Par desus la planche est li chevaliers passez.
 Thomas ala après, tut enchaperonez;
 Mes a sun cheval est un de ses piez eschapez:
 Il e li cheval est enz el duit reversez;
 Il ad voidié la sele, aval esteit flotez.
 Dejuste la planche ot un mulin tut molant;
 De grant ravine ala; Thomas vint la flotant:

Quant il dut en la roe chair, le chief devant,
 Li molniers out mulu; mist la closture a tant.
 Si guari Deus de mort a cele feiz l'emfant.

(Lines 211-225)

If we compare this with Grim's version, we shall see that there are some small, but not negligible differences:

"Die vero quadam accidit ut ad ripas eunte Thoma simul cum divite, motam de flumine anam accipiter insequeretur, secutusque divertentem in flumen cum ipsa pariter mergebatur. Quod videns adolescens, miseratus accipitrem jam periturum, equo desiliit, seque in gurgitem, ut avem eriperet, praecipitavit; sed priusquam avem contingeret, raptus ipse intra alveum fluminis, et nunc mersus sub aquis, nunc undarum vi impellente levatus, periclitari coepit, et penitus periisse putabatur ab intuentibus, dum nullus adesse potuit qui manum porrigeret pereunti. Denique ad molendinum, quod tunc forte molebat, aquae tractu perlatus, ubi primo aquae exitibus propinquavit, stetit rota nec se movit semel, quousque vivus quidem, sed vehementer afflictus, adolescens extractus est. Sed fovit afflictum medica manus Salvatoris, quem inter undas desperatum protexit ne exstingueretur lucerna futurus in Israel, cujus morte pretiosa tanta cernimus beneficia provenisse."

(Grim, ch.9, pp.360-1)

The first obvious difference between the two accounts is the manner in which Becket got into the water. It is possible that this episode in Becket's life was quite well remembered, and was circulated in oral form at Canterbury after his death. The oral tradition would create variants much more readily than the written word, and Guernes may have heard a variant of it before he began his poem; this might serve to explain the difference, but at all events, Guernes rejected

Grim's explanation here. Grim's story of the young man, filled with pity, diving into the river on a spontaneous impulse to save the hawk is certainly more picturesque than plausible, and Guernes preferred to give a more rational and probable explanation. The desire to rationalize is important, because it extends to the stopping of the millwheel, which popular accounts would be very keen to see and portray as miraculous. Grim, without being explicit on this point, suggests that the millwheel began to move again, if not as soon as, then soon after Becket had been pulled out of the water, with the miller still in complete ignorance of what was going on a little upstream. Guernes, however, gives out that the miller had finished work for the time being, and, although not knowing of the boy's predicament, stopped the wheel for some time. Guernes' more rational account certainly strikes us as being more providential or even coincidental in nature than does that of Grim, whose version hints much more strongly at the miraculous. (Guernes, later most solicitous about the fate of the archbishop's horses, fails to tell us what happened to his horse in this instance, which is perhaps no more surprising than the fact that we do not learn from Grim the fate of the hawk.) The difference between the accounts of Grim and Guernes is not perhaps quite so strong as has been suggested,⁴ and is not so clear-cut as the difference between the miraculous and the non-miraculous, but rather it involves, or implies a differing view of God's providence, and how it may function. Grim feels and wishes to reflect this more intensely than does Guernes, who nevertheless imitates the Latin author in so far as he points out God's purpose in preserving the young man. His conclusion, however is more muted than Grim's, and suggests that such instances may not be very rare or even confined to those who will later greatly benefit mankind:

Car Deus le volt pur ceo garder e garantir
 Ke il deveit par li si granz biens accomplir.
 Les alquanz sueffre Deus a vivre e a guarir,
 Pur ceo que mult grant mals deit par els avenir;
 E li alquanz redeivent mult granz biens parfurnir.

(Lines 226-230)

This, under the circumstances, is a far more subdued ending to the episode than we might have expected of Guernes had we seen that he wished to impress upon us at this stage the sanctity of the future archbishop, and that this sanctity had to be preserved, during his youth, which could in turn be construed to imply that his adolescence, as well as his later actions and attitudes when he was primate, was of a saintly nature. We have seen that, thus far, such was not Guernes' concern.

When he comes to recount the fires which afflicted the Becket household, Guernes does so briefly, omitting the pious remarks of Grim, who seeks to explain these unfortunate phenomena by interpreting them as a kind of inverse manifestation of God's love and esteem of the family, reminding us of the divine words "Ego quos amo arguo et castigo". Thomas now has to set about finding himself employment, and he takes up a position with Osbern Huit-Deniers, to whom he seems to have been related:

A un sun parent vint, un riche hume lundreis,
 A Osbern Oit-Deniers, kil retint demaneis.
 Mult esteit coneüz e de Francs et d'Engleis.
 Puis fu sis escrivains, ne sai dous anz u treis.
 Dunc comença a estre e senez e curteis.

(Lines 241-245)

This last line, a little surprising in the abruptness which it

implies, is all that Guernes offers in the place of a further passage of some length in Grim's text in which he again extols the many virtues of the young man. At the conclusion of this passage, Grim tells us how, and why, Thomas came to the notice and consequently to the service of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Theobald:

"Sed didicit tunc, quod postmodum fatebatur, non esse in homine viam ejus, sicut nec vitam, sed a Domino dirigi gressus hominis; aliud nimirum disponebat ipse, aliud atque aliter operata est in ipso divina dispositio. Siquidem, ut facilius ei ad honores pateret promotio, invitatus a quodam ministro domus archiepiscopi Theobaldi, illo ductu divinæ gratiæ, adveniens, quali decuit honore susceptus est."

(Grim, ch.11, p.361)

Grim continues by giving us a list of Becket's many virtues, and by showing how he excelled in the archbishop's service through his prudence, wisdom and care. In Guernes' account, as we shall see, the emphasis is slightly different. Omitting the mention of any purpose or motive of ambition in Becket's introduction to the archbishop's household at Canterbury, it is the element of devotion to duty, of loyalty to one's master which Guernes chooses to stress:

Mes tant ala Thomas e amunt e aval
 K'a l'arceveske vint par un sun mareschal,
 Ki soleit repairer chiés sun pere a l'ostal.
 Mult bel i vint a dras e mult bien a cheval,
 E adjutur i ot le rei espirital.
 Thomas fu vedziéz e Deus mult l'avança
 En sens e en conseilz. E jur e nuit veilla;
 De servir sun seigneur, quanque pot, se pena.
 De sun conseil par tut durement s'aprisma,

Tant que li arceveskes suvent l'i apela.

(Lines 246-255)

Thus far, as we have seen, Guernes has tended to be briefer than his Latin source, covering the early part of Becket's life in a fairly rapid review and not dwelling long on the incidents in it. Certainly he does not seem to have been at pains to impress us that Becket's character in youth, up to his early twenties, was especially saintly, nor that the vicissitudes should lead us to any great conclusions about his future. Now, for the first time, as Becket as a young man enters the archbishop's household, we find the first real insistence on his qualities, and at the same time, the first real suggestion that God was beginning to direct his path. For the first time, whether by accident or design, Guernes has omitted a detail not necessarily favourable to the martyr which is to be found in Grim, albeit a rather weak suggestion, namely that there was an element of ambition in the move to Canterbury; it is worth pointing out that there is no complete agreement among the biographers on this point, and Guernes is conservatively vague. This is not to say that Guernes suddenly attempts radically to change the picture which he has been giving us of the man. It is interesting that, as Becket begins to acquire preferments, such as the Archdeaconry of Canterbury, (in which he succeeded Roger of Pont l'Évêque, already, as Guernes has told us, an adversary,) and the provostship of Beverley, among others, from the hand of Theobald, Guernes seems to feel the need to justify him; later Becket was to be criticised for retaining some of these preferments when he resigned the chancellorship soon after his election to the see of Canterbury, and Guernes tries to explain Becket's attitude, juxtaposing God's part in his advancement to Becket's own natural interests, and trying to reconcile them:

De Beverlei li ad purquis la provosté,
 E rentes e iglises en plusurs lius doné;
 Kar unc ne trova hume kil servist si a gré.
 Deus li duna our, ki l'aveit aspiré;
 Tutdis trest a honor, a sen e a bunté.
 Chiens e oisels ama e deduit seculer.
 Mult fu larges e proz, de vif sen e de cler;
 Mes pas ne refusa, s'um li voleit doner,
 Gum li autre qui poent nuiré e amender,
 E ki volent al mund par lur avoir munter.

(Lines 271-280)

In point of fact, Guernes seems to have misunderstood his source Edward Grim here, for in the last three lines quoted above he seems to be giving the opposite of what Grim tells us of Becket's attitudes to the preferments and the income he receives from them:

"Vir autem liberalis animi, secundum monita Sapientis, melius esse arbitrans nomen bonum quam thesauros plurimos, ad augmentum fame et nominis ampliacionem divitias studuit detorquere, ne quando pecunie parcens parcitytis naevo splendorem nominis obfuscaret."

(Grim, ch. 13, p.363)

Having taken this to mean, presumably, that Becket was not averse to accepting such material benefits as he might be offered, Guernes rationalizes this by telling us of his liking for secular pleasures in the two lines preceding those which show us Becket's acceptance. Grim carries no such mention of his penchant for secular pleasures at this time; Guernes' explanation has the effect of showing us that Becket is still rather worldly, and this serves as a preface to the next development in his career:

L'arceveske Theobald ne l'ad ublié mie.
 Al secund rei Henri met Thomas e alie,
 Ki dunee li a lués sa chancelerie.
 Einsi li crut honors adès e manantie;
 Mes le servise al rei en nul liu n'entroblié.
 Le rei de quanqu'il pot servi mult volentiers;
 En pensé e en fet li fu del tut entiers.
 Quanque il pot avoir, e argent e deniers,
 Or e dras e chevaux, dona as chevaliers.
 Mult ert humbles de quer, e de vis ert mult fiers.
 As povres huemes ert, as halz de fier reguart:
 Aigneals esteit dedenz, defors semlout lupart.
 Del rei servir a gré ne targa tempre u tart.
 Mes quel qu'il fust dehors, n'i ot point de mal art:
 A Deu guardot adès la dedenzeine part.

(Lines 281-295)

The period during which Becket was chancellor to Henry II poses obvious difficulties for the biographer of the martyr. Some of his actions at that time were hardly consistent with those of a man whose purpose was to serve God and protect the Church. We have seen how Guernes has hinted that Becket made a virtue of good and faithful service whilst he was in Archbishop Theobald's household, and the echo of this in the lines just quoted shows that Becket was consistent in his obedience and efficiency of service when it was required of him in his office of State. Moreover, having explained Becket's attitude to worldly wealth, the embarrassment of riches which fell to his lot as chancellor need not be too strongly felt, especially if it can be shown that he used them wisely and was generous and considerate. Similarly, the fact that the chancellor underwent many

difficulties in the faithful service of his king can be used to win him the respect of the listener or reader, albeit respect of a secular and not specifically religious nature:

Mult par esteit beals clers, e menot grant boban:

Li riches reis Henris, ki del mund a grant pan,

N'en menot pas greinur; nel tenez a engan.

Ne plus vezié hune ne verrez vus uan.

El servise le rei suffri maint grant aban.

De chevaliers vassals grant maisnie teneit,

E duns e livreisuns richement lur duneit.

Cotereals e archiers e serganz reteneit;

Forveier les menot, e grantment mesfeseit.

Les enemis le rei mult durement greveit.

(Lines 341-350)

But Guernes was almost bound to sense the essential problem which the situation created, and for all that he has shown himself more willing to give us a picture of a youthful, active and pleasure-conscious man than Edward Grim, who strives to maintain a figure of piety and sobriety, the poet must have felt that such justification of Becket's actions as is contained in the lines above was not sufficient, in view of what is to come, to redress the balance of misconduct implicit in the last two lines of the above passage. Thus, as we have already seen, Guernes tells us that Becket, despite the fact that he is devoted to the king's service in body and in intellect, is nevertheless exclusively God's servant when it comes to matters of the soul. Guernes does not make the point here, as he does a little later in a different context,⁵ that Becket is even reluctant to appear too sanctimonious, as evidently such a contention is not borne out by the historical facts, but he does imply that Becket's show of pride arose from the political

requirement of overcoming the opposition of the proud and the powerful, and that where possible, he was meek and mild, as in his dealings with the poor and humble. Edward Grim makes no mention of Becket's dealing with the Church at this time, but Guernes does; it is perhaps not so much in this instance that the poet feels it will not be harmful to mention the subject here, as that he senses a need to reinforce the opinion that Becket at this time has not at all forgotten where his spiritual duty lies. We shall see in a moment that Guernes is about to turn to the account of William of Canterbury. William overcomes some of the difficulties which he may feel to be raised by Becket's early life by his brevity, whereas Guernes, in the early part of his poem, has been concise, rather than brief. At all events, it is possible that Guernes reference to the Church here stems from the following passage in William's account:

"In omnibus tamen lenociniis mundi blandientis, et prosperitatis arridentis applausu, memor conditionis suae et oneris sibi impositi, contra bestias curiae pugnavit, portans necessitates ecclesiae, et quatenus regia severitas et reverentia permisit, contra regem contendens, tanquam quodam futurorum praesagio sub pacis tempore dimicabat in acie."⁶

If William is the source for the following lines of Guernes, the poet is less convincing than the original, and one may suspect that the relative weakness of his assertion suggests that he himself doubts the validity of the claim; as he attempts to offset the impression of pride and vanity which he is not, however, afraid to ascribe to the archbishop, because, as we shall see shortly, he feels he has a means of showing the chancellor in a much more favourable light:

Ja seit ceo que il fust e orguillus e vains,

En cures seculers e en semblanz forains,

Chastes ert de sun cors e en esprit sains;
 E ja seit ceo qu'il fust el servise al rei plains,
 De seint'iglise fu, tant cum pot, destre mains.

(Lines 296-300)

Guernes' main purpose in turning from Grim to William of Canterbury is, however, to good effect; rather than attempt to justify the chancellor by a number of often unsubstantiated protestations as to his chastity and fortitude in the face of the manifold temptations of the secular world to which, in his elevated position, he might have fallen prey, the poet gives us one striking instance which will demonstrate his point admirably. William tells us the story of a woman of Stafford whom King Henry had loved, but had now left, and she now sent gifts to the chancellor. Becket was staying in the area as the guest of a man who suspected something between him and the woman, but one night, stealing into his bedroom, he found the chancellor stretched out on the floor, where he had apparently collapsed out of exhaustion from long prayer, leaving his bed untouched. William concludes: Et factum est ut religiosus inveniretur qui luxuriosus putabatur.⁷ Guernes retells the story with certain minor modifications and factual additions: in his account the lady sends messagiers as opposed to exenia, and he also informs us of the woman's name, Avice of Stafford, the name of Becket's host, Vivien, a clerk, and where he lived, namely in Stoke. (If Avice actually lived in Stafford, it is worth pointing out that Stafford and Stoke are about a dozen miles apart.) These details add a degree of substance to the story, in that they might have been verifiable at the time when Guernes was reading his poem in the cathedral. He may have found these details in some other account, since lost, but in the main he follows William closely enough to suggest that he checked on the story and possibly

heard some oral version of it in Canterbury, before modifying William's account. With this firmly based episode Guernes believes he can safely affirm the chastity of the chancellor, and he adds to his account an original conclusion:

Cum plus crut e munta Thomas seculerment,
 Plus fu umles de quer, queus qu'il fust a la gent.
 Pur le rei mesfeseit en plusurs lius suvent,
 Mes vers Deu l'amendeit les nuiz priveement.
 Pur ç'ad Deus tant ovré sur le bon fundement.

(Lines 334-335)

Here indeed is a suggestion that Becket's life as chancellor had a facade which hid a heart devoted to God. The admission can safely be made that Becket was sometimes in the wrong, since it is implied that his penances always won acceptance in the sight of God. This suggests rather more than that Becket was devout as opposed to dissolute, or that we cannot always know a man by external appearances.

However, we can see that there is in Guernes' poem a growing concern at this stage to protect the future archbishop from the possibility of excessive censures. But it appears that he is not prepared to do so if it involves suppression of the historical facts, so that he does give us a fairly full and vigorous picture of Becket's exploits as a soldier (admittedly one which mentions anything which could possibly be construed as advantageous), and Guernes includes the only direct reference in the poem to occasions on which the poet himself saw him. The following extract, which owes something to Grim, and just possibly something to FitzStephen, although this seems somewhat unlikely,⁸ shows how Guernes gives us a firm and vivid account of Becket's campaigning, which is followed by a somewhat apologetic reminder of the way of the world, culminating in a reaffirmation of

Becket's virtues which has strictly speaking very little to do with what has gone immediately before, to which Guernes finally adds another reference to the fact that Becket was acting as a perfect and obedient servant of his master:

Par assalt pris chasteals, motes e fermetez,
 E burcs e viles arst, e assaili citez.
 Sur sun destrier esteit del bon hauberc armez,
 Tant qu'il en fu suvent mult durement grevez;
 Pur sæetes le fist, ke il ne fust navrez.
 En Guascoine fu il lung tens pur guerrier;
 As Guascoinz i cuvint de lur chasteals leissier.
 En Normendie rot sun seigneur grant mestier,
 E jeol vi sur Franceis plusurs feiz chevalchier.
 De ses bosines fist le rei mult avancier.
 Li siecles est malveis, bien le poëz veer.
 E cum plus a li hum, meins atent al saveir,
 E cum plus pot al mund, vers Deu pot meins valeir;
 Car dunc ublie Deu e met a munchaleir.
 Le mund volt embracier, li munz volt li avoir.
 Li malfez estre iceo ne fine de guaitier
 Le cristien tutdis, k'il le pusse enginnier.
 E cum meilur le veit, prudume e almodnier,
 Tant se peiné il plus k'il le face pechier,
 Que il le puisse od sei en enfern trebuchier.
 Cist Thomas dunt paroil, ki dunc fu si puissanz,
 Ainz k'il fust chanceliers n'esteit pas mesfaisanz;
 Simples esteit a tuz, as petiz e as granz.
 Or ert pur sun segnur durement empernanz,
 E par tut se penot ke il li fust plaisanz.

Le chancelier serveit le rei tut a sun gré,
 E quanque il feseit li ert a volenté.
 Il saveit sun conseil trestut le plus segré;
 Par sun cunseil errot, ne li ert rien celé.
 Nul hume a cel contemple n'a li reis plus amé.

(Lines 351-380)

Thus we can see that Guernes tends to rationalize Becket's actions, and render them acceptable, without trying to portray them as pious or saintly in themselves. If we are to admire anything about the man here, it is his sense of loyalty and obedience to his sovereign, and the achievements which result from this. In addition to this he is bountiful and considerate, qualities of a good man without necessarily proving him to be a saint. Guernes will rarely let pass an observation about the chancellor's worldly advancement, without reminding us of the cause in which he seeks it; thus when we are told that Becket is in Normandy with his king, and that the chancellor ^(Line 402) quereit los e pris, we are almost surprised that this bald statement, which for the first time suggests a spark of personal ambition in the man, is not immediately qualified, and although we are told three lines later that the chancellor's ulterior purpose is to ^(Line 405) bien servir le rei, and that to this end ^(Line 405) s'esteit mult entremis, the delay is long enough to strike us. There is, of course, another facet of Becket's life during this period, which is his private penance for his confessed wrongs, and the strength and intensity of his regret is emphasised by the professions of his chastity and probity. Guernes does not give us the scope to dwell on the discrepancy between the action and the subsequent regret, as there will be unavoidable unease in this area. Indeed, Grim probably comes closer to abording this question than Guernes, and then in a quite

rhetorical manner, when he asks Denique quem unquam timebat offendere ut regis satisfaceret votis, pareret imperiis? (Grim, ch. 14, p.365)⁹

Instead, the two pictures are often juxtaposed to create a balance between the two opposite factors in Becket's life, the figure of the soldier and the politician softened by his generosity, the proof of his innocence of intention strengthened by the references to his frequent prayers and penances. This means of course that Guernes is prepared to tell us of the chancellor's misdeeds, although admittedly he is sometimes more ready to admit them than at others, and he does not, if we may analyse more closely and with more facility than might his audience, achieve complete consistency on this point, as has been suggested.¹⁰ The picture we are left with of Becket before his consecration is one of a good scholar, a frank and genuine and often pleasure-seeking youth, an industrious and loyal servant, and a rich and powerful figure of State and soldier, whose misdeeds in the service of the king are offset by his generosity, his deep-felt regret, and his private communion with God, to whom we see him becoming gradually drawn, and by whom this growing sense and relationship is rewarded with help and advancement. There are evidently traces of a saintly figure in this picture, and they tend to increase as Becket grows older, but it is not the picture of a man whose every action since the day of his birth is fully justified or the token of a perfect saint. The final picture which Guernes gives us of the chancellor immediately before his election to the see of Canterbury resumes many of the earlier strands, not all of them necessarily favourable to a good and an upright man, let alone auspicious for one about to become the head of the English Church:

En tut le regne n'ot ne si halt ne si fier

Kil poust, s'il volsist, bien nuire u aidier.

Ki que venist al rei, de quei qu'ouïst mestier,
 Errament l'enveast ariere al chancelier.
 Quanqu'il fist e desfist, tut voleit ostreier.
 E trestute Engleterre e tute Normendie,
 Autres teres asez, aveit en sa baillie.
 E quanque il feseit ne desplot al reime.
 Od sei meneit adès mult grant chevalerie;
 Al rei fist de sa guere mult suvent grant aïe.
 En la terre n'aveit plus large viandier.
 Adès vindrent a lui baron e chevalier,
 Puteins e lecheür, a beivre e a mangier.
 Ses ostels fist suvent l'ostel le rei voidier,
 Tant que li reis se prist vers lui a curecier.
 Quant fu arcediacnes, provoiz e chanceliers,
 Vedves e orphanins e povres aveit chiers;
 Mes asise n'en sot serganz ne almoners,
 Mes tut adès les pot, e fist bien volentiers.
 E cum plus fu halz jorz, tant lur fu plus pleners.

(Lines 406-425)

This is another passage which is not fully paralleled in Guernes' written sources, although it owes something to Grim.¹¹ Guernes must have found some of his information by dint of private investigation, or through the oral tradition, and having sought out this material, he is prepared to set it down as historical fact; we cannot know whether he discovered anything so difficult to master and rationalize that he was forced to omit it, but the evidence in this early part of the poem tends to suggest that, whether his source was a Latin biography, some other unknown written source, an eye-witness account, the oral tradition or his personal observation, he is not afraid to use the

material and convey it as historical fact; he must have an eye for the future archbishop's reputation, but not necessarily at this stage as a saint, and he often takes care that Becket's actions or attitudes may seem, if not praiseworthy in every single instance, at least reasonable. As we approach the time when Thomas will be elected and consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury, the picture of him becomes gradually more pious, and more attention is paid to those qualities which recommend him best to the reader, and it is suggested that God now had a firm interest in and solicitude for his future. But nevertheless, the picture Guernes gives us of the early years of Becket's life is on the whole succinct and credible; his attempts to justify the martyr's conduct when he was chancellor of England show that he is concerned to preserve a favourable impression of him in the minds of reader or audience, but even if we wish to dismiss the justifications as favourable, apologetic and sometimes specious rationalization, the actions themselves seem to be a fair account of the youth of a good young man, rather than an undoubted saint.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ELECTION

The election of Thomas Becket to succeed Archbishop Theobald, who had died in 1161, represented a very significant development in the life of the king's chancellor and hitherto trusted friend. While it must of necessity form an integral part of any account of the martyr's life, Becket's previous career dictated that it could not be treated with the intention of conveying unmitigated pleasure or satisfaction even by those who generally wished to give a favourable account of his life. As we have seen, Guernes did not choose to restrict as much as he might have done his account of such details of Becket's earlier life which seemed less than meritorious in one destined for the highest position in the English Church; thus, when he comes to give his version of the election, he must have been conscious of the difficulties which Becket's preferment raised; it is of course more than possible that greater indignation at the seemingly worldly chancellor's election was aroused at the time than any of the biographers cared to admit, and it would not be unnatural for such objections as many people may have felt at the time of the election, in 1162, to be set aside or forgotten in the light of the events leading up to the murder at the end of 1170. But Guernes had already gone some way towards creating the impression that Becket was spiritually prepared for the position to which he was about to succeed, even if to a not inconsiderable extent his actions and appearance did not reflect this fitness. Certain problems still persist for Guernes to resolve, and certain discrepancies still remain to be reconciled

in this respect, but other considerations make for further complications for the biographer, as we shall see, for he must also show what part was played by King Henry in this matter, and what significance may be attached to it. For Henry to canvass his chancellor's election to the see of Canterbury can be interpreted as selfishly calculating and political, or as thoughtful and considerate towards the needs of the church. This ambiguity of purpose finds its origins in the ambivalence of Becket's character and behaviour as chancellor, and the general tenor of his life up to that point. Nevertheless, Henry's actions cannot be said to be without import for what was to ensue, and for his subsequent attitudes and approach to the problems which the election created, or at least gave scope to, during the next decade, and it should be important for the biographer to establish Henry's position at this time. Similarly the position adopted by the bishops is of interest and significance in the light of subsequent developments. Whilst Becket may hold our attention at the centre of the stage, it is not possible for him to do so in isolation, without any reference being made to King Henry or the bishops, or even the monks of Canterbury, who had to be approached over the question of the successor to Archbishop Theobald. It is true that we may tend today to seek a greater degree of consistency or regularity in the actions of those participating in the events than would a twelfth-century audience listening to the story as it was read in the cathedral, or reading it for itself; we would naturally expect their attention to be fixed fairly firmly upon the central figure of the proposed archbishop, as indeed ours is. But for some of the time the archbishop is not at the centre of the action, and we observe developments which took place in his absence, and of which he may not have been aware at the time. When we read Guernes at this point, it is difficult to find any great

degree of consistency in his account as to the reasons and actions of those involved closely with the election, and, as we shall see, this is not explained by the greater stress which may now be laid upon this factor of consistency. Disappointingly, Guernes gives us only a rather confused, and to some extent confusing picture of how and why the election took place, and how the outcome was decided. But as we saw in the opening chapter,¹ we still have not compiled a clear and convincing picture of all the considerations which came into play and how they may best be reconciled historically. It is quite possible that Guernes himself had no clear picture of all the details of this period of Becket's career, and whilst conscious of this, he tried to reconcile them as best he could. In doing so, he seems, perhaps unwittingly, to have introduced certain new complications, which means that in this instance his account strikes us as less satisfactory, at least from a purely logical point of view, than that of his primary source for much of the material here, which is again the Latin biography of Edward Grim. Guernes has in addition found some new material from elsewhere, as we shall see, which supplements that given by Grim, and by his inclusion of this and by his treatment of that which he found in Grim, gives us a rather different picture from that which we find in the Latin account, and which perhaps did not fully satisfy the French poet.

Guernes first mentions the archbishopric at a stage when he is still concerned with giving us details of Becket's service to the king as chancellor, soldier, adviser and companion; he tells us:

Mes Quant li arceveskes Tedbalt fu deviez,
 Al chancelier, qui si esteit del rei privez,
 Greantée fu dunc del rei la dignetez.
 Car el regne ne sot nul clerc de ses buntez,

E quida k'il sewist par tut ses volentez.

(Lines 396-400)

Indeed, it is worth reminding ourselves, at this stage, of the picture of Becket which Guernes has given us, in the period before the election, before we go further in our considerations of the picture of Becket given in subsequent lines; it may be important to do this, since we must bear in mind Guernes' earlier treatment, and see if he attempts to modify the impression he has given us, at a later stage. As we saw in the previous chapter,² Becket's recommendations are not exceptionally strong, and proof of his innocence seems to be couched in rather negative terms, although we must admit that it is easier to confirm innocence in negative as opposed to positive terms:

Cum plus crut e munta Thomas seculerment,
 Plus fu umles de quer, queus qu'il fust a la gent.
 Pur le rei mesfeseit en plusurs lius suvent,
 Mes vers Deu l'amendeit les nuiz priveement.
 Pur ç'ad Deus tant ovré sur le bon fundement.
 N'out unkes si privé, ne clerc ne compainun,
 Chanberleng ne sergaunt, seneschal ne garçun,
 Nul ki taunt lungement servist en sa maisun,
 Ki le puise affermer ne faire mustreisun,
 K'en nul tens le veïst a tele mesprisun.

(Lines 331-340)

We shall return later to examine how Becket appears in Guernes' narrative throughout the election, but for the moment it is worth bearing in mind this description, which, far from being unqualified in its admiration for Becket, may be said rather to be a mixture of rationalization of the man's actions and historical scepticism of the magnitude of his failings in view of the lack of conclusive evidence

which the author has been able to discover on this point.

The picture which we have of Becket may not yet recommend him compellingly for the archbishopric, but no such doubts existed for King Henry. His immediate reaction to the news of Archbishop Theobald's death is that Becket, the most suitable man to succeed Theobald, should indeed do so, and Guernes implies that Becket was informed verbally of this.

Guernes is able to emphasise the extent of the king's evaluation and trust by relating in some detail Becket's service to Henry in the war against King Louis VII of France, which was being waged in Normandy at the time of Theobald's death. He says of Becket: de bien servir le rei s'esteit mult entremis (Line 405). Guernes does not dwell exclusively on Becket's secular attributes, however, and carefully shows Becket to his audience from a different point of view:

En la terre n'aveit plus large viandier.
 Adès vindrent a lui baron e chevalier,
 Puteins e lecheür, a beivre e a mangier.
 Ses ostels fist suvent l'ostel le rei voidier,
 Tant que li reis se prist vers lui a curecier.
 Quant fu arcediacnes, provoç e chanceliers,
 Vedves e orphanins e povres aveit chiers;
 Mes asise n'en sot serganz ne almoners,
 Mes tut adès les pot, e fist bien volentiers.
 E cum plus fu halz jorz, tant lur fu plus pleniers.

(Lines 416-425)

This is clearly no longer Henry's assessment; nevertheless, sure of his man, he sends Becket back to England on royal

business. Guernes has thus skilfully mingled two impressions of Becket here: the king's, and what we fairly presume to be his own. Both are favourable to Becket, but necessarily from different angles. Guernes is doubtless conscious of the need to present Becket in a highly favourable light at this stage, and perhaps the modern reader may be fairly judged to be more conscious of the ambivalent elements in Guernes' assessment of Becket than his twelfth-century audience would have been.

Guernes goes on to tell us that Henry now begins to make moves which will bring Becket to a position of favourable prominence when the election is actually being considered:

Dunc enveia li reis a Seinte Ternité
 Treis eveskes, ki sorent mult de sa volenté,
 E Ricard de Luci, un baron mult sené.
 Dunc sunt od le covent dedenz capitre entré;
 E Ricard de Luci ad pur els tuz parlé.

(Lines 431-435)

Richard then goes on to address the assembly; we shall consider shortly how his words, seemingly sweet and palatable to his audience, come to convey a more insistent message. But before we do so, it is worth comparing what Guernes has written with the account of his source for the material which he has used so far in this episode, Edward Grim, and seeing how Grim approaches the question. Here is his account:

"Sortitus est interea finem temporalis vitae Theobaldus archiepiscopus, et sedes vacavit a praesule. Rex autem,

arbitratus cancellarium suas per omnia sequi voluntates, ut ante, et imperiis obtemperare, ipsi archiepiscopatum dedit: sed aliquamdiu differtur negotium, donec a conventu consensum extorqueat, qui liberam ab antiquo solet habere vocem in electione pontificis; nam illo reclamante nulli regum licuit intrudere quenquam propria auctoritate. Igitur, ut conventus sibi inclinaret assensum, tres episcopos destinavit Cantuariam, et cum eis Ricardum de Luci virum nobilem et praefectum patriae. Cancellarium quoque misit in Angliam pro diversis negotiis, et praesertim ut filio suo, jam tunc coronando in regem, fidelitatem et subjectionem acciperet ab universis, et juraretur in regem. Episcopi vero transmissio mari venientes Cantuariam salutaverunt conventum ex nomine regis; et in capitulo coram omnibus Ricardus, vir magnae facundiae, allegans causam pro qua missi sunt,..."

(Grim, ch. 15, pp.365-366)

We can see many points of similarity between the two accounts. We should however recall that all Guernes has told us so far concerning the question of the next archbishop is that to Becket greantée fu dunc del rei la dignetez (Line 398). Grim is even more peremptory: ipsi archiepiscopatum dedit. In neither case do we learn - such information would be crucial if it could be furnished - how firm and how public or how private King Henry made this proposal; we must suppose witnesses. But Grim goes on to explain to us the necessary stages before Becket can become archbishop, and he uses forthright terms at times - donec a conventu consensum extorqueat, as we have just seen. Guernes, on

the other hand, omits explanations which tend to emphasise the king's attempt to influence events. (Some of Grim's references to the king and his son at this stage may have been misinterpreted and erroneously included by Guernes at a later stage in his poem, with some confusion, as we shall see later in this chapter.) Guernes' failure to explain matters to his audience does not make for clarity. Perhaps he had received conflicting evidence from oral sources. William of Canterbury says little of the events leading up to the election, but suggests that King Henry played a strong part in them, with implications of his having an eye to his own ends; the relevant passage, however, which follows immediately one from which Guernes had made borrowings (the story of Avice of Stafford³), varies slightly in the different manuscripts, some having more to say than others on Henry's purpose here.⁴

If Guernes has been less successful than Grim, for whatever reasons and motives, in conveying a clear picture of events thus far, he does follow Grim in reporting the words of the king's embassy; after the initial niceties, we find the transparent sophistry, the veiled expediency and warnings, yet no mention of Becket. The second speech of the king's embassy gives us the tone:

"Mes or vus covendreit mult bon conseil avoir,
 Ke vus eslisez tel ki vus puisse valeir
 Par tut envers le rei; car bien poez saveir,
 Se vus eslisez nul encontre sun voleir,
 Vostre iglise en purra en grant perte chaeir.
 Kar pes ne s'amistié a nul jor n'avriez,
 En cisme e en discorde tutzdis mes seriez;
 Ne vus n'avez mestier k'il seit vers vus iriez.
 Mes s'un k'il mult amest eslire puriez,

De tutes voz bos dignes el desus seríez."

(Lines 446-455)⁵

Faced with this reasoning, which must have seemed somewhere between acceptably sensible advice and an ultimatum, the monks, not surprisingly, seemed to consider Thomas Becket as their natural choice; at least neither of the two biographers gives us much reason to think that they gave serious consideration to any other candidate. Guernes goes further than Grim in that he gives us the names of those whom the assembly consulted over the election, the bishops who, we may presume, were among those in the delegation representing King Henry. He names two of the three bishops, Hilary of Chichester and Bartholomew of Exeter, and although he does not state specifically that these two are in the original delegation, he implies as much. We must assume that Guernes knew of some source, oral or written, which gave the names of these bishops, as they are not in any of his written sources which have survived down to us. Obviously, it is likely that he would have no great difficulty in finding in Canterbury monks who remembered the time and some, at least, of the details of Becket's election quite vividly. It is possible that these sources also led, to some extent, to a certain amount of subsequent confusion in Guernes' account as he reported perhaps more than one oral account of what followed, thus creating discrepancies, or at least a lack of clarity in his final account, although, having seen already something of his desire for historical precision, we may be surprised that he himself did not feel the problem which was thus created; perhaps he did, and was not able to rectify it to his own satisfaction. Here, in full, is Guernes' account of the final stages of the election:

Dunc en unt li covenz a lur conseil parlé.

L'eveske de Cicestre unt a els apelé,

E celui d'Exceestre n'en unt il pas sevré,
 E Ricard, ki tint d'els e fiu e herité.
 K'il conseillent l'iglise de Sainte Ternité.
 A lur dreit escient lur unt le mielz loé.
 Or unt tant le conseil e estreit e mené
 K'a ceo s'asentent tuit, li juefne e li sené,
 Ke Thomas eslirunt a cele dignité.
 A cel conseil se sunt li barun acordé.
 Bien quident que li reis s'i voldra assentir;
 Ne plus oneste clerc n'i purreit nuls choisir,
 Ne nul ki mielz poust lur iglise avancer,
 Ne ki mielz fust del rei; e s'il funt sun plaisir
 Mult en purra grant pru a l'iglise avenir.
 Or unt li moine einsi fermement greanté.
 E li baron s'en vont a Lundres la cité.
 Tut le barnage i unt del país asemblé;
 Plenierement i furent eveské e abé,
 E li priurs i fu de Sainte Ternité.
 La unt eslit Thomas e pris a avocé
 Tut senz nul contredit de lai u de letre,
 Fors de celui de Lundres, kin aveit guernonné:
 Car de seint'iglise ad persecuturs esté,
 Ceo dit; a mult grant tort avreit la digneté.
 Il meismes l'aveit cuntr'els tuz contredit:
 N'est pas dignes, ceo dit, d'aveir si halt abit;
 Destruit ad seint'iglise, sa lei mis en despit,
 E adès parsewi; a tort l'i unt eslit.
 Od lermes en requiert e delai e respit.

(Lines 456-485)

In this passage there is perhaps less suggestion of collusion, and more of a natural choice, even to the extent where the line bien quident que li reis s'i voldra assentir^(Line 466) would lead us to believe that the king had not designed Becket for the see, an impression which has not been created either in Grim or in Guernes; this reflects how effective the sophistry of the king's messengers had been in their political dealings at Canterbury, and this new implication is to be found not only in the account of Guernes, but also in Grim, who tells us approbant electionem nuncii regis, asserentes regem facile assensurum fore, nec esse in regno aptiorem sive honestiorem quempiam ad hunc honorem.⁶ The ambiguity, which undoubtedly exists in this matter of the king's influence on the election, is perhaps summed up by the juxtaposition, in Guernes' account, of two statements which suggest contradictory motives in the minds of the king's representatives. Guernes tells us that a lur dreit escient lur unt le mielz loe^(Line 461), which implies that they wished to give honest and objective advice to those at Canterbury, but the following line lends a slightly different complexion to the picture, and goes in fact some way towards suggesting a degree of connivance on the part of the bishops, for we are told that they or unt tant le conseil e estreit e mene^(Line 462), and that this has some bearing on the outcome of the election. It is difficult to tell here whether this attempt, which Guernes holds to have been successful, was dictated by the professedly honest belief that Becket was the most suitable man for the archbishopric, or by a desire to see the king's will complied with, which is perhaps the more likely explanation, if the less creditable, here. If we accept this latter interpretation, the later assurance that the king can be persuaded to accept Becket's election is nothing less than disingenuous, as has already been suggested, but perhaps the ambiguity may in the last analysis reflect

the state of mind of some at least of those closely concerned with the election, in that many people doubtless felt at the time that a happy medium might be achieved if Becket were to become archbishop; however we are finally left unsure, both by the Latin author and the French poet, as to what account was taken of the earlier speeches of the king's party, and perhaps, by the very nature of the election, if they were to be honest, the authors had little alternative to this impression of ambiguity. Neither might care to dwell on the efficacy of veiled warnings from the king's party in this matter.

Guernes follows Grim in not pretending that everyone was happy at Becket's election, and reports, as does the Latin writer, the opposition of Gilbert Foliot.⁷ Grim tells us that Foliot was effectively outvoted, whilst Guernes, who makes no further reference to the effect of Foliot's objections, is briefer here. He does, however, make him voice complaints that Becket has persecuted the Church, a charge which can gain little substantiation, as we have seen, from the earlier part of Guernes' account of Becket's chancellorship. It is, as the above passage shows, in the nature of a passing reference, which does not nonetheless go unanswered, but it would be safer for Guernes to allow himself to put this accusation in the mouth of a character now, especially one who was subsequently to receive little approbation in the poem, than to have gone into details earlier in the poem, even if he had been able to justify the actions of Becket in the face of such a serious and potentially damaging charge. Guernes may have been prepared to admit, as we saw in the previous chapter, that Becket's character and behaviour in the days before he was Archbishop of Canterbury may not have been totally beyond reproach, but he never went so far as to allow the possibility of his having actively and consciously pursued a course which could only be harmful to the Church.

However, a reference to failings on Becket's part is here at the least unfavourable, and Guernes not only makes Foliot voice lone objections, but skilfully pre-empts any adverse effect they might create, with his audience rather than with those concerned with the election at the time, although he implies that they were also aware of the state of matters. He suggests that Becket himself had raised the same, or similar, objections to his election, at an earlier time, (this must be the force of Il meïsmes l'aveit cuntr'els tuz contredit,^(Line 481) especially of the use of the pluperfect tense here, so that the lines 481-485, and possibly, by a logical extension, also 486-490, are in the nature of a back reference to earlier events), and that these objections, however deeply felt and piously expressed, had been overcome once and for all by the reply of the Bishop of Winchester. Thus the substance of Foliot's objections had already been successfully dealt with and set aside by the discussion which had already taken place concerning them. Thus, Foliot's charge may not be without foundation; in Guernes' account it is now shown to be largely without weight.

We shall shortly discuss these objections, which Guernes now mentions as the cause of the hesitation of Becket to accept his office. But whilst discussing the question of Becket's attitude towards the Church, we should look to the speech which Guernes puts into the mouth of Henry, Bishop of Winchester, a few lines later. M. Walberg⁸ has pointed out that Becket's hesitation is, according to William of Canterbury, (and other biographers), overcome partly through the advice of Henry, Cardinal of Pisa, whilst Grim mentions no such hesitation, (although he does mention much subsequent soul-searching and private reflection), but does at this juncture give a speech by Henry of Winchester concerning Becket's obligations as chancellor, from which, argues the bishop, he should be forthwith released; Guernes later gives

a parallel to this speech, but he now also puts into Henry's mouth an original speech about Becket's past and future relationship to the Church; his starting point may be Grim, but the content of the speech is both peculiar to Guernes' account and revealing as to his conception of Becket. Henry of Winchester says:

"Fiz, si seras, ceo dit l'eweske de Wincestre;
 Si purvers as esté el servise terestre,
 Mielz e plus volentiers serf le seignur celestre.
 Tu fus lus as ueiles; or seies pastre e prestre.
 De Saul persecutur Pols seras e deiz estre."

(Lines 486-490)

Here is an admission of the possibility, at least, that Becket has acted in the past against the best interests of the Church.⁹ Although his misdemeanours are not enumerated for us, we see that Guernes must have been conscious of the foundation of the charge. But rather than suppressing totally any mention of the accusations of misconduct, which might under the circumstances seem to be the wisest course if his sole concern were the preservation of an unblemished and irreproachable picture of the martyr, he turns this seeming acknowledgment of wrong on his part into a positively favourable reflection of the archbishop's character. He will put off the old man and put on the new, and is compared by the poet, (if we wish to doubt that the words ever proceeded from the mouth of the Bishop of Winchester), to that great benefactor and apostle of the Church in its earliest days, Saint Paul. This suggestion that Becket will no longer oppress the Church, but will henceforth prove to be one of its strongest servants, is sufficient, in Guernes's eyes, and hopefully in those of his audience, to offset much, if not all, of the adverse effects of the accusations. Bishop Henry implies that the hope of future benefit should outweigh

the fact that in the past he may have persecuted the Church, that he may have been lus as ueiles^(Line 487), which is, after all, a strong charge. The comparison to Saint Paul must carry significance, as well as promise, and we can see that it might be made without the danger of appearing empty or specious; with the benefit of hindsight, the life of Thomas Becket might indeed appear in this light to one in the years after his murder who was not prepared to pretend or proclaim that Becket's life had always been a model of goodness and consistency. Although he is understandably not keen to dwell at length on the martyr's early shortcomings, and baulks perhaps at the worst of them, at least in public, Guernes, as we saw to some extent in the previous chapter, does not paint a picture of Becket as a saint whose every action was beyond reproach. As might be the case with Saint Paul, we should anticipate that in the last analysis the balance might be favourable to Saint Thomas.

We should now return to the question of Becket's hesitation to accept the archbishopric, which has already been mentioned in passing more than once. Grim makes no explicit mention of any doubt in Becket's mind before his consecration, and Becket certainly voices none in Grim's account. William of Canterbury does, however; in his Vita, Becket realises that he will be in an untenable position as chancellor and archbishop, and is bound to excite the king's anger and displeasure. He reflects upon the scriptures and the examples which they offer, and much of his doubt seems to rest on his inability to decide which should carry the most weight with him. This is how William concludes his somewhat lengthy passage on the nature of Becket's reflections:

"Et eo usque dividuo animo fluctuabat, ut eligeret potius regem amicum privatus habere quam privilegiatus adversarium. Itaque ei aliisque eum promovere volentibus aliquamdiu reluctatus est."

(William of Canterbury, ch. 5, p. 8)¹⁰

This shows a degree of awareness and political sense in Becket which is not paralleled in Guernes' version at this stage. We have already seen the passage in which Guernes lets Becket voice his doubts and a plea for delay, at least, (If indeed they are meant to be Becket's words.)¹¹ Whilst they contain an admission of past guilt, in Becket's mouth they also assume an air of modesty and contrition which go some way towards offsetting the unfavourable nature and aspects of what they actually say. Even so, tears and a contrite heart may not fully expiate the crime of "destroying the Church and flouting her laws". The words tend to evoke sympathy rather than outright justification, admiration, rather than exoneration.

Having covered this hesitation, and told us of how Henry, Bishop of Winchester spoke to overcome it, Guernes moves to the action of the election itself. At this point Guernes' account becomes somewhat problematical, and it will be as well, first of all, to see exactly what he has to say about it:

Dunc l'unt a arceveske a grant joie levé,
 Quant tut li clergiez l'a eslit e apelé.
 Li reis aveit purquant as justises mandé
 E al clergie par brief, -mes ne l'unt pas mustré,-
 K'en respit le mesissent; pur ceo se sunt hasté.
 Ne sai pur quei li reis s'en volt si tost retraire.
 Bien entendi, ceo crei, tut changot sun afaire;
 Ne mes sa volenté ne purreit de li faire,
 Ne les dreiz seint'iglise ne lerreit pas detraire.
 Mes tut ceo que Deus volt ne pot nuls hom desfaire.
 U pur ceo que li reis vit bien e entendi
 K'il l'aveit lealment e par tut bien servi,
 Ne trovereit ja mes kil servist altresí,

Or li pesot k'il ot sun servise guerpi.

Mes il fut présenté al fiz le rei Henri.

(Lines 491-505)

With the last line, Guernes returns to follow Grim's account, but there is no parallel in any of his sources for much of what has gone before in the previous fourteen lines; no other writer speaks of a desire on the part of the king to have the election delayed. There is a slight echo in the line Mes tut ceo que volt Deus ne pot nuls hom desfaire^(Line 500) of a line in Grim, which, however, concerns the retraction, or rejection, of Gilbert Foliot's opposition to Becket's election: "Voces Dei et non hominis!" But apart from this, Guernes seems to have had some original source for these lines. We may imagine that one of the monks had told him of this hesitation on the part of the king, and that Guernes believed the report and was moved to include it in his narrative. But it seems to mark a complete change of heart on the part of the king, and Guernes is not unaware of the fact; he attempts to rationalize such a move on Henry's part, and, having admitted that he does not really know why Henry should wish to change his mind in this way, he goes on to attempt some sort of explanation. There is no suggestion that Foliot has the king's ear at this time, despite his opposition, so it could not be assumed that the king's change of plan was in any way due to his intercession. Thus Guernes supposes the king to be much more perspicacious than is the case in the other biographies of Becket at this stage, and has him suspect the implications of Becket's translation upon his outlook and his whole relationship with the king and the State, even before Becket in fact gives him any cause for such concern, before he resigns the chancellorship. This is not an impossible interpretation,¹² and it would explain to some extent the lines 501-504, which are comprehensible only if we can allow that Henry is at this

moment looking into the future, although his motive would not in this case involve the drastic consequences which he seems to envisage here. M. E. Walberg, pointing out the difficulty of these lines, thinks that they may have been added later, and incorrectly, to the text.¹³ At all events, if the lines are authentically placed, Guernes seems to be suggesting that the king's suspicion of his chancellor, if not his actual dislike, began earlier than any other source gives us to believe, although this can only be reconciled with his later expression of surprise and dismay when Becket actually did resign the chancellorship,¹⁴ if his real wish was for Becket to remain chancellor and not become archbishop at all, and does not explain why he should in that case wish him to remain as chancellor, and not as archbishop, unless he thought that in this way Becket's attitude to the king and his interests could remain unaltered. In the last analysis, the king's alleged change of mind is very hard to justify as a logical step, although it does give Guernes the opportunity to let us have an early glimpse of the king being defeated, and unable to overcome the will of God, and to suggest that, by the haste which they showed to thwart the king's wishes, Becket was a firm and popular and natural choice with all others, especially the clergy. But such an early 'victory' over the king is surely unnecessary at this stage, and certainly not worth the invention (to which Guernes does not appear to be prone) or even inclusion of such a story. The information may originate in the oral tradition at Canterbury, possibly among the monks, as has been suggested, unless we admit of the unlikely, but not unparalleled event of Guernes' having misunderstood his source.¹⁵ The only possible lines in Grim which might lend themselves to this have come considerably earlier, chronologically speaking, at the beginning of his discussion of the process of the election. The context would thus make it unlikely that Guernes could misinterpret the following

words of Grim in such a way as to misconstruethem into the meaning of lines 491-504 in his poem, although, as we have already seen in this chapter, they have no direct equivalent elsewhere in Guernes' account of the election: sed aliquamdiu differtur negotium, donec a conventu consensum extorqueat, quo liberam ab antiquo solet habere vocem in electione pontificis; nam illo reclamante nulli regum licuit intrudere quenquam propria auctoritate.¹⁶ But this is at best improbable. It may be worth mentioning at this juncture that Guernes' account of the haste with which the ceremony was completed, and the defiance of the king's letters, of which the clergy seemed to have knowledge, and in which the consecration was allegedly forbidden, at least for a time, does bear a passing similarity to what we know of the circumstances of the coronation of Prince Henry, King Henry's son, in Westminster Abbey in June 1170. On that occasion letters were sent, this time by the pope, forbidding the bishops who were planning to officiate at the ceremony from so doing; the bishops, however, whether in ignorance or defiance, pressed on quickly with the ceremony and young Henry was crowned. This is almost a mirror image, from the ecclesiastical side, of the measures which Guernes attributes to King Henry in mid-1162.¹⁷ Guernes says nothing of such prohibitions when he comes to discuss young Henry's coronation, and it is quite possible that he knew nothing of them. It seems highly unlikely, given the differing circumstances, the discrepancies in time and place, and the different consequences, that Guernes should have confused the story of letters of prohibition, and having heard some oral account of these letters, which as has been said, is not at all certain, transferred them so drastically. If it were not for the fact that in his account the coronation of young Henry is so radically out of place in the chronology, - and in this, as we shall see, he is merely following his source Edward Grim - we

might discount the possibility of such a gross error completely. We can see then that there is no explanation of Guernes' account which can be seen to be a rationalization which satisfactorily agrees with what the poet actually says. We should therefore accept his account in good faith, as being a genuine expression of what he wished to tell us. It may help us towards a partial solution, however, to reflect that Guernes had heard of some story according to which King Henry changed his mind, but as he had no positive proof of such an event, he was not prepared to lend too much significance to it. He does, after all, tell us that:

Ne sai pur quei li reis s'en volt si tost retraire.

Bien entendi, ceo crei, tut changot sun afaire.

(Lines 496-497)

He is admitting that he does not really have any evidence to bring before us, but only hearsay of a dubious nature, and his imperfect information is presented to us as such. It may be worth pointing out that Guernes is rather evasive about the timing of the election, especially in relation to the letters which he says the king sent. Moreover, he knows that someone must have disobeyed the king's orders, or at least ignored his recommendation, in that the clergy either never saw the letters, or else failed to act upon the instructions which they contained. Lines 493 to 495 are not perfectly clear, and this has been reflected in the attempts at varying times, to amend, rearrange, or clarify them. As they stand, we cannot be sure of the force of mustre, or who was responsible in this matter. This may well reflect the position of the poet himself, who, as he has told us, has only imperfect knowledge in the matter, and probably knows no more and no less than he tells us here. We may still be wise to take the whole of this passage of Guernes, for all its difficulties, to be at least intended for its present position in the Vie, to accept the poet's statements

as to his own difficulties over his material here, and to the effect that he had heard some such unsubstantiated account, and attach no greater importance to it than the fact that Henry is credited with a degree at least of perspicacity, but is unsuccessful in any attempt he may have made to divert the course laid down by God and carried out by the clergy.

Guernes follows Grim closely in having Henry of Winchester appeal for the newly-elected archbishop to be released from all monetary obligations for which he might have been liable or responsible in his capacity as the king's chancellor. This in itself may seem to be a detail of no great importance, save that it reminds us of Becket's very recent secular connections, but we shall see later, in another chapter, how it is important for this piece of information to be included at this stage. Soon after this, the king's orders to his officers suggest that he cannot now be too unhappy with the result of the election, or at least he must be quickly reconciled to it, because he had told them previously that he would accept the election result. At all events, this request is granted and Becket is in fact released from his financial ties. Thus he can be presented for consecration without sign or suspicion of blemish, much to the delight of many people, as Guernes is no doubt pleased to tell us:

Les justises le rei, ki il ot comandé
 Ke quanqu'il en fereient par li ert cumfermé,
 E sis filz ensement, l'en unt quite clamé
 D'acuntes, de tut el, e al clergie livré.
 Dunc l'unt a arceveske a grant joie levé.
 N'i ot gueres de tens après ceo trespasé
 K'a Cantorbire l'unt a grant joie mené
 E a mult grant honor receü e sacré.

Mes n'a pas erranment sun abit remué:

Par l'abit volt covrir ceo qu'al cuer ot planté.

(Lines 526-535)

But, as the last lines quoted above suggest, the new archbishop immediately ran into difficulty, creating a feeling of illwill, not in the officers of the State or the king, but amongst his own monks at Canterbury, over the question of the way in which he dressed. It seems that he was reluctant to assume the monastic habit, and it was not long before grumblings and complaints were being made against him. Guernes, again following Grim, tells us how the archbishop was warned by a monk, who told him of a vision which he had seen, to put off his secular dress and adopt that which was appropriate to his new position. This is a none too auspicious beginning, but Guernes, in keeping with Grim, and William of Canterbury, who, as we shall see, also has something to say on the subject, decides to include the incident in his poem, as follows:

E li seignur en unt suvent entr'els grucié,
 K'il entrot enz el quer, sa cote par sun pié;
 Ne sorent qu'en sun cuer ot Deus edifié.
 Unski privé li fu l'en aveit chastié,
 Un sunge li conta k'uns moines ot sungié.
 Deus s'aparut al moine e dist lui en dormant:
 "Va tost al chancelier; di li que jeo li mant
 Prenge abit monial, ne voist mie targant.
 E s'il nel fet, tutdis l'irai contraliant,
 E mal li avendra adès a sun vivant."
 Quant l'arceveske l'ot, un ris li ad jeté.
 Partie li mostra de ceo qu'out en pensé;
 Mes a Deu sulement ad sun cuer demustre,
 Ki l'ot, ainz k'il fust nez, eslit e apele.

Car tut ert ja changié de tel cum ot esté.

(Lines 536-550)

M. E. Étienne states¹⁸ that Guernes is "évidemment scandalisé" at Becket's highly irreligious attitude to this severe and pious warning. This may be so, for we could hardly expect such a reaction on the part of the archbishop as laughter. However, it must be pointed out that Guernes has chosen, or perhaps mistaken, to alter Grim's words Quod audiens venerabilis vir amarissime lacrymatus est, into his own Quant l'arceveske l'ot un ris li ad jete.^(Line 546) It is difficult indeed to see why Guernes should wish to give this different account; even if he had heard of such a detail as Becket's laughter on this occasion, he still had before him Grim's account, and must have been sorely tempted to adopt the latter. It may be that he intends Becket to be laughing to himself in his silent knowledge of his unknown communion with God, but it is perhaps tempting to suggest that Guernes has misunderstood amarissime lacrymatus, perhaps in some confusion with risus, although, again, it is not easy to see exactly how such a mistake could arise. We must in the last analysis accept that Guernes probably did have some oral source for this detail. Again, it may be the imperfection of his knowledge which leads to the singularity of this detail, which he felt unable to reject completely, although he was unable to say more on the subject of Becket's laughter than he actually tells us here.

This detail set apart, however, Guernes is quick and skilful enough to turn the incident to advantage, and, having developed the matter more fully than either Grim or William of Canterbury,¹⁹ concludes this passage by explaining to us Becket's real reasons for behaving in this way:

Par tels raisuns esteit de treis parz anguissiez.

Mes a un mult prudume s'en esteit cunseilliez,
 Priur de Kenilwrdhe; cil li ad dras tailliez.
 Les regulers a pris, les seculers laissiez;
 Chanoine fu defors, mes dedenz fu chargiez.
 Trop grant religiun ne volt defors mustrer,
 Mes les dous ordres volt en un sul cors porter:
 La cule ot suz les dras, - cel ordæ volt celer, -
 Mes de pans e de manches l'aveit fait escurter;
 La haire ot a la char pur son cors plus grever.

(Lines 576-585)

It may be that such were Becket's real reasons for his reluctance to adopt the monastic habit, and certainly he seems to have desired to conceal his hair-shirt, to which Guernes no doubt rejoiced to give a forward reference; but we must suspect that Guernes was prepared here, if necessary, to rationalize the actions of the archbishop so as to remove the possibility of strong criticism and replace it with an impression of modesty and silent suffering which might invoke sympathy and admiration and understanding. Guernes has turned for some of his details here to William of Canterbury, and it is possible to see his explanation of the thoughts in Becket's mind as stemming from the following passage in William's Vita:

"Habitueque monachili cum cilico suscepto, spiritualem hominem, quem sub honestate tamen vestium oculis hominum eximebat, meritis implebat. Paucisque consciis sub lorica fidei militabat, gaudens quia in triplici veste triplicem personam gereret; exteriori clericum exhiberet, interiori monachum occultaret, intima deserti molestias citra desertum sustineret; gaudens quia exteriori mundum falleret, interiori fratribus suis se conformaret, intima motus illicitos carnis reprimeret; gaudens quia exterius canonicus pateret, intime solitarius

lateret, interius mandatum Domini compleret."

(William of Canterbury, ch.10, p.10)

But if William is Guernes' starting point he differs from him in some respects. Guernes does not suggest quite so strongly that Becket actively set out to deceive the eyes of the world, and he is evidently not so keen to follow through the theme of the triplicate in the intricate and rather moralising way of William. Instead he is more direct, more precise, although the earlier part of the incident, in which the point of view of the monks in the matter of Becket's dress is expressed, is quite long, and seems to be an original piece in Guernes, containing in fact just such information as we might have expected him to find in the oral tradition at Canterbury, especially in this instance, with which the monks themselves are so directly involved. But for the most part here, Guernes chooses to keep his account uncomplicated, and such motives as he attributes to Becket, briefly expressed, show his concern rather that his picture of Becket should not be marred, than that his example should greatly edify his audience. Thus Guernes turns to advantage what aspects he can in the story here, not so much to set before his public a worthy example to follow, but to show that the man so recently elected to this high office had valid reasons for acting in a manner which suggested a lack of regard or respect for the correct forms of the Church. Becket's modesty here may not be intended to outweigh the balance against him which his initial reluctance to conform created, and the effect is one of impression rather than edification.

Guernes follows William of Canterbury in telling us that Becket thus avoided the fate of two of his predecessors, AElsige and Stigant, whose deaths, or, at least in the case of the latter, departure from favour, are interpreted as just rewards for their failure to carry out their obligations as Becket has just done. This, for us, rather tenuous

and unconvincing piece of historical justification, might indeed carry more weight in the twelfth century, and might certainly be seen as a cautionary example. William of Canterbury has previously told us that Becket was granted the pallium, the token of his office, by Pope Alexander III, who was then in exile from Rome in France, first at Montpellier, and then for a longer period, some twenty months, at Sens. There is no suggestion in William's account that any difficulty was encountered in this matter; rather his brevity and matter-of-fact tone suggest the opposite.²⁰ But Guernes elaborates on this theme, giving us details of the receipt of the pallium which are to be found in no other author. Becket sends the Abbot of Evesham, Adam de Senlis, at the head of a party containing two clerks and a monk, and they found the pope at Montpellier. But Guernes differs greatly from William of Canterbury in suggesting that they met with no initial success in their requests to have the symbol of Becket's office granted to them on his behalf. Guernes suggests that this may be due to the influence of the cardinals, for whom he already shows no great liking, hinting that the party might have been frustrated on account of its failure to produce any gift or payment either to the pope or to the cardinals. Only as the result of an earnest and pious application, made largely in scriptural terms, to the pope himself, is their request finally granted; the Abbot of Evesham addresses the pope:

"Sire, fet il, ceo dit Deus, ki est veritez

(Par tut le deveiz fere, quant el liu Deu seez):

'Demandez justement', fet Deus, 'e vus l'avrez:

Querez le seintement, e vus le troverez;

Li uis vus ert overz, s'al verrai us butez.'

"Mult sumes travaillié e mult de luinz venum.

Ceo que volum aver seintement demendum;

Ici devom trover ceo que nus requerum.

Vus nus overeiz l'us; dignement i butum.

Vus estes el liu Deu, Deu en vos troverum."

Dunc li dist l'apostuille, quant il ot parfiné:

"Frater, tu prendras ci ceo que as demandé.

Tu l'as quis justement, e tu l'avras trové;

Nus t'overum mes l'uis, car tu i as buté."

Dunc aveit hum avant le pallium porté.

(Lines 621-635)²¹

Guernes was almost certainly on the continent at the time that these events were taking place, and possibly he was in a better position to hear of developments than some of the other writers. Also, if Adam did come from Senlis, it is to be noted that this is the area, at least, from which Guernes originated,²² and he may have heard some news of these exchanges from someone who knew Adam well, but this is not too convincing. No other biographer, as has been said, mentions in detail the quest for the pallium. Why, then, should Guernes include it? First of all, he had evidently gone into the question in some detail, as the length of his account of the receipt of the pallium is quite considerable. He may have found his material in some written source, now lost, but it is more probable that, investigating some rumour concerning this story, or perhaps quite incidentally to his main purpose, he actually came across one of the people who had been most closely associated with the affair. Indeed, the fact that he can tell us precisely how many people were involved, and what they were, suggests the possibility that he found at Canterbury one of them, whom he pressed for details, which he duly received. Such a first-hand source might help to account for the wealth of detail which Guernes gives to his account, and would moreover give Guernes no great reason to doubt its

veracity. If this is so, we must assume that this oral source at Canterbury was either neglected by other writers, or, more probably, unknown to them. Guernes may, then, have consulted, if not Adam of Senlis, one of the dui bon clerc e uns moines,^(Line 599) whom he is careful to mention in his account. Having done so, there would be little reason for the poet to qualify to any great extent what he had been told, and thus he would feel at liberty to include this incident at length. The historical desire for completion no doubt dictated his decision here to some degree, and it also adds a little, but only a little, to the historical justification of Becket's position as archbishop, which was to be questioned by some later, and this end is served as well by William of Canterbury's brevity as Guernes' expansiveness. However, his conclusion suggests that there is some merit in not following the custom of having to present gifts in order to receive confirmation of one's office, but in making an earnest and honest application for recognition. It may then be a mild attack on the system propagated by the cardinals, and at the same time as it is historically complete, the credit in this matter can be shown to redound to the archbishop himself. It may possibly be this latter element which is important to Guernes' purpose, and we may doubt whether, although the desire for historical accuracy and detail does seem to be more remarkable, the 'moral' aspect would justify the length which the episode as a whole demands and receives in his account, and his audience may equally have done so, despite the firm and impressive message with which the poet concludes:

Le pallium lur a l'apostoile chargié
 E il s'en sunt od tut ariere repairié.
 Einsivint Thomas senz dun e senz pechié;
 N'i ad pur ceo denier ne or n'argent baillié;
 Essample i deivent prendre li successur del sié.

(Lines 636-640)

From this little exemplum, Guernes goes on to deliver the first and longest of a number of what may be termed without injustice sermons, in which he tries to explain to his audience the workings of God's ways, his grace, justice, and divine purpose, before proceeding to tell how the first signs of disagreement and a rift arose between King Henry and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Of these 'sermons', more will be said in a later chapter, but before we bring to a conclusion our examination of Guernes' treatment of Becket's election, there is one further consideration, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, to which we must return.

Becket, a man much used to life in the secular world, has just been elected, not without some opposition, as we have seen, to the highest position which the English Church could offer in its own lands. To have achieved this is a great honour, and in order to do so, a man must be possessed of some especial merit, prowess and ability. We should not expect the poet to pass over this aspect of the new archbishop's worthiness and aptitude for his office. Let us see what Guernes has to say about Becket in this respect:

E si tost cum il ot la dignité emprise,
 Les mals murs a guerpi e seculer servise.
 Reddement governa e clers e saint'iglise,
 Tint preste de ferir l'espee de justise;
 Nel lessa pur pour ne pur grant coveitise.
 Tut ceo que dut amer bien maintint e ama,
 E ceo que dut haïr guerpi e esluingna;
 Al servise le rei cuntre Deu n'aprisma.
 Les povres revesti e pot e governa;
 De Dammedeu servir, quanque pot, se pena.

(Lines 551-560)

Guernes does not claim here for Becket any greater merit than he had hitherto given us to understand that the new archbishop had possessed as the king's chancellor. He has already given us a picture of a worldly man, who gradually before our eyes has applied his unquestioned qualities of diligence and assiduity and become perhaps more conscious of his religious ties and inclinations, while there can have been no doubt in the minds of Guernes' public as to the chastity of the man. But it may perhaps be questionable whether these attributes alone are sufficient to recommend him for the archbishopric. Thus, once elected, and without stopping to allow his public to question the election in the light of this, it might be necessary and natural for the writer to wish to impress upon his audience the man's undoubted zeal in his new office. However effective it may be to state that he had private communion with God and that God now directed his paths, (an aspect which Guernes can hardly be said to have stressed greatly at this stage), the archbishop would undoubtedly grow in stature in the eyes and minds of the public if he could be shown to be putting his new-found strength and virtues into practice. But the picture which Guernes has given us here, whilst no doubt fair, is by no means an unqualified eulogy of the archbishop. To begin with, he admits that Becket desists from les mals murs ^(Line 552) and seculer servise, ^(Line 552) which redounds to his credit, but it is a sword which cuts both ways, and Guernes might have been reluctant earlier to allow himself to associate so closely Thomas Becket and avowedly mals murs.²³ The whole tenor of the description of Becket's first actions as archbishop is one which suggests honesty and diligence, rather than inherent saintliness. Even when we come to the final line of the description, the effort of Becket to serve his new master is implied, almost as if it did not come altogether naturally: and indeed, if we refer back only a short way in the poem we can see the similarity

in Guernes' description between De Dammedeu servir, quanque pot, se
 (Line 560)
pena, and his descriptions of Becket's approach to duty in other
 circumstances. Of his service to Archbishop Theobald, a matter in
 which God also guided him, Guernes says that De servir sun seignur,
 (Line 253)
quanque pot, se pena. Of his service to King Henry, with especial
 reference to the wars with King Louis in France, we are told that De
 (Line 405)
bien servir le rei s'esteit mult entremis. Nor are we told that Becket
 had any great deliberations over his new way of life, or that as a result
 of much soul-searching he emerged with an even greater will and
 determination than he had had before to put what talents he had to the
 service of his church, his flock, or his spiritual master. His resolve
 to do his utmost with diligence and honesty and fearlessness is portrayed
 as being as great as ever, but not necessarily any greater. This aspect
 of Guernes' picture of the archbishop is all the more striking when we
 compare it with the Latin biographies which he knew well on this subject.
 It is true that Guernes' rather brief description may owe something to
 a passage in Edward Grim, but to say, as M. Walberg does,²⁴ that Guernes
 "abrège considérablement", is perhaps rather an understatement of the
 case. Grim is at pains to impress upon his reader the extent of the
 transformation which has taken place in Becket, the very great
 strictures which he imposed upon himself, the physical rigours of his
 new mode of life and how much he was conscious of the need to live up
 to this new plan which he imposed upon himself. Yet Grim has been
 more careful, as we saw in the previous chapter, to protect the saintly
 aspects of Becket's character in his portrayal of the earlier years of
 his life, and therefore should not be very conscious of a great need
 to impress upon his reader how great a change was effected in the man.
 And in all this, it is necessary, perhaps more than in Guernes, for
 the reader to be made aware of the working out of destiny according to

God's purposes. Grim is much too lengthy to be quoted in full on this subject, but the following extract will suggest the tone and intention of his account; Becket has been reflecting in private on what he will now require of himself, and how he should conduct himself:

"His et similibus quotidie, imo et continue, ad congressum spiritualis militiae vir sanctus armavit animum, et propositum solidavit. Praeventus siquidem inspiratione divinae gratiae, et jam terrena omnia sub se videns et contemnens, animo ad coelestia conscendebat. Nec moratus arrepto spiritualis zeli mucrone secuit nodum necessitatis antiquae, qua vinciri videbatur eatenus, et saevus exactor sibi semetipsum mactavit Deo, hostiam vivam, sanctam, Deoque placentem. Siquidem attenuato victu gulae jugulat appetitum, irrumpentes in animum illicitos motus sacrae lectionis et orationis assiduitate reverberat, reprimit insolentiam naturalis incendii somno brevioris, et vestis mollitiem asperiore commutavit cilicio; et, ut multa praeteream, carnem suam crucifigens cum vitiis et concupiscentiis totum se redegit infra metas necessitatis, et ab eo qui fuerat totus alter efficitur. Quicquid honestum, quicquid sanctum, quicquid justitiae fuit, et fecit et docuit, et quaecumque his contraria a se funditus elongavit. Et quidem ab exordio ordinationis suae tantum divinae dilectionis et devotionis sanctae, tantum etiam zeli contra omnem injustitiam, concepit, ut nulli personae, cujuscumque esset dignitatis, pepercerit, quae quicquam contra traditam sibi a Domino justitiae normam praesumpisset. Sed nec regis obsequiis seu voluntati, contra Regis omnium voluntatem, nec minis nec amore victus obtemperare ulterius adquevit."

(Grim, ch.19, p.370)

This is the type of extended eulogy, in which little qualification of Becket's merit is allowed, which Guernes could find without difficulty

in Edward Grim's account, but which, as we have seen, he seems not to wish to imitate. We can see that by comparison with Grim, Guernes' commendation of the new archbishop is muted and more controlled. If we turn to the account of William of Canterbury, we shall find that he is not so expansive as Grim, but still has considerably more to say on this subject than has the French poet. He also makes a number of biblical parallels, unlike Grim, but Guernes eschews them in his own version.²⁵ William gives certain details of Becket's life, which Becket himself, in modesty, would have wished, at least during his lifetime, to have remained unknown. The most impressive detail here is the story of how Becket daily and in secret washed the feet of thirteen poor men, or at least if he could not, had it done by some other member of the clergy. Perhaps Guernes doubted the veracity of this story, if he noticed the detail, but at any rate it would not accord well with the tone of Guernes' own account, which, as we have seen, fails to elevate the archbishop almost to a new plane in the way in which the Vita of Edward Grim, and, to a lesser extent, that of William of Canterbury, do. He prefers to concentrate the attention of his audience on the thoroughness and diligence which the archbishop brings to his position, and, whilst not suggesting that Becket was anything less than devout, sincere and considerate in all that he did, he does not feel the need to impress upon us the great change of mood, mind and heart, in the character of the archbishop which is important in the Latin biographies, and which Edward Grim, in particular, seems most anxious to stress. It is true that Guernes has, in an earlier part of the poem, gone some way towards suggesting the fitness of Becket's character for the archbishopric, in that he was chaste, scrupulous, earnest and studious in his devotion to his work, whatever duties it might involve, but he has arguably said less to suggest a saintly picture of the archbishop

before his election than either Grim or William of Canterbury, and there is little in this part of his poem that suggests that he is unhappy with his portrayal of Becket, or that he wishes in any way to redress this balance. It is fair, in short, to say that Guernes' account is much less interiorated than either William of Canterbury's or Grim's; that is to say that Guernes is unwilling to go very far in the field of surmising what Becket's own thoughts might be, what considerations might be going through his mind at this time. He makes much less of any inner transformation which may have taken place in the newly-elected archbishop, because anything which cannot be factually verified to his own satisfaction is not reported in Guernes' account; much more than either of the two Latin authors whom he consulted at this stage, he limits greatly any conjectures on what Becket thought, and concentrates rather on what he did. He certainly will not invent if he cannot substantiate, especially in the matter of unreported thoughts. In concentrating on externals, Guernes was no doubt bearing in mind the reaction of his audience, who would welcome more detail in action, and less psychology or discussion of inner thoughts, and to some extent this consciousness of his audience reveals a difference in tone and spirit in the French poem from the Latin biographies, a difference which is also reflected by Guernes' desire generally to omit long passages leading to pious morals (although he does include one towards the end of this section of his poem, which is really divorced from the narrative thread), and to omit such biblical parallels and references as he might have found in his Latin sources.

As was suggested at the beginning of this chapter, and as we have seen, there are certain aspects of Guernes' account of the election of 1162 which are not totally satisfactory, in that he fails to explain such details as the king's change of plan at the time of the election,

and he does not in the last analysis, leave us with a very precise idea of the relevance of the part played by the king as a whole, although this may have been beyond him without a degree of invention or largely unsubstantiated rationalisation. Furthermore, he now makes mention, although admittedly only in passing and as if hurriedly, of faults and misdemeanours on the part of the archbishop which had previously remained hidden; but he neither explains nor describes them in detail, and we may conclude that he had been reluctant to include them earlier. He would no doubt be aware that some at least of his public would overlook or miss their existence, as their nature is that of a back-reference, and a listening audience would have no opportunity to think back or to question him on this point. But to the reader, and perhaps to the twelfth-century eye as well as that of a modern reader, albeit to a lesser degree, it is a defect in that it requires either explanation or expansion, whereas Guernes is expansive on things of seemingly lesser importance, but which reflect the archbishop in a somewhat better light, and it is hard to resist the temptation to conclude that Guernes is aware of the vulnerability of the archbishop here, and, sensitive of his cause in a way in which he had not been earlier in the poem, is rather more selective in his treatment, if not in his choice, of the material for this section of his poem. This does not mean that he pays no attention to historical detail, for this is demonstrably not the case, but he must juxtapose the two motives which are uppermost in his mind at this stage more carefully than might earlier have been the case. But it is to his credit that he does here make mention of these issues, which are after all of a wider nature than the election itself, and which might have been omitted, had his desire to protect the image of the archbishop been of paramount importance. And it is no doubt due to his sense of verisimilitude and the need for

historical accuracy in the last analysis that he refrains from the long and eulogising description of the new archbishop in which the two Latin authors have, as we have seen, indulged, in which Becket does, almost before our eyes, become metamorphosed, and emerges, at the end of what may not unfairly be termed a panegyric passage, a new man. In Guernes' poem, we may say only that his diligence and zealous devotion to duty seem as great as ever, and this reflects the fact that, generally, Guernes' account differs in both tone and spirit from those of the Latin biographers. We have seen that he desires to be more historically accurate and exacting than they, and that suppositions or projected reflections have little place in his poem at this stage. No doubt with his audience in mind, at least to some extent, Guernes exteriorizes much of what is interiorization in the works of Grim and William of Canterbury. Nor does he pronounce on the validity of the various points of view which may find expression in his poem, whereas both the Latin writers tend to lean towards the propagation of the pious thoughts which they discuss in their accounts. Guernes does not attempt to impress upon us the pious, almost mysteriously religious way in which Becket is brought to the change in his life to anything approaching the extent that Grim and William of Canterbury do. This is not to say that he feels anything but pleasure and joy at the change which takes place in Becket and the prospects of what might follow, but his account is generally more matter-of-fact and circumstantial, and the overall effect is to give the impression of a man who changed, rather than was changed.

It was suggested at the beginning of this chapter that Guernes did not deal with the episode of the election of Thomas Becket to the see of Canterbury with the same degree of clarity and smoothness as his principal sources, notably Edward Grim; our investigation of Guernes'

treatment has borne out this earlier assertion. We may feel that Guernes was perhaps something less than the skilful and talented writer here that he has already in the poem shown himself to be, but perhaps it is possible to suggest that there may be another reason for the apparent shortcomings of his poem at this stage. We have seen that Guernes tends to tell us more of the early failings of the chancellor and the new archbishop, and if he does dwell on them more than other authors this must necessarily make it more difficult for him to produce an account of this part of Becket's life which can compare favourably with their accounts for smoothness, clarity, and cogency. But this should perhaps give us a clue, for, if we accept that Guernes failed here to write as well as he might have done, we are assuming that his aims coincided with those of his written sources. It might not have been difficult for him to produce an account which equalled Grim's in clarity and evident logicality, but that he did not do so suggests that he may not have wished to do so. We have seen that a considerable amount of his material came from sources unknown to us, which we may reasonably take to have been oral sources at Canterbury, and this in itself may betoken Guernes' desire for historicity. Thus the 'shortcomings' of his work here from a logical viewpoint may reflect an attempt to get at the true nature of the election, and to include details of it when he had what he admitted to be only imperfect or limited information, and was necessarily handicapped in a search for veracity. That he is more circumspect than Grim and sometimes than William of Canterbury tends to confirm this view, for had his aims coincided with theirs, he had only to parallel closely their texts to produce a very similar effect. As it is, it may not be unjust to credit him with motives of greater historical accuracy and a more circumspect appraisal of the situation than his Latin counterparts, and this in view of, rather than in spite

of, the apparent lack of clarity, and sometimes logicality and cogency, which exists in this part of his poem.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. J.C.Robertson, Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury: a biography.
(London, 1859), ch.1 .
2. Dom David Knowles, Thomas Becket (London, 1970) p.6.
3. Knowles, Thomas Becket, p.7 .
4. L.B.Radford, Thomas of London before his Consecration, (Cambridge, 1894). Radford attempts to reconcile all these accounts as follows: Gilbert Becket approached the archbishop through the two brothers Baldwin and Eustace, who were friends of Theobald. The latter granted Thomas an 'interview', and Thomas was brought to the archiepiscopal court at Harrow by the official Ralph of London. pp.28-31 .
5. Radford, Thomas of London before his Consecration, p.31.
6. Knowles, Thomas Becket, p. 39 .
7. W.L.Warren, Henry II, (London, 1973), pp.79-81.
8. J.R.Green, Henry II, (London, 1892), p.65 .
9. Ed. W.J. Millor and H.E.Butler, The Letters of John of Salisbury Volume One, The Early Letters (1153-1161), (London, 1955) p.223
10. A.Saltman, Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, (London,1956), p.158 .
11. Knowles, Thomas Becket, p.45 .
12. The Letters of John Salisbury, Volume One, pp.35-36.
13. Knowles, Thomas Becket, p.47 .
14. Robertson, Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury: a biography, p.37.
See also, Raymonde Foreville, L'Église et la Royauté en Angleterre sous Henri II Plantagenêt (1154-1189), (Paris, 1943), livre II, ch I .

15. The Letters of John of Salisbury, Volume One, p.250 .
16. Green, Henry II, p.80 .
17. Knowles, Thomas Becket, p.51 .
18. Z.N.Brooke, The English Church and the Papacy from the Conquest to the Reign of John, (Cambridge, 1931), pp.198-9.
19. Brooke, The English Church and the Papacy from the Conquest to the Reign of John, p.189 .
20. See Knowles, Thomas Becket, p.50ff; Green, Henry II, pp.80-81; Robertson, Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury: a biography, pp.37-39; Foreville, L'Église et la Royauté en Angleterre sous Henri II Plantagenêt (1154-1189), livre II, ch.2; R.Barber, Henry Plantagenet, a biography, (London, 1964) pp.100-103; W.H.Hutton, Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, (Cambridge, 1925), ch.3 .
21. See above, pp.19-20.
22. Warren, Henry II, pp.399-403 and pp.447-453.
23. Warren, Henry II, pp.400-401.
24. Warren, Henry II, p.401.
25. Warren, Henry II, pp.456-457.
26. See above, pp.28-31.
27. Warren, Henry II, p.448.
28. It seems difficult to establish that the king could have known that Becket's influence on him was bound to wane, if, as suggested, he did not know in advance of Becket's intention to resign, unless it can be assumed that Henry himself consciously meant to see that this happened. At all events, if he did attempt to alienate Becket's influence in this way, it is possible that the latter was not unaware of this, that there

was an element of acrimony, as well as the major considerations of principle, in the actions of both men in the rather pronounced, deliberate behaviour which they displayed immediately upon Becket's decision to resign, even before the rift was in any serious way exacerbated by later developments.

29. Foreville, L'Église et la Royauté en Angleterre sous Henri II Plantagenêt (1154-1189), pp.104-105, has a further theory: that Henry himself may have had doubts as to the wisdom of his decision, and that once the election had been made, there was undue haste in proceeding to the consecration because it was feared that Henry might indeed change his mind. Equally, there were fears of difficulties which Roger de Pont L'Évêque, Archbishop of York, might raise. The election took place on 23 May 1162; as we have seen, Becket was ordained priest on the second of June, and consecrated the following day, with Henry, Bishop of Winchester, officiating at the ceremony. Such a theory requires that by May there was some considerable degree of active support among the bishops for Becket's candidature, unless it is to be supposed that Henry himself sanctioned the haste of the ceremony for the same reason.
30. Brooke, The English Church and the Papacy from the Conquest to the Reign of John, pp.193-194 .
31. Robertson, Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury: a biography, ch.4 .
32. Barber, Henry Plantagenet, a biography, pp.100-103 .
33. Knowles, Thomas Becket, p.55 .
34. Warren, Henry II, p.451 .
35. Barber, Henry Plantagenet, a biography, pp.100-103, states that it is very improbable that Becket should have accepted the archbishopric fully aware of the dangers and difficulties

which he would encounter, and that it was only later events and experience which hardened his resolve and brought him to open resistance of the king. This view is not shared by those other historians whose views have been discussed here.

36. Knowles, Thomas Becket, pp.78-79, and Ed.A.Morey and C.H.L.Brooke, The Letters and Charters of Gilbert Foliot, (Cambridge,1967), letters nos. 142 and 144 .
37. Warren, Henry II, p.504.
38. Foreville, L'Église et la Royauté en Angleterre sous Henri II . Plantagenêt (1154-1189),p.116.
39. See Brooke, The English Church and the Papacy from the Conquest to the Reign of John, ch.12.
40. C.Duggan, The Becket Dispute and the Criminous Clerks, article ^{the Institute of} in The Bulletin of Historical Research,XXXV, (1962, pp.1-28), p.23 .
41. Warren, Henry II, p.460, points out that possibly as many as one in six of the population was a member of the clergy, although many of these were not, and would never be, ordained for the priesthood.
42. F.W.Maitland, Henry II and the Criminous Clerks, article in The English Historical Review, VII, (1892, p.p.224-235), p.234 .
43. See Duggan, The Becket Dispute and the Criminous Clerks, pp.1-28.
44. See Maitland, Henry II and the Criminous Clerks, pp.224-235.
45. Knowles, Thomas Becket, p.85; see also Warren, Henry II, pp.467-469. Warren feels that whatever the strengths and weaknesses of his case, Becket was unnecessarily and unwisely provocative and extreme in his approach; Robertson, Archbishop of Canterbury: a biography, p.80, taking issue over the

question of the authenticity of the canons, declares categorically against the archbishop: "Nothing, as appears to us, can be plainer than that the archbishop's cause was decidedly wrong".

46. For the text of the constitutions, see the appendix; for a fuller discussion of the constitutions and their implications see Warren, Henry II, pp.473-485; Knowles, Thomas Becket, pp.87-94; Green, Henry II, pp.96-101; Hutton, Thomas Becket Archbishop of Canterbury, pp.87-104; Robertson, Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, a biography, pp.89-108; Foreville, L'Église et la Royauté en Angleterre sous Henri II Plantagenêt (1154-1189), p.125ff; Barber, Henry Plantagenêt, a biography, pp.110-115.
47. See above, pp.47-50.
48. For a detailed discussion of the bishops and their positions in the conflict between Becket and the king, see Dom David Knowles, The Episcopal Colleagues of Archbishop Thomas Becket, (Cambridge 1951), especially chapters 4 and 5.
49. Becket claimed that he had been acquitted of all his responsibilities as chancellor, and that all his accounts had been accepted as just, when he resigned the chancellorship, and that this had been ratified.
50. Warren, Henry II, pp.488-489.
51. Whilst Becket seems prepared to admit this to the pope on this occasion, he seems to have denied the charge strenuously at other times, and he did not claim that papal reinstatement in late 1164 set right previous confessed irregularities.
52. Warren, Henry II, p.492.
53. For the order and significance of Becket's three letters to the king in 1166, (i) "Loqui de Deo", (ii) "Desiderio desideravi",

- (iii) "Exspectans exspectavi", see Foreville, L'Église et la Royauté en Angleterre sous Henri II Plantagenêt (1154-1189), pp.213-222. Mlle Foreville believes that the order given here is the correct one, contrary to the usual theory of order (i) (iii) (ii), and that "Exspectans Exspectavi" is subsequent to Becket's pronouncements at Vézelay.
54. Beryl Smalley, The Becket Conflict and the Schools, (Oxford 1973) p.62 .
55. For a discussion of the papal letters concerning the coronation of young Henry, and the possible extent of the bishop's knowledge of them at the time of the ceremony, see Warren, Henry II, pp.500-504; Foreville, L'Église et la Royauté en Angleterre sous Henri II Plantagenêt (1154-1189), pp.302-307; Green, Henry II, pp.143-148; Robertson, Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury: a biography, ch.12; Hutton, Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, ch.12; Brooke, The English Church and the Papacy from the Conquest to the Reign of John, pp.208-211; Barber, Henry Plantagenet, a biography, pp.140-142 .
56. Warren, Henry II, p.507.
57. For the text of the Concordat of Avranches, see, ed.J.C.Robertson, Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, in seven volumes; (Rolls Series, London, 1875-1885) Volume VII, p.513 ff. For a discussion of its effects and implications in greater detail, see Foreville, L'Église et la Royauté en Angleterre sous Henri II Plantagenêt (1154-1189), pp.329-367 and pp.389-401; Warren, Henry II, pp.518-555 .
58. E.R.Kemp, Canonization and Authority in the Western Church, (London 1948) pp.86-89,

59. Quoted in Kemp, Canonization and Authority in the Western Church, p.87.
60. Robertson, Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury: a biography, p.318.
61. For the views of the historians here on Becket and for an evaluation of his career as archbishop, see ed. Robertson, Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury: a biography, ch.15; Hutton, Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, ch.14; Warren, Henry II, pp.399-403 and 511-517; Knowles, Thomas Becket, ch.12; Smalley, The Becket Conflict and the Schools ch.5.
62. Hutton, Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, pp.249-253.
63. Warren, Henry II, p.517.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. C.Hippeau, La Vie de Saint Thomas le Martyr par Garnier de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, publiée et précédée d'une introduction, (Paris, 1859) p.204 .
2. E.Walberg, La Vie de Saint Thomas le Martyr par Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, poème historique de XIIe siècle, (1172-1174), (Lund, 1922) .
3. These commentators and editors include the following:
 V. Le Clerc, article Garnier, L'Histoire Littéraire de la France, (Paris 1856), tome xxxiii, p.368 ff; G.Paris, La Littérature Française au Moyen Âge, (7th edition, Paris 1913) pp.237-238; M. Le Roux de Lincy, La Vie et la Mort de Saint Thomas de Cantorbéry, par Garnier de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, article in the Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes, 1er série, tome iv, 1842-1843, pp.208-241; Hippeau, La Vie de Saint Thomas le Martyr par Garnier de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, introduction, ppvii-xlvii; E.Étienne, La Vie Saint Thomas Le Martir, poème historique de XII^e siècle, composé par Garnier de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, thèse pour de Doctorat, (Paris, 1883); A. Mebes, Über Garnier von Pont-Ste-Maxence, dissertation, (Breslau, 1876); E.Magnússon, Thómas Saga Erkibyskups, Two volumes, (Rolls Series, London, 1883) volume II, preface, pp.lxxxvii-lxxxviii; P.Mayer, Fragments d'une Vie de saint Thomas de Cantorbéry, (Paris, 1885), introduction, pp.i-iii;

E.A.Abbott, St.Thomas of Canterbury, his Death and Miracles, two volumes, (London, 1898) volume I, pp.25-26; T.Carlé, Der altfranzösische Dichter Garnier von Pont-Ste-Maxence und seine Zeit, dissertation, (Munster, 1914); L.Halphen, Les Biographes de Thomas Becket, article in Revue Historique, tome cii, (1909), pp.35-45; the list of commentators is not intended to be exhaustive, as other surveys of early French literature equally may contain references to Garnier rather than Guernes.

4. For a discussion and an assessment of the six manuscripts of the poem, and another incomplete section of the poem, see Walberg, La Vie de Saint Thomas, introduction, ch.vi, pp.cxi-cxxv. See also Le Roux de Lincy, La Vie et la Mort de Saint Thomas de Cantorbéry, pp.214-217; Hippéau, La Vie de Saint Thomas, introduction, ch.vii, pp.xlviii-liv; Étienne, La Vie Saint Thomas Le Martir, pp.1-2.
5. Ed.E.Walberg, Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence: La Vie de Saint Thomas Becket, (Classiques Français du Moyen Age, Paris, 1936) p.181. I have only used this edition to quote from the text of the poem, and after each quotation I have given the appropriate lines references in brackets, and have omitted any reference to page numbers, which are not necessary for consulting such references; all other references are to the Lund edition unless otherwise stated. (The texts are identical in these two editions).

6. For the text of this poem, see Walberg, La Vie de Saint Thomas, (Paris, 1936 edition), pp.191-192; for a discussion of the poem, see Walberg, La Vie de Saint Thomas, (Lund, 1922 edition) pp.xxiii-xxiv; pp. cxii-cxv; pp.210-211. (Unless otherwise stated, all references to Walberg, La Vie de Saint Thomas, refer to this Lund edition).
7. Le Clerc, article Garnier, in L'Histoire Littéraire de la France, p.370 .
8. Abbott, St.Thomas of Canterbury, his Death and Miracles, volume I, pp.25-26 .
9. Mebes, Über Garnier von Pont-Ste-Maxence, p.3.
10. Magnússon, Thómas Saga Erkibyskups, volume II, pp.lxxxvii-lxxxviii .
11. Halphen, Les Biographes de Thomas Becket, p.42 .
12. Carlé, Der altfranzösische Dichter Garnier von Pont-Ste-Maxence und seine Zeit, p.110.
13. Paris, La Littérature Française au Moyen Age, p.238 .
14. Étienne, La Vie Saint Thomas le Martir, p.1 and p.98.
15. For a fuller, although admittedly not complete, list of the suggested dates, see Walberg, La Vie de Saint Thomas, p.xx ff. Walberg himself concludes in favour of the dating 1172-1174. He also indicates, in a footnote (n.1, p.xxxiii) that the correct explanation to the problem had been given in a very brief form by H.Morf in a compte rendu of Étienne's work, in Deutsche Litteraturzeitung, 1884, col. 1049-1050 .
16. It must be pointed out that three of the manuscripts carry either the reading bien mis or the reading mis bien, in place of pres mis .

17. See, for example, Bond's Handybook for Verifying Dates (Selby's edition, 1887) pp.91-101.
18. Ralph de Diceto, Ymagines Historiarum, (Rolls Series, London, 1876) p.371. Gervais of Canterbury, Chronica, two volumes (Rolls Series, London, 1879-1880), volume I, p.242.
19. Ralph de Diceto, Ymagines Historiarum, p.401 and p.403; Gervais of Canterbury, Chronica .
20. Dr. Ian Short, An Early Draft of Guernes' Vie de Saint Thomas Becket, in Medium Aevum, xlvi-1 1978, pp.20-34;
As he states in note 3, p.33, the fragments had originally been brought to light by late Professor F. Wormald, and had been used and mentioned briefly by Professor M.D.Legge in her Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background, pp.249-250.
21. See Walberg, La Vie de Saint Thomas, introduction chapter II, pp.xxvi-lv, and chapter IV, pp.lxv-xcix .
22. See Halphen, Les Biographes de Thomas Becket, pp.35-45; compte rendu of M.Walberg's Lund edition of the poem in Revue Historique, cxlii, 1923, pp.242-243 .
23. Walberg considers exhaustively the various earlier theories which had been put forward concerning the relationships between the numerous biographers of Becket.
24. Ed J.C.Robertson, Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, seven volumes, (Rolls Series, London, 1875-1885) volume II, pp.429-430.
25. See Walberg, La Vie de Saint Thomas, pp.cxxxiii-cxxxiv.
26. Short, An Early Draft of Guernes' Vie de Saint Thomas Becket pp.31-32 .

27. See ed. Robertson, Materials for the History of Archbishop Thomas Becket, volume II, introduction pp.xix-xxii; for the text of the passio, see volume II, pp.1-19.
28. Claudine I. Wilson, La Vie de Saint Thomas le Martyr par Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, article in The Modern Language Review, xviii, 1923, pp.491-499 .
29. E.Walberg, article in Mélanges de Philologie offerts à L.Johan Vising, (Gothembourg 1925), pp.123-145, and reproduced in M.Walberg's own work, La Tradition Hagiographique de Saint Thomas Becket avant la Fin du XII^e siècle, (Paris 1929) pp.135-172 .

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. See, for example, Ronald C. Finucane, Miracles and Pilgrims, (London, 1977), especially introduction, pp.9-14.
2. Quoted in translation in ed.C.Storey, La Vie de Saint Alexis, (Oxford, 1968), introduction,p.ix. For accounts of the lives of saints, see J.D.M.Ford, The Saint's Life in Vernacular Literature of the Middle Ages, article in the Catholic Historical Review, volume xvii, 1931, pp.268-277; A.T.Baker, Saints' Lives in Anglo-French: their historical, social and literary Importance, article in Essays by Divers Hands, trans of Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom, New Series, volume IV, pp.119-156.
3. David H.Farmer, The Oxford Dictionary of Saints, (Oxford 1978), introduction, pp.x-xi.
4. Étienne, La Vie Saint Thomas le Martir, p.100; see also pp.225-263.
5. Étienne, La Vie Saint Thomas le Martir, p.100. It will be noted that, for the reasons set out in the previous chapter, I am not in complete agreement with Étienne in the matter of which authors Guernes relied upon in the composition of his own poem.
6. It must be pointed out here that one of the manuscripts reads, in our line 146, primes traitai de joie. This would suggest an approach even less careful than the one implied by traitai d'oïe, and that, taking little care over his material, the poet

was not at first very concerned to give an accurate account. The reading adopted by Walberg implies that Guernes wished from the first to be faithful to the truth, but found this impossible from the sources available to him at a distance from Canterbury. In both cases, the evidence of the desire for greater historical accuracy remains.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. For a full account of the growth of the many legends surrounding Becket, see P.A.Brown, The Development of the Legend of Thomas Becket, thesis presented to the University of Pennsylvania, (Philadelphia, 1930). See also Finucane, Miracles and Pilgrims, pp.121-126 and pp.162-166.
2. Edward Grim, Vita Sancti Thomæ Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi et Martyris, in ed.Robertson, Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, seven volumes, (Rolls Series, London, 1875-1885) volume II, pp.353-450; here, prologus p.354. In the following pages, unless otherwise indicated, references to this work will be to this edition; chapter and page references where appropriate will be given directly after the quotation, in the following form: (Grim, prologus, p.354).
3. St.Luke, ch.1, v.6. For Samson, see Judges, ch.13 vv.2-7. For Samuel, see Samuel, ch.1. vv.1-11. (References are to the Authorised Version of the Bible).
4. For further discussion of this incident, see Brown, The Development of the Legend of Thomas Becket, pp.79-81; Abbott, Saint Thomas of Canterbury, his Death and Miracles, volume I, pp.216-219.
5. See lines 581-585, where Becket must attempt to reconcile his position regarding the dress of a monk and the dress of a regular canon; Guernes on this occasion states of Becket trop grant religiun ne volt defors mustrer.
6. William of Canterbury, Vita, Passio et Miracula Sancti Thomæ Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi, in ed.Robertson, Materials for

the History of Thomas Becket, seven volumes, (Rolls Series, London, 1875-1185), volume I, pp.1-136; here ch.4, p.5.

In the following pages, unless otherwise stated, references to this work will be to this edition; chapter and page references where appropriate will be given directly after the quotation, in the following form: (William of Canterbury, ch.4, p.5).

7. For the full text of William of Canterbury's account, see William of Canterbury, ch.4, p.6. For Guernes' version, see lines 300-330. Both accounts are a little too long to quote in full here.
8. This problem was discussed at the end of chapter two; see also Walberg, La Vie de Saint Thomas, introduction, p.lxviii.
9. Walberg threatens to reject lines 391-395 where Guernes seems to come closest to this as inauthentic; see Walberg, La Vie de Saint Thomas, p.223. Certainly if Guernes did make the chancellor say covient a suffrir, it is a very severe statement from his lips, and one which is not reflected elsewhere in the portrayal of his character.
10. A study and comparison of the following lines should serve to reinforce the point made during the preceding pages: lines 349, 332, 300, 372 ,
11. For lines 410-420, compare Grim, ch.14, pp.363-365; Guernes does not take up Grim's comparison of munificence of the chancellor to the role of Joseph in Egypt (cf. Genesis, chs. 39-50).

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. See above, chapter one, pp.27-36.
2. See above, chapter four, especially pp.167-176.
3. See above, chapter four, pp.165-171.
4. See William of Canterbury, ch.4, pp.6-7.
5. For the full texts of the discussion between the two parties in the two biographies, see Guernes, lines 430-455, and Grim, ch.15, p.366.
6. See Grim, ch.15, p.367.
7. Both Grim and Guernes refer to Foliot as the Bishop of London, whilst at the time of Becket's election in 1162 he was still the Bishop of Hereford, being translated to London only in the following year. The aberration is initially on Grim's part, and Guernes, who may well have been unaware of the date of Foliot's translation, at least, probably did not hesitate to follow the Latin writer.
8. Walberg, Le Vie de Saint Thomas, pp.xl-xli; pp.226-228.
9. See above, chapter one, pp.13-26; see also Walberg, Le Vie de Saint Thomas, p.226. It would be difficult for Guernes to exonerate Becket in the face of the evidence which is recorded there. Even if Becket could ultimately be shown to have acted without harm or danger to the Church, the very process of the discussion would be felt to show him in a disadvantageous light.
10. For the whole passage, see William of Canterbury, ch. 5, pp.7-8.

11. We considered this passage, (lines 481-485), a little earlier in this chapter. Walberg, in La Vie de Saint Thomas, p.226, states that il meismes must refer to Becket, although immediately beforehand, Guernes' has been treating Gilbert Foliot's objection to Becket's election. Grammatically, this must be the correct interpretation, but it would be tempting to put the words into Foliot's mouth, bearing in mind the strength of the objections and the charges, and that they would be of a piece with what Foliot has just said. However, the fact that immediately after line 485 Henry begins with the word Fiz, and goes on to address Becket seems to show conclusively that Becket himself is responsible for the objections which are presented in lines 481-485.
12. See above, chapter one, pp.29-35; see also Warren, Henry II, pp.399-403, pp.447-503, for the full version of his theory; to make this theory at all compatible with Guernes' account, however, it seems necessary to assume that Henry, having settled on Becket's election to the see of Canterbury, then thought better of it, and changed his mind, as indeed Guernes suggests.
13. Walberg, La Vie de Saint Thomas, p.lxix .
14. See lines 741-750 ,
15. We saw a recent example of this in chapter four, p.p.167-168, concerning lines 278-280 .
16. See Grim, ch.15, p.366; see also the discussion at the beginning of this chapter .
17. See above, chapter one, pp.71-74, where the questions concerning the coronation of Prince Henry are discussed. Grim and Guernes both record this coronation as taking place during the period

of Becket's exile at Pontigny, that is, between the end of 1164 and November 1166.

18. Étienne, La Vie Saint Thomas le Martir, p.59.
19. For Grim's treatment of this incident in full, see Grim, ch.17 pp.368-369. William of Canterbury passes over the question of the vision and its warning, to discuss Becket's thoughts and how his decision was reached. See William of Canterbury, ch.9 and ch.10, p.10. Guernes borrows some details from this part of William's account, as we shall shortly see .
20. For William's account, see William of Canterbury, ch.8, pp.9-10. For his reference to Stigant and Aelsige, see ch.10, pp.10-11
21. The whole passage is much longer than this; see lines 596-640
22. See above, chapter two, p.83. See also Walberg, La Vie de Saint Thomas, pp.lxx-lxxi .
23. Perhaps the closest admission to misconduct on Becket's part which Guernes has allowed himself to express thus far has occurred in line 349, where the poet tells us that Becket maintained what amounted to a private army and that forveier les menot, e grantment mesfeseit. These may fairly be said to be the strongest criticisms of the future archbishop, in that Guernes has been describing Becket's secular life, in which he has recently said (lines 331-340), that if Becket sinned, he made amends and expiated his sins in private, but now he pursues the same theme with no mitigating remarks, and leaves us with the impression that, whatever the secular merits of his actions, from a clerical or religious point of view his conduct is not fitting or acceptable. Nor could it be claimed

that Guernes is so explicit in order to show a sinner come to repentance, and more than mere repentance, for although this may have some place in his scheme, it is not a prominent feature of his work at points where we might expect it to be particularly stressed, if such were the case .

24. See Walberg, La Vie de Saint Thomas, p.lxx. For the passages of Grim in question here, see Grim, chs.17, 18 and 19, pp. 368-371 .
25. For the whole of William's treatment here, see William of Canterbury, ch.9 and ch.10, pp.10-12 .

