INTRODUCTION

This thesis rests mainly on the assumption that there are certain historical events which lend themselves more easily to imaginative or literary or dramatic treatment than others, whatever may be their importance as history proper. The story of Becket and Henry II was only one of a series of similar clashes between English kings, from William the Conqueror to John, and their respective archbishops of Canterbury. This again, was only one of the manifestations of the struggle between Empire and Papacy, regnum and sacerdotium which shook Europe during the high Middle Ages.

The conflict between Henry Plantagenet (1154-1189) and Thomas Becket is one of the most dramatic and clearly defined episodes in English history. It has, especially in recent times, inspired a number of works of literature. Most of these are plays, thus indicating the dramatic nature of the story as a 'stand up fight between will and will'. It centres on a confrontation of two great, equally intransigent personalities embodying what ultimately turn out to be two world views, the temporal and the spiritual. The outcome of the conflict was, however, largely the result of two incompatible temperaments, as well as the personal animosity resulting from a broken friendship.
A sharp contrast is provided by the earlier conflict between Henry I and St. Anselm. It had been concluded in an amicable compromise because the two men retained a mutual personal respect, and an attitude of good manners towards each other all along. A conflict of ideals and principles had not been allowed to get mixed up with unhealthy personal rancour.

The literary potential of the story becomes even greater when we realise that Becket was no conventional saint, qualified for a halo from the day of his birth. Contemporary records show him as basically a man of the world, a man of great diplomatic and administrative ability with rather more than the average person's share of pride and arrogance. A brilliant and colourful personage, but one who has, even among ostensibly disinterested historians, excited, on the one hand, fierce recrimination, and on the other, equally fierce partisanship. This was equally true of Becket's own contemporaries. Even in the moment of the Archbishop's murder, a voice was heard to murmur that his death had been well-deserved.

The literary works dealt with in this thesis are, Aubrey de Vere's St. Thomas of Canterbury (1876), Tennyson's Becket (1879-84), Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's novella Der Heilige or The Saint (1879-80), Laurence Binyon's The Young King (1924), T. S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral (1935), Jean Anouilh's Becket, ou l'honneur de Dieu (1959), Christopher Fry's Curtmantle (1961), and Shelley Mydans's novel, Thomas (1965).
Of these, the plays by Tennyson, Eliot, Anouilh and Fry are treated in greater detail. This is because the last three are indubitably significant contributions to twentieth-century drama, while Tennyson's play has elicited comparative asides from several people commenting on Eliot's. Among works which contain references to the story, the best known are probably Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. The latter portrays, curiously enough, a son of one of Becket's murderers, Waldemar Fitzurse as a sort of 'aide' to Prince John in his nefarious plots.

The four main works chosen for comment all belong to the same literary genre, the drama; and the aim of the thesis is mainly the comparative and exploratory one of showing how the same historical episode has resulted in widely diverse works of art. It has, therefore, seemed advisable to organise the chapters in terms of form, themes, characters etc., instead of devoting one chapter to each author or work.

The first two chapters are devoted almost exclusively to considerations of history. The first briefly sketches the episode itself, the figures of the protagonists and the medieval background against which the events took place. The second attempts to indicate the main areas of imaginative appeal in the original story itself. The rest of the thesis can, thus, be devoted to considering the
literary works as such.

A large part of the interest of the story rests on the question, "Was Becket really a saint; was his death a political assassination, a martyrdom, or an indirect form of suicide?" This is where the imaginative writer finds scope for invention, because nobody really knows what Becket's motives were in accepting his death. Perhaps he himself did not know.

An appendix has been added to juxtapose the interpretations of the various authors of the most crucial incident in the entire conflict, the death of Becket. Edward Grim's eyewitness account as well as the closely documented accounts of biographers like Fitzstephen present us with as much relevant and irrelevant factual detail as a modern newspaper might give of a murder the day after the event. However, their statements regarding the attitudes behind Becket's own acceptance of his death, fall into a conventional medieval hagiographical pattern, and are usually taken with a pinch of salt by modern historians. The attitude of T. S. Eliot, who is concerned with presenting a sacramental vision of Christian martyrdom, parallels that of the hagiographers to a large extent. But none of the other writers hazards any kind of certainty regarding either Becket's acceptance of death or his various prophetic
utterances about his martyrdom.

Tennyson has been strongly criticised for the ambivalent conclusion of his play. We are never sure whether Becket died for the Church, or a prey to his own spiritual arrogance. This is in fact extremely true to history, though that is no excuse for a glaring artistic flaw. It is merely one more consequence of Tennyson's academic attitude to his raw material. Historians to this day make out equally plausible cases to support widely divergent hypotheses on Becket's character. At one extreme are writers like J. A. Froude and William Stubbs who think of him as a conscious hypocrite and an unscrupulous self-seeker. Others like A. L. Poole, E. A. Freeman or Z. N. Brooke soften a point and make out a case for the congenital perfectionist who was self-deceived. This also seems to be Fry's implicit judgement. Others again, like David Knowles or Robert Speaight accept Becket's claim to martyrdom, citing instances in his early life that show his religious nature and upbringing.

Dr. Margaret Murray in her book *The God of the Witches* elaborates the rather startling hypothesis that Becket was killed as a substitute for the Divine King in a pagan cult still prevalent during the Middle Ages. Shelly Mydans clearly incorporates some of Dr. Murray's evidence in her novel. The dramatists, however, show no awareness of this
interpretation of the historical facts. However, if the hypothesis is taken into account, a good deal of the ambivalence attendant on Becket's "suicidal" actions and supposedly clairvoyant statements disappears. On the other hand, almost all of the historical facts Dr. Murray adduces as evidence can be interpreted in terms of the Christian martyrdom theory.

The popularity of the Becket story with nineteenth and twentieth-century writers can be seen as a specific instance of the general revival of historical consciousness in this period. In the stream of twentieth-century drama it forms a part of the efforts of Eliot and Fry to produce a poetic drama capable of tapping the depths of human consciousness and emotion. It has also been a part of the attempt to revive the tradition of religious drama. The plays of Tennyson and Binyon were adapted for performance in the early years of the Canterbury Festival of Arts. T. S. Eliot wrote Murder in the Cathedral specially for this festival.

The historical and, therefore, somewhat 'distanced' nature of the subject is conducive to the creation of characters who are larger than life, while the shape and sequence of the incidents is, in Helen Gardner's terms,
"incipiently tragic". In an age which critics have repeatedly called inimical to tragedy, the works on the Becket story all show strong lineaments of the tragic. But none of them except Curtmantle is an unequivocal tragedy in the Aristotelian sense.

As we explore each writer's manipulation of the same facts to body forth his or her own preoccupations and views of life, we realise that the works implicitly reveal differing attitudes to the concept of history itself. This is most clearly apparent in Elliot's play. Murder in the Cathedral embodies a synchronic or sacramental view of history. It is an important aspect of all his work, and one of the traits which makes for the unity of his entire oeuvre. History for him is neither cyclical nor progressive, but a static "pattern of timeless moments" simultaneously present, and viewed spatially. It acquires significance only in the individual's efforts to redeem the time in attaining to an apprehension of God, however dim; and in working for salvation, his own and the world's.

Anouilh is chiefly remarkable for his disregard of factual fidelity. He uses the Becket story - as he had earlier used the St. Joan story and the Greek myths - merely as a peg on which to hang his own view of life, with a blithe use of anachronism and contemporary parallelism. Similarly, Meyer's use of history is entirely subjective. As he says
himself, it provides him with a mask for his own thoughts and emotions. He does not attempt to revive the actual events of the past. Nor does he scruple to invent, distort or even blatantly falsify facts where he deems necessary.

Fry's main concentration falls on Henry the second. He does not see Henry as a picturesque figure from the past surrounded by the trappings of pageantry. The Plantagenet is essentially a man, compounded of almost all human traits except "chastity and sloth". Fry's conception of history reveals the English respect for past events and a reluctance to achieve theatrical effects at the expense of falsifying what actually happened. History is viewed as a human drama; and human nature as something, at bottom, unchanging. Eliot, Anouilh and Fry, the twentieth-century dramatists, have in common an attitude which searches in the events of the past a relevance to their own day.

Tennyson and Aubrey de Vere, on the other hand, illustrate the dangers of academicism. Tennyson set himself the grandiose task of completing Shakespeare's chronicle series, and composing a historical trilogy on the making of the English nation. The view of history which emerges from the trilogy - of which Becket was the last play - is strictly Victorian and conventional. The past is the past. The Laureate sees it as having somehow been a remote cause of the present, but
this view comes through only in his extra comments. The plays do not dramatise it. They present history as a pageant, in the course of which famous figures of the past enact their adventures in full view of a nineteenth century audience. His comments quoted in his son's memoir indicate that he was conscious of the vast body of information made available by the diligent and scientific researches of contemporary historians. He thought it his duty to indulge in excessive research before composing his plays. The result we see, however, is a diligent reproduction of all the important incidents of a period, with very little that can be called "theme" - in the sense of a governing idea or aim - to hold them together; and as little insight into the motivations of human actions. Although the titles of the individual plays are the names of the protagonists, Tennyson's main aim is reproducing history. Such an approach leads to a number of features that are detrimental to his plays as works of art. In size the plays become huge and sprawling, and need ruthless cutting and reshaping for stage-production. The characters are often insipid in virtue or farcically diabolical in evil. The preoccupation with surface historical accuracy also results in clumsy devices for imparting information.

The same charges may be made against Aubrey de Vere. His play on the subject of Becket is longer than any
dramatic work even Tennyson ever wrote. The author is conscious that it is a "literary" rather than a "theatrical" performance. He himself admits that it is better to approach St. Thomas of Canterbury as a "dramatic-poem" rather than a stageworthy play.

It has often been pointed out that in the great ages of dramatic literature non-comic drama was chiefly historical. Greek and medieval drama treated the myths and the Bible as history. In the twentieth century, on the other hand, literary artists tend to look upon classical myth, the Bible, and even history itself - particularly the history of a rather remote period - in terms of psychological "archetypes". On the other hand, the field of history proper is unwilling to take things on trust as the Greeks and medievales did. It investigates the authenticity of every fact with almost scientific thoroughness. Nineteenth century drama as instanced in Tennyson and de Vere, reflects the consequences of a historian's approach to history rather than an artistic one: the mania for accuracy and the portrayal of history per se for patriotic reasons. Twentieth century writers - Eliot, the French dramatists - using Greek and Bible stories exemplify modern and extremely original uses of history as essentially archetype. The historical events illustrate or help clarify an underlying idea or preoccupation of the
author's own. The past is used not merely for itself but for the light it can throw on the present, or an insight it might give into certain perennial aspects of the human condition.
CHAPTER I

'THE SEETHING CAULDRON': The Historical Background
Between these two dates (1154-1189) there is a seething cauldron of events, conflicts, purposes, errors, brilliance, human endurance and human suffering, which could provide, in those thirty-five years, all that we need, for a lifetime's study and contemplation of mankind.  

(i)

Before turning to the main theme of the conflict between Henry Plantagenet and Thomas Becket, a brief sketch of the Church and the State under his Norman predecessors should enable us to gain a proper perspective on our principal story.

The year 1066 is sharply engraved in English history as the date of the Battle of Hastings, and the Norman Conquest of England - the last successful invasion of the island by a foreign power. William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, defeating Harold at Hastings took England with the blessing of the Pope, and protected by the banner of St. Peter. William, however, although personally a devout, clean-living Christian, was also an extremely strong ruler, and would have been quick to resent Papal interference of

any magnitude in the governing of his kingdom.

He was, however, fortunate in that the Pope - who had observed William's reforms in the laxity of the Saxon clergy - was willing to let things ride for the moment. He was also fortunate in his Archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc, Abbot of Bec. Lanfranc was a "statesman rather than a logician", who "followed, in matters of faith and discipline, the straightest path of orthodoxy; but in the sphere of politics he attenuated the theocratic principles of Cluni to suit the wishes of the king". Unlike his successor Anselm, Lanfranc was a man of action and of the world; in this, but in very little else, he resembles Thomas Becket. Lanfranc, working hand-in-hand with William I, hauled up and re-organised the English clergy, putting into practice the Hildebrandine reforms advocated by the Papacy without, in principle, placing his king in the awkward position of acknowledging the Pope as his overlord.

It was William I, also, who took the step which was to have such disastrous consequences in the time of Henry II. In 1076 he decreed the separation of lay and ecclesiastical courts.

The spiritual jurisdiction of bishop and archdeacon had hitherto been exercised in the public courts; and we gather from the terms of William's ordinance that the doommen claimed the right of acting as assessors in spiritual no less than in secular causes, with the result that the canons of the Church were relaxed or corrupted by an admixture of local custom. The change was one at which every reformer would rejoice; the advisability of a moral censorship being once admitted, no man of common-sense could approve the idea of placing this censorship under the control of the very class which it was intended to correct.3

Whatever may have been William's reasons, the fact remains that this separation of ecclesiastical and secular jurisdiction was the cause of the 'benefit of clergy' which was attacked in article three of the Constitutions of Clarendon of Henry II, and became the chief bone of contention between him and Thomas Becket.

During the reign of the Conqueror's second son and successor, William Rufus, was held the trial for treason of William of St. Calais, Bishop of Durham. During one of the rebellions which had disturbed Rufus's reign, the Bishop, a popular prelate, had defected to the rebels. When the revolt had been suppressed, the Bishop was summoned to stand trial in the king's court. The contemporary

3 Ibid., p.51.
record, says Richard Winston, "often reads like an anticipation of the trial of Thomas Becket, Northampton, seventy-five years later. The right of the king's court to try a churchman was stated with surpassing clarity.

In this case, however, the Archbishop of Canterbury (Canfranc) took the side of the State against the Church". The conduct of the Bishop himself is reminiscent of Becket's. When the King ordered his goods confiscated, the Bishop wrote to him: "I beg you not to keep me unjustly out of my possessions. It is not for everyone to judge bishops, and I offer you such full justice as is consistent with my order." In the proceedings of this trial also, we come upon one peculiar consequence of the Conqueror's edict of a separate jurisdiction and the resulting clerical immunity. When the Archbishop informed the Bishop of Durham that the lay court was judging him in respect of the temporal fiefs he held from the king, not in respect of his bishopric, he replied: "My lord archbishop, you have not today heard me mention my fief nor the fact that I possess one. It is about my bishopric that I have made my complaint." The person of a bishop was, in effect, split into two, in consequence of which he was bound to two unequal allegiances; he was

5 Ibid., p.25.
a baron as well as a bishop, a temporal as well as a spiritual lord. For his temporal possessions he owed allegiance to his king and for his spiritual jurisdiction to the Pope.

This conflict between the two aspects of a bishop's office is exemplified in the long drawn out controversy between popes and German emperors throughout the latter half of the eleventh and the first quarter of the twelfth century. This controversy had its offshoot in England while Anselm of Aosta was Archbishop of Canterbury, for a while under William Rufus and then under Henry I.

Unlike his great predecessor Lanfranc, or Becket, after him, Anselm was essentially a saint with monastic ideals,

a man to whom action appeared a feverish dream, the visible world a transitory shadow, and contemplation the true end and function of the soul; not self-centred..., but a profound individualist who saw in the universe nothing real or valuable except God and His law on the one side, and on the other the individual with his consciousness of God,....

Any estimate of Becket's character inevitably calls forth a comparison with Anselm, largely because Becket himself, after his conversion set out to model his behaviour on his

7 Davis, op.cit., p.90.
great predecessor's; but also because of the similarity of their situations vis-à-vis their respective sovereigns, and the differences in the ways the two conflicts concluded. This was mainly due to the utterly dissimilar characters of the protagonists.

Whereas the Henry II—Becket quarrel ended in bitterness on both sides, disillusionment and death, the Henry I—Anselm differences ended in a compromise, both parties retaining throughout a tolerance and affection for each other. A. L. Poole sums it up:

The contest... (between Anselm and Henry I) was carried on in a dignified manner, without bitterness or apparent loss of temper; and the antagonists maintained throughout its course a not unfriendly correspondence. Anselm from his natural peace-loving disposition, Henry from his characteristic prudence, exercised remarkable forbearance... the road lay open for a compromise.

What marks the reign of Henry I's successor, Stephen, is the general anarchy in the land, the general relaxation of the bonds of law and order which Henry I had begun to forge. His friction with the Church was only one aspect of his general ineptitude as a ruler. Henry I, having

lost his only son in 1120 in the disaster of the White Ship had, before his death, made all the barons of the realm swear allegiance to his daughter Matilda, wife of Geoffrey the Fair, Count of Anjou. Among those who took the oath was the King's nephew, Stephen of Blois, Count of Mortain. When the King died, however, Stephen seized the crown, and the English barons who were of no mind to accept the rule of a woman — a haughty, imperious, arrogant woman into the bargain — supported Stephen. Initially, he also had the assistance of the Church led by his own brother Henry, Bishop of Winchester — who lived long enough to befriend Becket —, and Theobald of Bec, Archbishop of Canterbury, Becket's mentor and patron.

Matilda, however, not one to accept such treachery meekly, crossed the Channel from her husband's Angevin domains to contest the crown with Stephen. There now ensued a period of civil war and anarchy, rapine, bloodshed and all manner of horrors, which the King — busy bolstering his precarious perch on the throne with mercenaries — was much too harried to check. Sir Winston Churchill quotes a description of the sufferings of the fen country in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* by a monk of Peterborough:

> Every powerful man made his castles and held them against the King.....and when the castles were made they filled them with devils and
evil men. Then they seized those men who they supposed had any possessions, both by night and day, men and women... and tortured them with unspeakable tortures... Many thousands they killed with hunger... And it lasted nineteen winters while Stephen was King;... They laid geols on the villages from time to time... when the wretched men had no more to give they robbed and burnt all the villages, so that you might go a whole day's journey and you would never find a man in a village or land being tilled,... whereasover men tilled the earth bare no corn, for the land was all ruined by such deeds; and they said that Christ and his saints were asleep.

This is what Fry attempts to convey in the Prologue to his *Curtamptle*: the land, says his Barber, was a "smoke and ruin", "bleeding away like raw meat." The conscious witness of the image does not detract from its almost sickening vivid immediacy.

In such times, men turned to the Church as the only remaining source of law of any kind; while Stephen made sweeping concessions of property and juridical rights to retain its favour. The Church thus gained, in those years, an ascendancy in government which Henry II did not quite succeed in curbing even after half a lifetime's unremitting


10 Fry, op. cit., p. 181.
struggle. In these times also, and in the brilliant household of Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket was finding his feet in the world of affairs, grounding himself thoroughly in Roman and canon law, and under his archbishop's aegis transacting a good deal of successful business at the Papal curia.

Towards the end of the see-saw struggle between Stephen and Matilda, Stephen who had already alienated the Church — including his own brother, the Bishop of Winchester — by arresting Bishop Roger of Salisbury some years earlier, forbade the attendance of Archbishop Theobald at the Papal council at Reims in 1143. The frail old Archbishop, however, courageously defying the King made his way secretly to France in a fishing smack accompanied, among others, by the two rivals Thomas Becket and Roger of Pont l'Evêque. Pope Eugenius, himself a fugitive thanks to the German emperor, was deeply moved by this testimony of unquestioning obedience from the English Archbishop. Winston commenting on these years says, ".....like Anselm before him and Thomas Becket after him, Theobald went into exile. And as was to happen in Becket's case, most of his suffra-gan bishops took the king's side..."11

11 Winston, op.cit., p.52.
During the negotiations between Stephen and Henry Fitz-Empress, Matilda's son, the Archbishop was a staunch supporter of the Angevin cause; and his influence exercised at the papal curia by the adroit diplomacy of his archdeacon, Backet, was decisive in gaining for Henry Plantagenet the support of the Pope who then refused Stephen permission to crown his son Eustace.

Commenting on Stephen and the impact of his reign on the country, Davis says,

Admirable as a knight, respectable as the lord of a small fief, he had been pushed by ambition into a position which would have tasked the ablest statesmen of the age. Too simple to anticipate intrigues, too scrupulous to destroy the roots from which they sprang, too vacillating to crush them when they began to take effect, he failed alike in peace and war. Among all our medieval sovereigns none owed his title in so real a sense to the election of the nation; few showed themselves more incapable; none was a greater curse to the nation. His reign furnished a warning, never to be forgotten, against the evils of an uncurbed feudalism, and prepared public opinion to accept the drastic centralization of Henry II. 12

The contrast in the characters and careers of Stephen and his immediate successor, is instructive. Stephen, weak, ineffectual and disastrous though he was as a ruler, was probably one of the few among the early Norman kings who had

a happy and affectionate family life. Henry, who scotched "the many-headed monster of feudalism", restored order, and gave the country a backbone of common-law, with all his energy and good intentions, all his love and ambition for his children, died a broken and lonely man, finally betrayed by his own family.

(ii)

The life-spans of Henry II (1133-1189) and Thomas Becket (1118?–1170), taken together, cover almost the whole of the twelfth century. Since they were to a large extent, not only the moulders but also the products of their times, it is helpful to have a general grasp of the premises on which their great controversy rested. This is even more necessary in the case of Becket than that of Henry. The average secular reader of the twentieth century is more than likely to dismiss Becket and all his works as the rigid obscurantism of a religious fanatic; while Henry, the progressive ruler, the man ahead of his time who set himself to undermining slowly but surely the feudal mode of government, appears to us to have all the reason in the world on his side. In sum, we are quite likely to take T. S. Eliot's Second Knight's view of the matter. 13

The twelfth century was more or less the summit of the European Middle Ages. Scholars have taken to speaking and writing about "the twelfth century Renaissance". The age was, of course, still "medieval", but seething with intellectual turmoil and social change. Feudalism as a way of life was beginning to decline, urban life with the bourgeois middle-class was beginning to take an ever stronger hold on society; this was the age of the great schools of Paris and Chartres, Bologna and Auxerre, it was the age of Abelard and Bernard.

Although feudalism was on the decline, its codes and morals, and essentially agrarian way of life still formed the base of the social structure. It was a decentralised, pyramidal and hierarchical form of government; at the centre of its ethics lay the personal relationship between the liege-lord and his liege-man or vassal; and at the centre of its economics lay the overlordship of land. At the top of the feudal hierarchy stood the king, who held his position because he held the largest tracts of land. This land he parcelled out among his barons who then became his vassals or tenants-in-chief. While being invested with their lands, they had to kneel, place both their hands between those of their overlord and take the oath.

of fealty - to guard the person of the lord, attend his
council, and help him with a certain number of armed men
in times of war. The tenants-in-chief then repeated the
procedure, enfeoffing their own knights, and so down the
line. At the bottom of the structure was the villain
or serf, a farm-labourer tied with all his chattels to
the place in which he was born. If the land changed
hands he went with it.

What was dangerous about a feudal system of government
was that a vassal owed allegiance only to his lord. So
that if the lord chose to make war on his king or on another
baron, the vassal was bound by his oath of fealty to follow
his lord in battle. Each baron also held jurisdiction over
his own lands; he had his own courts and meted out his own
justice which was often rough-and-ready and rather primitive.

The great achievement of Henry II as king was that
while adhering to the manners and morals of the feudal
code, he managed gradually to centralise his government
by taking direct oaths of fealty from his vassals' vassals,
by improving his judiciary - making regular use of trial
by jury and abolishing the primitive ordeals - and by opening
his courts to anyone who wished to appeal from the manor
courts of the barons.
Side by side with the feudal conception of the king as the highest landlord in an agrarian hierarchy, was the older conception of the divine right of kings, of the king as God's vicegerent on earth. "It was the king with the aid of his bishops, who had ruled the church, who had led his people to salvation, and who had reformed ecclesiastical institutions."15 This was the older Saxon view, which had given the feudal Norman rulers in England greater authority over the realm than their continental counterparts exercised over theirs. The most extreme and outspoken advocate of this view was a twelfth century author commonly known as the Anonymous of York "who wrote in defence of King Henry I in his conflict with Anaelm,.....John of Salisbury, who belonged to the party of church reformers, was equally convinced that the king derived his authority from God...."16 The Normans and Angevins exploited this tradition to the best of their ability. Henry I claimed to exercise the supposed power to heal scrofula, the "king's evil". Henry II succeeded in getting his Saxon predecessor, Edward the Confessor canonized in 1161. This view of the king as God's viceroy laid a strong emphasis on the duty of lordship.


16 A. Poole, op.cit., p.3.
The relationship between Monarch and Community was steadily conceived as a relationship which involved reciprocal Rights and Duties. ...Lordship, therefore, was never mere right; primarily it was duty, it was a divine, but for that very reason an all the more onerous calling; it was a public office, a service rendered to the whole body.¹⁷

On the other hand, a strong slant somewhat to the contrary of this concept, was provided by the newly reformed Papacy. Taking its impetus from the extreme reforming zeal of Pope Gregory VII (1073-85), it claimed for itself supremacy over an ecclesiastical hierarchy which cut through national boundaries and held jurisdiction over the spiritual welfare of all Christendom. The latter half of the eleventh century had been an age of thoroughgoing reform and revitalising of every aspect of the Church; the Gregorian party wished to enforce clerical celibacy and to forbid lay investitures of bishops. It was over this latter problem that Pope Gregory VII and his secular counterpart, the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV were at loggerheads. The struggle between Gregory VII and Henry IV, culminating in the Emperor's dramatic humiliation in the snows at Canossa.

¹⁷ Otto Gierke, Political Theories of the Middle Ages, trans. F. W. Maitland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p.34. Fry in Curtmantle emphasises this aspect of Henry in his attempts to make "a fair and governable England".
provides a prototype for the spiritual-secular struggle that was to rage throughout the Middle Ages. R. W. Southern puts it in a nutshell:

secular interests suffered some very obvious and spectacular reverses. Kings and laymen lost their direct control over ecclesiastical persons and causes; they could not defy the pope for very long. All this was most dramatically displayed in a series of incidents which have caught the imagination of later generations - Henry IV of Germany at Canossa, Henry II of England at Canterbury, King John as the vassal of a pope...

The ecclesiastics in each country claimed independent jurisdiction under the overlordship of the Pope. The danger to a strong royal or imperial government was obvious in an age when any literate man could get himself a tonsure and call himself a "clerk".

The primary importance of the Church in social and cultural matters during the Middle Ages can never be gainsaid. Especially to the common man, bound to the soil, all his days filled with hard labour, the after-life promised by the Church, in which the meek would inherit the earth, provided an alluring prospect. Their faith was simple.

Since so much of the world about them was unknown the invisibility of the next world did not trouble them... Heaven, purgatory, or hell ranked equally with the world around them as the unavoidable experience of man. 19

Christianity was universally accepted as a way of life, the Church as an institution of mediation between God and man.

This being the case, it followed that Church censures of all kinds were universally regarded as extremely effective and direful weapons. They would not kill the body, but they could damn the soul to eternal hell-fire. A man excommunicated from the bosom of the church was to be avoided like the plague for fear of spiritual contamination; he was forbidden to enter a church or partake of the sacraments, and might be absolved only after sincere repentance and due penance. In such circumstances, if a king or any lord incurred excommunication, his subjects or vassals were automatically absolved of allegiance to him; rebellion could become legal and holy. To a man like Henry Plantagenet, who might not be cowed by mere verbal censures, rebellion with the sanction of Holy Church posed a very real and practical threat. Interdict and anathema

laid on lands were a similar threat. "Simple souls abhorred as the plague the awful withholding of the sacraments, the darkening of altars, the silencing of parish bells, the sudden extinction of those communal rites that marked with solemnity and grandeur the narrow round of their existence."20 They could not be expected to tolerate such a state of affairs for long. This importance and relevance of Church censures is one of the aspects of medieval society that is the hardest to comprehend in this age. It is nevertheless, essential to a full understanding of the twelfth century. The Church was also the seat of almost all cultural and intellectual pursuits. Students who thronged the schools of Paris, the schools of canon law at Bologna and Auxerre were, most of them, "clerks" in minor orders; one such was Thomas Becket during the thirties of this century. The greatest minds of the age - Abelard, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Gratian of Bologna, Peter the Lombard - were all in holy orders. Latin was the universal language of learning. The renaissance of the twelfth century, says Christopher Brooke, "was a cosmopolitan movement"; and, speaking of John of Salisbury, "he was a cosmopolitan scholar first and foremost, and a moving witness to the

community of minds among the Latin-writing, Latin-speaking clergy of the renaissance."21

It was at this time, around 1140, that Gratian, a monk of an enclosed order of Bologna, composed his treatise on canon law entitled *Concord of Discordant Canons*, better known as the *Decretum*. This treatise was a landmark in the hitherto unsystematic study and practice of law at the papal curia. Gratian's achievement has been compared to Adam Smith's in the field of economics. Becket, at this time among the luminaries of the household of Theobald of Canterbury, later himself a student of Roman and canon law, was surely strongly influenced by the work of Gratian. At the same time Peter the Lombard brought out his great theological treatise titled *Sentences*.

John of Salisbury, Becket's friend and later secretary had, during his early years in Paris, studied under the brilliant Peter Abelard. Abelard had attempted to revolutionise medieval theology by claiming that faith should be reinforced by human reason. Brooke cites as an example Abelard's approach to the traditional doctrine of the Atonement: "it was not an act by the Divine Judge, but the launching of the human Jesus, to be a companion and example to men."22

21 C. Brooke, op. cit., p. 74.
22 Ibid., p. 47.
In moral teaching his emphasis fell on the human will and human motivation, not on the objective act as it appears.

Abelard's illustrious persecutor, St. Bernard of Clairvaux was perhaps a greater, but wholly different kind of man. Of an ascetic temperament, he was the founder of Clairvaux, one of the daughter houses of the strict Cistercian order of monks. In a couple of decades, by reason of his saintly life and complete other-worldliness, he was wielding a spiritual influence over Christendom that was greater even than the Pope's. To him, Abelard's quasi-rationalist attitude smacked of heresy, calculated to corrupt all young and impressionable minds with which it came into contact. Bernard, "with a mixture of prayer and intrigue which modern observers find impossible to forgive", engineered a condemnation of the men and his works.

The intellectual and cultural ferment of these years was shaping the brilliant young minds of both, Thomas Becket in London and Paris, and Henry Plantagenet in Anjou and England.

At the same time we hear of a flourishing secular literature and an entirely mannered, aesthetic culture in the southern French counties of Poitou and Aquitaine,
whence came Henry's queen, Eleanor. Her own grandfather, William IX, Duke of Aquitaine, had been a troubadour poet. This warm, brilliant, richly fruitful region was also a hot-bed of heresy and scepticism among the upper classes. Amy Kelly in her biography of Eleanor of Aquitaine, points out that Eleanor had grown up in an atmosphere where bishops and churches were accustomed to bow to the dictates and demands of their secular lords. Later in the century, it was Eleanor, presiding over her court in Poitou who was partly responsible for bringing into fashion and disseminating the cult of courtly love. This cult may be seen as a parody - to a certain extent - of religious faith. In the twelfth century, says Brooke, "there were plenty of folk to whom 'religious' concerns as ordinarily defined meant little, but...it was a world in which a range of theological interest spread from the schools to the manor house, in which theological interest was more widespread, and culture more theologically conditioned by far, than in our own."23

(iii)

In England, a year before his death, Stephen had consented to a treaty with Matilda's son, young Henry of

23 Ibid., p.21.
Anjou, who was now in right of his father's conquests also Duke of Normandy, and through his wife Count of Poitou and Duke of Aquitaine. Stephen's eldest son Eustace having died, all the fight and ambition had gone out of him. Henry was acknowledged as his heir at Winchester in 1153. When Stephen died, Henry was acclaimed and crowned King of England with more general hope and rejoicing than had ever uplifted any monarch in England since the days of Alfred the Great.24 For the first time since Rufus, a king had ascended to the throne with an undisputed title. Henry's youth, efficiency and energy inspired hope in the English people, torn and weary after the "nineteen winters" of anarchy under Stephen.

The reign of Henry II spans a period from 1154 to 1189. When he came to the throne, he was already lord of more than half of western and southern France, although nominally the vassal of the French King Louis VII. With England, his dominions now stretched from the Scottish border to the Pyrenees, and Henry bade fair to become the most powerful potentate of Western Europe. He had all the strength, energy and dynastic ambition of his Norman and Angevin forbears, but his vast possessions, although the source of his

24 Churchill, op.cit., p.156.
power, carried within them also the seeds of disintegration.
Henry's various provinces had nothing in common with each other by way of customs or traditions; what held them yoked together willy-nilly was the ownership of one man. The king himself was actually more interested in his French possessions than in England.

So he set about the task of providing England with a strong backbone of law and a machinery of government that would be able to run itself most of the time, while he attended to matters on the continent.

Henry's reign falls with almost classic neatness into three periods. The early years of his reign, probably the happiest, are characterised by his friendship with Becket whom he appointed Chancellor; and his energetic progresses all over the land, overhauling the machinery of government, dispensing justice, and attempting as far as lay in his power, to right the wrongs committed by both sides during Stephen's reign. This period extends roughly up to 1162, when he caused Becket to be elected Archbishop of Canterbury. The next seven or eight years, up to the Archbishop's death, were taken up by the bitter, exhausting controversy with his one-time friend now enemy,

25 These may be compared to the scheme of Fry's act-
division in Curtmantle,
over the respective rights of Church and State in
government. But even in the midst of it, his work of
administrative reform was not held up. The last period
extending from 1170 to the king's death in 1189, comprised
the downhill years, in which his personal life was
embittered by the ceaseless jealousy and intrigue within
his own family, fomented at every opportunity by the
king of France. During these years he reached the zenith
of his power in the eyes of the world, but disunity and
fratricidal strife, and his sons' treachery towards him
were inwardly eating away at his strength and his vast
scheme like a canker. He died a broken man defeated by
his own son.

When Henry II came to the throne, his first chore
was to demolish all the unauthorised castles that had
sprung up over the countryside during the anarchy. He
expelled all the mercenaries who had been brought in by
either side, reclaimed all grants made during Stephen's
reign. In short he wished to restore the realm to the
state in which his grandfather Henry I had left it.
"Henry of Anjou," says Davis, "ascended the throne with
a fixed determination to ignore the predecessor upon
whom,...he laid the sole responsibility for the nineteen
years of anarchy."26 With his ambulatory courts he

26 Davis, op.cit., p.199.
hurried up and down the realm, personally looking into things and attempting to redress wrongs; the king's justice had been thrown open to all; people were no longer confined to the manor-courts of their own lords.

Peter of Blois gives an amusing account of the king's peregrinations in which he had shared:

If the king has decided to spend the day anywhere, especially if his royal will to do so has been publicly proclaimed by herald, you may be certain that he will get off early in the morning, and this sudden change will throw everyone's plans into confusion... You may see men running about as though they were mad, urging on the pack-horses, driving chariots into one another, and everything in a state of confusion... His pleasure, if I may dare to say so, is increased by the straits into which his courtiers are put. After wandering about three or four miles in an unknown forest, frequently in the dark, we would consider our prayers answered if we found by chance some mean filthy hut. Often there were fierce quarrels over these hovels and courtiers fought with drawn swords over a lodging that it would have disgraced pigs to fight for.27

In this work of restoring law and order, and forging a strong administration his Chancellor Thomas Becket was his right hand man. He carried out the King's plans with all the thoroughness and capability which he had earlier

demonstrated in the household of his mentor Archbishop Theobald. It was through the good offices of the gentle old Archbishop that Thomas held his chancellorship. Theobald's plan had been to place one of his own trusted protegés in a position of daily proximity to the King, whereby he might uphold the interests of the Church in the King's councils. In this the Archbishop was deceived. Thomas flung himself wholeheartedly into the King's programme. Part of it was to recover whatever juridical ascendancy ecclesiastical courts might have acquired during the anarchy together with other privileges.

"Always but especially in the beginning of his reign, Henry was jealous of his prerogatives and determined to restore to the royal power the ground it had lost during the Civil War."28

Two incidents stand out in the career of Thomas as chancellor, in the conduct of which he sided conspicuously with the King in opposition to the claims of the Church. These incidents cost him a lot of explanation during his tenure as archbishop and were continually being flung in his face by his opponents as examples of his apostasy. The first was the case of Battle Abbey, early in Henry's reign. Battle Abbey was a foundation of William the

Conqueror commemorating his victory at Hastings, on the site of the battle. Traditionally its abbot had autonomous jurisdiction over the abbey, excluding it from the government of the diocese in which it was situated. At this time, Hilary, Bishop of Chichester, having appealed to Rome brought before the King letters from the Pope authorising his jurisdiction over Battle Abbey. The abbot defended his autonomy. Thomas the Chancellor, speaking on behalf of the King and the abbey's traditional rights, berated the Bishop of Chichester for having appealed to Rome, and won a verdict in favour of the abbot of Battle. At this time, says Winston, "Thomas acted in accordance with his conscience and his view of the facts. As archbishop he repudiated his conduct." 29

The other incident concerned the levying of a general scutage — a tax paid in lieu of personal service during a war — which was to include the clergy, for the prosecution of Henry's war against Toulouse in 1159. 30 The clergy refused to pay on the grounds that they were exempt from fighting anyway. But the King and Becket had their way. Years later, when Becket the Archbishop was in exile, Gilbert Foliot of London accused him of having

29 Ibid., p.71.
30 Anouilh dramatizes this incident as a council at the beginning of which Becket is nominated Chancellor.
plunged the sword of state "into the vitals of Holy Mother Church with your own hand when you despoiled her of so many thousand marks for the expedition of Toulouse." 31

During his chancellorship, Thomas as some said, had "put off the deacon and put on the chancellor". What all historians remark: at this stage is his magnificence and ostentation. He was always richly and elegantly dressed; though himself abstemious, his table was always loaded with the choicest foods and wine; he was lavish in his generosity and entertainment, and prodigal in alms-giving. All this magnificence was epitomised in the embassy he led to Paris in 1158 to negotiate a marriage between Henry's young heir and the infant princess Marguerite of France. William Fitzstephen, a clerk of Thomas's household sums up the Chancellor:

Being a man of diligence and industry, revolving great matters in his mind and experienced in many and great affairs, he so discharged the onerous duties and obligations of the office to the praise of God and the well-being of the whole realm, that it may be regarded as doubtful whether he served the king with greater distinction and efficiency or to greater advantage in peace or in war.32

On April 18, 1161, Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury,

31 Quoted, Winston, op. cit., p. 79.

32 Dougles and Greenaway ed., English Historical Documents, Vol. 2 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1952), p. 705. Subsequent references to this work will abbreviate the title to E.H.D.
died, and the news was conveyed to Henry taken up with affairs in Normandy. For about a year the archbishopric remained vacant, administered in its vacancy by Thomas as Chancellor. In May 1162, Thomas came to Henry who was holding court at the castle of Falaise in Normandy. The ostensible purpose of Thomas's presence was to take young Henry, the King's eldest son, back with him to England in order that the chief barons might take an oath of allegiance to him. Towards the end of Becket's stay at Falaise, the King casually sprung on him his idea of making his chancellor also Archbishop of Canterbury, and so uniting the highest secular and ecclesiastical offices of the realm in the person of his most trusted friend. In the words of Amy Kelly, "Becket, the king's chancellor, would speak privily to Becket, the archbishop, and persuade him to be reasonable with the king." Far from being slated, Becket reacted with distinct alarm and tried to pass the whole thing off as a joke. He pointed with a smile at his magnificent attire and said, "How religious, how saintly is the man whom you would appoint to that holy see and over so renowned and pious a body of monks. I know of a truth that, should God so dispose it, you would speedily turn your face away from me..."
and the love which is now so great between us would be changed into the most bitter hatred. I know indeed that you would make many demands — for already you presume overmuch in ecclesiastical affairs — which I could never bear with equanimity. And so the envious would find occasion to stir up endless strife between us."34 Some historians have interpreted Becket's reaction as a conventional nolo episcopari response; others have seen in it a genuine foreboding and evidence of Becket's insight into his own character and Henry's as well as their relationship. The dramatists, on the whole, incline to the latter view.

Henry had his way despite his friend's protests. Becket's election, engineered at the King's will, was "unanimous". "Only Gilbert Foliot", says Roger of Pontigny, "...opposed and murmured against the election, but when he saw that the others were unanimous in their assent and that of his own malice he could effect nothing, he likewise gave his consent."35 Bishop Henry of Winchester requested Prince Henry, in the absence of his father, that Becket "shall be handed over to us and God's Church free and absolved from all ties and service to the court, and from all suits,

34 Herbert of Bosham in E. H., D., p.708. This scene has been dramatised by Tennyson in his chess-game prologue, Anouilh at the end of the second act, and Fry in the first scene of his first act. Meyer's Bowman narrates it with a twist. Becket addresses his words not to the King but to the ubiquitous narrator.

accusations or any other charges, and that...he may be at liberty and leisure to pursue freely the service of God...."36 This petition was accepted, and Thomas released from all secular claims.

During all these proceedings and for almost a year afterwards, King Henry stayed abroad, occupied with his continental domains. After the consecration of Thomas as Archbishop of Canterbury, disquieting rumours had reached the King about a sudden transformation in Thomas' bearing, habits and behaviour. It seemed as if a miracle had occurred; for the thoroughgoing worldling seemed changed into an equally thoroughgoing ascetic who seemed heading for sainthood.

Putting off the secular man he now put on Jesus Christ. He vacated the secular duties of the chancellorship and was at pains to fulfil the functions of a good archbishop. To this end he kept a strict watch over his mind. His speech was grave and to the edification of his hearers; his works were those of mercy and piety; his decisions in conformity with justice and equity. Clad in a hair-shirt of the roughest kind, which reached to his knees and swarmed with vermin, he mortified his flesh with the sparest diet, and his accustomed drink was water used for cooking of hay.....He often exposed his naked back to the lash of discipline.37

36 Ibid.

This juncture in Becket's career provides the crux which radiates all the extremely divergent, sometimes contradictory estimations of his moral character. To superficial observation the change would seem either a working out of God's infinite grace - this is the interpretation of the hagiographers - or the reaction of an ostentatious and unscrupulous hypocrite - which is the interpretation of J. A. Froude. The general tendency among historians is to see in this change, the unconscious reaction of a personality prone to self-dramatization in the limelight. Very few interpretations like that of David Knowles, give Becket credit for genuine sincerity.

The King, who had already been incensed over the return of the great seal signifying Becket's resignation of the chancellorship, soon fell out with him over certain matters of practical jurisdiction. As soon as the Archbishop had assumed office, he had zealously set himself to recovering all the property that had been alienated from his see. In the process he laid claim to the castle and honour of Tonbridge in the hands of Roger de Clare who, says Fitzstephen, was related to all the nobility of England. The King waxed indignant. A little later the Archbishop again aroused the King's wrath by excommunicating one of his tenants-in-chief,
William of Eynesford. The Archbishop had wished to install one of his own clerks to the living of Eynesford, the lord threw him out, and put up his own candidate. The Archbishop retaliated with excommunication, which he later withdrew to pacify the King.

Henry, in his drive to provide the kingdom with a stable government and an impartial law had, through the years, watched with growing concern and chagrin, the extent to which the church, in his view, had encroached on the jurisdiction and privileges of the crown. He determined to take firm and immediate steps. At a council at Woodstock in July 1163, the Archbishop stood out against the King on the purely secular matter of a tax called the sheriff's aid. The case of Philip de Brois, a canon of Lincoln was then brought up. The canon was accused of murdering a knight, and the sheriff of the province alleged before the King that the culprit had been tried and acquitted in the bishop's court although he had been guilty. The sheriff had wished to take him into custody, whereupon the canon had flung abuse at him. This case was a concrete instance of the privilege of clerical immunity around which the whole of the subsequent conflict between the King and Becket centred. A few

38 "This is the first case of any express opposition being made to the king's financial dealings since the Conquest." W. Stubbs, The Early Plantagenets (London: Longmans, 1876), p.69.
months later, in October, Becket and all his bishops were summoned to a council at Westminster at which the King flatly demanded that if a cleric were found guilty of a crime in an ecclesiastical court, he should be promptly degraded and handed over for punishment to the secular arm. Becket refused, quoting from Jerome's commentary on the prophet Nahum, that God does not punish twice for the same offence; that degradation itself was already a heavy punishment. The King, then, changed his tactics. He suddenly rounded on the whole body of bishops, and demanded an oath of consent to the ancestral "customs" of the realm, as they had been in his grandfather's day. The bishops, led by Thomas, swore conditionally, "saving their order". From this stand they would not budge. The next day the King revoked from Thomas the custody and revenues of the two honours of Eye and Berkhampstead which Thomas had retained even after resigning his chancellorship. Henry also recalled his son and heir from the guardianship of Thomas in whose household he had been placed for his upbringing.

Not long after the council at Westminster the two former friends attempted to see if an agreement might be reached by informal discussion. This took place outside Northampton, but broke down in personal recrimination.
The King accused Thomas of gross ingratitude. Had he not raised him up from being an absolute nobody, to the second most important personage in the realm? The Archbishop replied: "...I am not unmindful of the favours which, not you alone, but God who dispenseth all things hath condescended to confer on me through you:....You are indeed my liege-lord, but he is both your lord and mine, to ignore whose will in order to obey yours would be expedient neither for you nor for me...." The King retorted, "I don't want a sermon from you; are you not the son of one of my villeins?" To which Thomas, "I am not 'sprung from royal ancestors'; neither was St. Peter, ... on whom the Lord deigned to confer the keys of the kingdom of heaven and the primacy of the whole Church."
"But he died for his Lord," said the King; and Thomas replied, "And I will die for my Lord when the time comes."
The argument then swung back to that eternal bone of contention, the saving clause that Thomas had used when taking his oath.39

In January 1164, the King convened a council of all the bishops and barons of the realm at one of his favourite hunting lodges at Clarendon. He demanded of the bishops an unequivocal oath of assent to the "ancestral customs" of the realm. Accounts of what actually happened at

39 As reported by Roger of Pontigny, E. H. DE, pp.716-717.
Clarendon are divided. What is important for the purposes of this study is to remember Becket's sudden and uncounseled change of front at some stage in the proceedings. Some writers maintain that the King first demanded a general verbal oath, which Becket — after a lot of indecisive soul-searching — took without his saving clause; and then when the written document was produced, would not seal it after seeing it in detail. Others maintain that Becket signed the document but would not seal it.

The celebrated Constitutions of Clarendon, which Henry caused to be written down, consisted of sixteen articles attempting to define the limits of ecclesiastical privileges. Among them the most controversial and the most obnoxious to high-Gregorian churchmen were articles three, four, seven, eight, and sixteen. The Becket-Henry controversy, however, pivoted on article three, about "criminous clerks" and eight, prohibiting appeals to Rome without the permission of the King.

Clerks cited and accused of any matter shall, when summoned by the king's justice, come before the king's court to be answerable there concerning matters which shall seem to the king's court to be answerable there, and before the ecclesiastical court for what shall seem to be answerable there, but in such a
way that the justice of the king shall send to the court of holy Church to see how the case is there tried. And if the clerk be there convicted or shall confess, the Church ought no longer to protect him.40

This seems to us reasonable enough; and it has been Becket's stand on this clause which historians in general condemn. But the Archbishop was not taking his stand on practical instances. He claimed to be defending the whole principle of ecclesiastical hierarchy.

At Clarendon, however, there was a moment when he suddenly weakened and consented, "overborne by a crescendo of pleas, persuasions and promises; by anxiety for his colleagues, fear for himself, and affection for the king... As always his decision was sudden and uncounselled."41 Thereafter, the other bishops also took the oath. However, Thomas immediately repented of his action and suspended himself from all his priestly functions till such time as he should receive absolution for his sin from the Pope.

Hereafter, he became entirely obdurate; the more so for having once vacillated and fallen. But having seen Thomas' inconsistency at Clarendon, and been worked upon

40 No. 3 from the Constitutions of Clarendon, E. H. E., pp. 719-720.

by Bishop Arnulf of Lisieux, Gilbert Foliot of London, Roger of York, and Hilary of Chichester fell away from him.

Some months later, in October, Thomas was summoned before the King's court at Northampton, ostensibly, on a charge of contempt of court for failing to appear in the case of one John the Marshal. However, the council which lasted for about a week, soon turned into an undisguised persecution of the Archbishop who had been consistently thwarting the King's plans. The original case of John the Marshal proved to be a mere pretext; during the proceedings, everyone save Becket - who kept insisting on it - seemed to have forgotten all about it. Over a period of several days the King demanded accounts of various exorbitant sums of money that Thomas might or might not have had when he was chancellor. Several people, led by the Bishop of Winchester stood surety for some amounts. But at the final demand for a sum of about thirty thousand pounds - for the proceeds of all the vacant sees under his jurisdiction while chancellor - everyone stood aghast.

A day's grace being granted, Thomas withdrew to confer with his colleagues. Some opined that he should resign his office and throw himself on the King's mercy.
Hilary of Chichester is reported to have said, "Would that you cease to be archbishop and remain plain Thomas."

But someone else said, "Far be it from the archbishop to consider the safety of his person and dishonour the Church of Canterbury....Not so did any of his predecessors, although they in their days suffered persecution. Besides although he might be able perhaps for a time to avert the seizure....of the archiepiscopal see,....and so preserve the Church's rights, yet he could by no means do so with his office." 42 The day following, the Archbishop was too ill to leave his bed, but the next day he attended court.

This was the last day of the council and one of the most obviously dramatic moments of the controversy.

Early on the morning of Tuesday, 13th October 1164, having celebrated the Mass of St. Stephen the protomartyr, with its introit, "Princes also did sit and speak against me," 43 the Archbishop rode to the castle. When he dismounted, he entered the hall carrying his archiepiscopal cross himself. The onlookers were stunned. Gilbert

42 FitzSTEPHEN, E. H. R. p.727.
43 Ibid. "Straightway informers, spying on him for the king told him how this Mass had been sung,.....that the archbishop had celebrated that Mass for himself, like another Stephen against the king and his wicked persecutors." p.728,
Foliot who called the Archbishop a fool, almost had a tussle with him in trying to wrest the cross from Thomas' hand. The bishop then joined the King and his barons in the council-chamber, while Thomas waited outside. Fitzstephen unctuously reports his own words to Herbert of Bosham before the Archbishop, Herbert having hot-headedly advised the prelate to excommunicate his enemies.

Far be it from him: not so did God's holy apostles and martyrs...; rather let him pray for them and forgive them, and possess his soul in patience. For if it should come to pass that he suffer for the cause of justice,...by God's providence his soul will be at rest and his memory blessed. If he should pronounce sentence against them, it would appear to all men that from anger and impatience he had done his utmost to avenge himself.

Thomas had told his suffragan bishops that he had appealed to Rome, and forbade them to sit in judgement. The bishops convinced the King that for the present they should obey, but lodge a counter-appeal against their superior. After all the tumult and uproar, one of the King's justiciars, Robert Earl of Leicester, was sent to pronounce the Archbishop's condemnation for high treason. Before the unfortunate baron could get to the point, however, Thomas stood up; and drawing himself
up to his full height, holding his cross, addressed the earl:

What is this which you would do? Have you come to judge me? You have no right to do so. Judgement is a sentence given after trial. This day I have said nothing in the way of pleading. For no suit have I been summoned hither save only the suit of John, who has not come to prove his charge...... Such as I am, I am your father; you are magnates of the household, lay powers, secular personages; I will not hear your judgement.44

With that he moved to the door bearing his cross, amid cries of "Traitor!" At the door he stumbled, but managed to get away. "O how great was the martyrdom he bore in spirit that day!" says his clerk, Fitzstephen.

That night he secretly left the town and made for the coast, from there making good his escape to France. Now began the six years of exile during which the Archbishop and his few companions subsisted, more or less, on the charity of Louis VII of France. These years were filled with dreary, exhausting negotiations.

The Pope, Alexander III, whose behaviour appears to us to have been as changing and fickle as a weather-vane, had troubles of his own. He himself was a fugitive in France, when first Henry's embassy and

44 Ibid., p.732.
then Becket himself went to the papal _curia_ at Sens, soon after Northampton. The German Emperor had enthroned a schismatic anti-pope at Rome. Alexander III himself had owed his papal dignity to the support of the kings of France and England at Tours, some years earlier.

In this precarious position, he certainly could not afford to alienate the good offices of the King of England by siding too violently with the Archbishop of Canterbury. His best course was to temporise— which he did very dexterously—and hope for a compromise and reconciliation.

In one of his letters we find him advising Becket,

> Do nothing hastily or precipitately, but act with gravity and deliberation by every means at your disposal, with a view to recovering the favour and the goodwill of the illustrious king of the English, so far as is consistent with the liberty of the Church and the dignity of your office.  

Patience, however, does not seem to have been Becket's _forte_; he chafed under the enforced inaction. Twice during the exile— at Vézelay in 1166, and in 1169— the Pope's fortunes having steadied somewhat, Becket was allowed to employ church censures against his opponents. On both occasions the culprits were granted absolution fairly swiftly at the Pope's direction.

Two attempts at reconciliation in 1169 — at Montmirail and Montmarte - under the aegis of the French king, proved abortive; the first because Thomas would not abandon his saving clause, the second because Henry, with vague excuses of an oath, refused to give the kiss of peace.

In 1170, Henry committed the cardinal blunder of the whole controversy. He had already alienated opinion by his earlier ill-considered, unjust acts - exiling all Becket's relatives and friends, alienating Canterbury property and putting it to farm with the de Brocas, the harsh treatment of clerics loyal to their archbishop. He now resolved to infringe one of the most ancient and cherished privileges of the See of Canterbury by having his son, Young Henry crowned by the Archbishop of York. Inspite of express prohibitions from the Pope as well as Becket who had legatine powers, Roger of York anointed and crowned the Young King. Henry realised that he had finally gone too far not only with the Pope and Becket, but with Louis of France as well. Louis's daughter, the Young King's wife, had not been crowned with her husband.

Hastening across the Channel, Henry now showed himself willing to grant all that was demanded of him. The King and the Archbishop met again on 22nd July 1170 near
Fréteval, in a meadow known as "Traitor's Field". "There", says Herbert of Bosham, "peace was made... and the kiss which had before in the other conference been sought but denied, was now neither demanded by the archbishop nor offered or refused by the king... Christ's dauntless champion, eager for peace and not afraid of death, did not demand the kiss... but prudently and consciously accepted the terms as they were offered, influenced by his love of peace rather than by fear of death".46

King and Archbishop then went apart and conversed together. The Constitutions were not so much as mentioned by either side. Herbert points out that among other things the Archbishop requested the King's permission to take suitable measures against the erring bishops and the King assented. Among the onlookers, he says, some were joyful, some dejected, others neither; "for they suspected some insincerity in these proceedings and anticipated that in the end the peace would engender discord, sorrow and lamentation."47

Some months elapsed before Thomas embarked for home. From the reports his friends sent from Canterbury, Thomas was slowly coming to the conclusion that the King did not intend to fulfil all his promises of restoration of

47 Ibid., p.756.
Canterbury property. On November 24th, he reached Wissant from where he was to embark for England. There, instead of the King who had intended to bear him company, he found John of Oxford, dean of Salisbury — one of Becket’s arch-enemies, twice excommunicated — who had been detailed to escort him home. Before embarking, however, he sent ahead letters from the Pope suspending Roger of York and excommunicating Foliot of London and Jocelin of Salisbury for their part in the coronation of Henry’s son.

Becket landed at Sandwich, in his own diocese, on the 1st. of December 1170, and made straight for Canterbury. The nobility and upper classes gave him a distinctly hostile reception. Armed men had been waiting at Sandwich, and only the intervention of John of Oxford, safeguarding the King’s reputation, had saved Becket. But the poor and humble gave him a warm, rousing welcome:

...he was welcomed by the poor of the land as a victim sent from heaven, yes, even as an angel of God, with joy and thanksgiving. ...Rather — if one can use such a term — Christ’s poor received him with the victor’s laurels and as the Lord’s anointed. So wherever the archbishop passed, a swarm of poor folk,... flocked to meet him, some prostrating themselves in the way before him, others tearing off their garments and strewing them in the way, crying aloud, ‘Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.’ Likewise the parish
priests with their flocks went out to meet him in procession with their crosses, saluting their father and begging his blessings...you would certainly have said...that the Lord was a second time approaching his Passion, and that amidst the rejoicings of children and the poor, he, who died once at Jerusalem for the salvation of the whole world, was now again ready to die a second time at Canterbury for the English Church.

It was less than a month to the day of his death. Although acclaimed by the poor, the Archbishop was constantly harassed by the godless de Brocas of Saltwood Castle. When he wished to pay his respects to the Young King at Winchester, he was forbidden access. On the continent, reports reached the King that the Archbishop had placed himself at the head of an armed rabble and was going about the country stirring up unrest. On top of that the bishops of York, London and Salisbury - who had already been on their way to Normandy to elect candidates to vacant sees, and had encountered their letters of excommunication as they were about to embark - carried an exaggerated version of their grievances to the King. Some writers place in the mouth of Roger of York words to the effect that while Thomas was alive, England

48 Herbert of Bosham, F. H. D., p.757 (Italics mine). Compare the speech of Eliot’s Messenger in Murder in the Cathedral Part I, as well as the theme of the coming in the opening chorus. Also compare Eliot’s treatment and the Initio Christi strand in Herbert’s language. Thomas like Christ is both a “victim” and received with a “victor’s laurels”.

p.57
would have no peace. Fitzstephen, however, reports that it was one of the barons who uttered the words, "My lord, while Thomas lives, you will not have peace or quiet or see good days." The King, overwhelmed with bitterness, fell into one of his Angevin rages and uttered the fatal words which caused four knights of his household—Reginald Fitzurse, William de Traci, Hugh de Morville and Richard Brito—to take ship for England and hunt up the Archbishop.

On Christmas Day, says Fitzstephen, before High Mass, the Archbishop preached a splendid sermon on the text "on earth peace to men of goodwill."

And when he made mention of the holy fathers of the Church of Canterbury...he said that they already had one archbishop who was a martyr, St. Alphege, and it was possible that in a short time they would have yet another.50

He then excommunicated Robert de Broc and certain others.

Meanwhile, the four knights, says Edward Grim, on the day after the Feast of the Holy Innocents, *gathered

49 E. H. N., p.758.

50 Ibid., p.759. Compare Eliot's 'Interlude'. However, the main theme of Eliot's sermon, the difference between the world's peace and God's, and the definition of a true martyr are his own inventions. He also omits all reference to the excommunications which followed the sermon.
together against the innocent*. The Archbishop, after dinner, sat transacting business in an inner room, when the knights entered without much commotion. Some of the monks at dinner "invited them to share their table. They scorned the offer thirsting rather for blood than for food". The knights entered the Archbishop’s room and sat on the rushes. for a while the Archbishop ignored, then greeted them. The knights made scornful reply and then began to level charges against Becket – charges of ingratitude to the King, of causing unrest in the kingdom, of desiring to deprive Young Henry of his crown. Finally, they demanded the absolution of the three bishops. The Archbishop replied, "Never was it my wish, to take away the crown from my lord the king's son or to diminish his power; rather would I wish him three crowns and help him to obtain the greatest realms of the earth, so it be with right and equity. But it is unjust that my lord the king should be offended because my people accompany me... when for seven years now they have been deprived... of the consolation of my presence... Moreover, it was not by me, but by the lord pope that the prelates were suspended from office." After another fierce altercation the knights departed to arm themselves, adjuring the clerks and servants to guard the primate. At this point Benedict

of Peterborough records a conversation between Thomas and his friend and secretary John of Salisbury, in which the later rebuked Backet for his general intransigence, as well as his tactlessness with the knights.

As it was time for vespers, notwithstanding the Archbishop's reluctance to move from his room, his monks and John of Salisbury with Grim as temporary cross-bearer, hustled him into the cathedral, while the knights causing a great uproar followed. The terrified monks were about to bolt the doors, when Thomas stopped them.

It is not meet to make a fortress of the house of prayer, the Church of Christ, which, even if it be not closed, affords sufficient protection to its children; by suffering rather than by fighting shall we triumph over the enemy; for we are come to suffer not to resist.52

Entering with drawn swords, the knights called out, whereat, says Grim, "quite undaunted, as it is written, 'The righteous shall be bold as a lion and without fear!'," the archbishop descended the altar steps. The knights repeated their demands, finally even tried to force the primate out of the sanctuary of the cathedral, but he stood his ground. Grim putting both arms around him.

52 F. H. D. p. 766 (Italics mine).
triad to ward off the blows. The first blow fell striking off the tonsure, the second, slicing through Grim's arm glanced off the primate's forehead, two more blows finished the deed. The Archbishop's last words, as reported by Grim, were "for the name of Jesus and the protection of the Church I am ready to embrace death."

It was about four o'clock in the evening and very dark as a storm broke over the city. Benedict of Peterborough describes the speedy preparations for the burial of the corpse, the discovery of the hair-shirt and sackcloth swarming with lice which the martyr had worn next to his skin, the tremendous impact of the deed on the poor of Canterbury and the monks, which then spread throughout Christendom.

A cult of the martyr spread all over Europe, his relics were hoarded, and miracles in his name reported by the thousand. The Archbishop was canonized on 21st February 1173, and his shrine became one of the most famous places of pilgrimage of medieval Europe.

Henry was holding his Christmas court at Bures in Normandy. However, as soon as he realized the full import of what his rash words might cause he had tried his best to get the four knights recalled before they reached the coast. All his efforts were of no avail.
His initial reaction to the news of the murder was a paroxysm of grief or despair or perhaps both. Arnulf, Bishop of Lisieux, writing to the Pope from the king's court says,

"At the first words of the messenger the king burst into loud lamentation and exchanged his robes for sackcloth and ashes, acting more like a friend than the sovereign of the deceased. At times he fell into a stupor, after which he would again utter groans and cries louder and more bitter than before. For three whole days he remained shut up in his chamber, and would neither take food nor admit any to comfort him, till it seemed from excessive grief that he had obstinately made up his mind to contrive his own death."

When he had recovered enough to think about taking steps to safeguard himself - for, says the Bishop of Lisieux to the Pope, "he thought it likely that his good name and reputation would be smirched by the slander of his enemies that the crime had been committed with his knowledge" - he sent envoys to the papal curia.

The Pope, however, had been so shocked by the murder, that he did not communicate with anyone for eight days, and flatly refused to have anything to do with the English king and all his works. The murder had been particularly shocking because of the thoroughly sacrilegious aura surrounding it. An archbishop had

53 I.H. D., p.779.
been brutally hacked to death in his own cathedral by laymen, and, it was suspected, at the King's instigation. The King's reputation was certainly in the worst danger it had ever been. His continental lands were already under interdict. It seemed as if Thomas dead had vanquished him, where Thomas living had merely thwarted him.

In the event, he decided to put a fair distance between himself and Rome before he could be excommunicated. Ten or twelve years earlier he had received a bull from Pope Adrian IV authorising the conquest of Ireland. This Henry was now resolved to accomplish, mainly to get away from a fire and brimstone atmosphere, but also to provide his youngest son John with a patrimony, and conciliate the Pope by making the Irish clergy abandon their independence and return to the bosom of the Universal Church.

He was away for about a year and a half. In May 1172, he met the papal legates at Avranches, submitted to all their conditions and was absolved. "On that day", says an anonymous observer, "in public audience the king, laying his hand upon the sacred Gospels, swore that he had neither ordered nor willed the murder of the
archbishop of Canterbury, and that when he heard thereof, he had rather grieved than rejoiced. He also added of his own accord that he grieved more for this deed than ever he had done for the death of father or mother."54

Among the other conditions imposed, he had to repudiate in their entirety the perverse constitutions of Clarendon, make full restitution to the church of Canterbury, and undertake to liberate Spain from the infidel, if the pope should so require; in addition, penance and alms-giving were imposed. The King accepted cheerfully. What Henry had been aiming at throughout his reign says David Knowles, was "a national church enclosed within the ring-fence of the coast, under his personal control, administered by a hierarchy of his own appointing, amenable to his justices in civil and criminal cases, and to the courts Christian in the spiritual cases, with himself as final court of appeal, the whole being still in communion, subject to certain personal limitations, with Rome."55 It seemed at Avranches as if all this must go by the board. In practice, however, he managed to retain a good many of

54 E. H. D., p. 773.

his "customs*. But in the matter of clerical immunity and appeals to Rome he was definitely worsted. The plea of "benefit of clergy" was destined to become a crying scandal in criminal procedure.

In the throes of the struggle with Becket, there had been a growing estrangement between Henry II and his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine. Historians attribute it largely to Henry's numerous infidelities which had finally, around the mid-sixties, culminated in his open and unashamed liaison with Rosamond de Clifford, the daughter of a Welsh nobleman. It was not the actual infidelity of the King which bothered Eleanor. She herself had acquired a certain reputation in her salad-days, and she came of a house where the women habitually condoned and learned to put up with the delinquencies of their lords and masters. What was especially remarkable about the Rosamond episode was the flagrancy with which it was openly flaunted. Eleanor came of a proud hot-tempered Southern race, and it was the affront to her position as queen, which aroused for her the support of both, her own and Henry's relatives, and the fierce partisanship of her sons. The tale of Rosamond's bower, and the wicked queen offering the lily-white maid the alternatives of dagger and poison is apocryphal, but in keeping with Eleanor's character. A warm-blooded,
passionate temperament combined with a masculine audacity
of intellect, a wide experience of the world and
remorseless perseverance in the pursuit of any goal,
made her a foe to be reckoned with.

Her political position owing to her vast domains
"resembled that of a piece upon the chess-board which
though it is not moved forms the pivot of elaborate
combinations and supplies the key to the whole game."56
By her marriage to Henry in 1152, she had at one stroke
impoorished the king of France of the greater half of
his kingdom and made Henry the most powerful man in
Europe. Now, soon after Becket's murder, which had
consolidated Henry's foes and weakened his prestige
with the Church, Eleanor intended to add her own efforts
to bringing about her husband's downfall. "Her vengeance
for the Clifford affair", says Amy Kelly, "was aimed not
at the flaxen beauty of the king's folly, but Henry
himself, his mounting ambition, his nearly realized
dreams of empire."57 She returned, therefore, to her
own warm, sunny domains of Poitou and Aquitaine, taking
with her her favourite son Richard, who had been
designated Count of Poitou and Duke of Aquitaine, and
as such had done homage to Louis VII of France at the
Montmirail conference in 1169.

56 H. W. C. Davis, op. cit., p.247,
The Montmirail conference was to prove a huge thorn in Henry's side for several years, and in the end an indirect cause of his downfall and death. Although best known for one of the abortive attempts at reconciliation between the King and Becket, its original and primary purpose had been political negotiation with Louis of France. Henry had brought along his three elder sons, wishing to install them nominally in their respective patrimonies from the very beginning so as to avoid jealousy and discontent later. Young Henry, the heir to the throne, as Duke of Normandy and Count of Anjou, Richard as Count of Poitou and Duke of Aquitaine, Geoffrey as Count of Brittany, had all done homage and been acknowledged by the French king. John was, at this time, only a baby. Henry, however, had no intention of allowing any of them one tithe of genuine power and self-sufficiency during his lifetime. This policy, instead of averting dissension, only accelerated it. His sons chafed at the actual impotence behind their nominal dignities. Each was afraid that a portion assigned to him might at any time be handed over to another. They were envious among themselves, and each was determined to be the equal of the others.
Eleanor, by taking Richard with her, and giving him real freedom in her own duchy, provided the spark which set off the whole conflagration. Jealousy, hatred, hostility had long been simmering under the surface. Henry's vigorous measures for centralising government in his own and his officials' hands, had aroused a sullen antagonism among his barons. To this were now added the jealousy of his sons, the vengeance of queen Eleanor, and the ever-ready efforts of the king of France to foment discord in the Angevin house. All these parties, in collusion with Philip of Flanders, roused a rebellion simultaneously in all of Henry's dominions in the spring of 1173. The king, at that time in Ireland, gathering a small army of mercenaries hurried over to attend to his continental lands, while his loyal government officials held England. At the beginning it seemed as if the odds against him were too great and he must be overwhelmed. What helped him, however, was that the confederation of his enemies was held together only by a negative purpose. Ultimately, each leader was self-interested and quite ready to turn the situation to his own advantage, at the expense of his allies.

Having subdued his lands in France, Henry crossed to England, where the revolt was threatening to get out of hand. As soon as he landed, however, he made straight for Canterbury, and from a church some distance outside the city, he walked barefoot in a smock to the martyr's
tomb. There, prostrating himself in prayer, he spent the whole day and night in fasting and vigil at Becket's tomb, after which he offered his bare back to the monks and bishops for scourging. How far this action was dictated by a remorseful conscience and how far by sheer policy, no one will ever know: "the blessed martyr", says Giraldus Cambrensis, "being appeased by the fears and supplications of the king, ... peace and a long season of prosperity were restored to England at the castle of Amboise." Henry's signal success in putting down this revolt, illustrates better than anything else the fruits of his judicial and administrative policy. Throughout the revolt his own officials as well as the common people had remained entirely loyal to him. At Amboise, he showed true magnanimity in forgiving his sons and granting a general amnesty to his barons. The queen, however, was put under restraint, where she stayed to the end of Henry's reign, being allowed from time to time to take her place in public on ceremonial occasions. It was in the period while the conspiracy was hatching, that she and her daughter by the French king, Marie of Champagne presided over the courts of love in Poitou which attracted the younger generation from all quarters of Europe, and launched a new fashion in mediaeval literature. These

courts of love were now disbanded. Henry seemed to be in command again, but it was a long way from being the end of his troubles.

The strife within his family caused by greed and fratricidal jealousy darkened the last two decades of his life. It gradually alienated him from his sons, and came close to fulfilling what was supposed to be a family curse of the Angevins: "from the devil they came and to the devil they will go". Henry, among other things, was reputed to have had a witch among his forbears.

To what a magnitude and height and strength the tree would have grown, if the branches had been naturally knit together, and had drawn their sap from the roots, is manifest from the premature decay and heavy fall of what was so precious. For as branches lopped from the stem of a tree cannot reunite so the tree stripped of its boughs, a treasonable outrage, is shorn both of its dignity and gracefulness.59

In the few years of peace that followed the revolt of 1173-74, Henry consolidated his administrative reforms. At his death he left a machine which could run itself with no ill-effects on the country through the long absences of the monarch in the succeeding reign.

59 Ibid., p. 164.
Among Henry's sons, Geoffrey of Brittany was thoroughly treacherous and unlovable. He had a brilliant mind and honeyed tongue with a good deal of the Poitevin charm, all of which he employed to subversive ends, playing off his elder brothers against each other to further his own interests. John, who was too young at this time to show his true colours, turned against his father in the end. Richard, the best and strongest of the four, was also the most Angevin in looks and temperament. More reserved, less attractive and charming than his elder brother, Richard was much more discriminating in his friendships, and without being prodigal was generous to the deserving. He could be utterly ruthless and brutal to his enemies. Among his several virtues, says Geraldus Cambrensis, "there are three which are incomparably eminent, and shed a peculiar lustre on his character. These are his brilliant courage, his boundless liberality so worthy of a prince...; and his resolute firmness both of mind and word..."60

Finally, there was the tall, handsome, utterly charming heir, Young Henry, a favourite of his father's. Prodigal and outgoing to all, he attracted hordes of adherents of his own generation like a magnet. With all his charm Young Henry had a mercurial temperament, full of restlessness, eager for power, but fickle, unsteady, irresolute and, once his mind has been worked upon, extremely suspicious.

60 Ibid., p.160.
After the incarceration of Eleanor, Young Henry's Achitophel turned out to be Bertran de Born, "an epitome of the violent contrasts that made the peculiar genius of the south country. Poet and warrior, cynic and romantic, hot-headed and cold-blooded, he gloried above all things in the spectacle and excitement of warfare..."61. He meets Dante and Virgil in the eighth circle of hell, a headless trunk, holding the severed head by the hair. He says to the two poets,

...I am Bertran de Born, he who to the Young King gave evil counsels. I made the father and the son rebels to each other, Achitophel did not do more with Absalom and David by his malicious instigations. Because I parted persons thus united, I carry my brain, ah me! parted from its source which is in this trunk.62

But among the Young King's friends was also the faithful Guillaume le Maréchal who did his best to steer a straight course between the irresolute vagaries of his young protegé and his duty to the Old King.

The French kings were extremely active in the working out of the Angevin family heritage of envy and discord. They realised that if Henry II were allowed to lay the foundations of his dynasty and empire in peace, his

61 Kelly, op.cit., p.205.
overlord of France would soon be reduced to a nonentity. Louis VII of France, that pious son of the Church and first husband of the English queen, was not above taking advantage of his rival's family feuds. Whenever Henry's sons fell out with him, or among themselves, they made straight for the French court at Paris. After Louis, his young son Philip Augustus, shrewder, more determined, but less noble than his father, carried on the tradition.

In 1183, the Young King, in the midst of his restless career, died of dysentery; and three years later, Geoffrey of Brittany was killed, some say, in a tournament. This left Richard and John. Henry was now busy carving out an inheritance for John. Richard's jealousy flared up first at his father's suggestion that he relinquish Poitou and Aquitaine to John, since Richard was now heir to England; secondly because Henry would not, in so many words, acknowledge Richard as the heir to all his lands. Richard suspected Henry of wishing John to inherit the crown. In the midst of these troubles, tidings were received of the Fall of Jerusalem. For a while the kings of France and England agreed to sink their differences and unite in an attempt to aid the Holy Land. Hostilities, however, soon began again, owing to Richard's aggressions in Toulouse and Philip's counter-aggressions against
Richard. When Henry met them both for talks, however, Richard with an about-face paid homage to Philip of France, since his father still refused to acknowledge him as his heir. This was almost the end for Henry. Philip and Richard together harried the Old King remorselessly. One by one, Henry's continental cities fell to them. Finally, Henry withdrew to his birthplace Le Mans, a city he had always held in the greatest affection, and where his dead father was buried. There one morning, as a thick mist lifted from the river, Henry's people perceived the French army encamped a few yards from the opposite bank. Orders were given to fire the suburbs so as to cut off the entry of the enemy. But the wind veered and the city caught fire.

The denizens of the faubourg fled in panic from their blazing thatches. Passing through the quarter to stay the fire, the King and Guillaume came upon a woman weeping bitterly as she dragged her household gear into the street. The marshal, always 'pitié by nature', as became a chevalier nurtured in the court of Poitiers, himself dismounted to help the woman. He seized a feather-bed smoldering on the underside, and the smudge, penetrating his helmet, forced him to take it off. While thus delayed the fire pressed on their heels. Seeing the quarter of his capital seething with flame, Henry challenged heaven... 'The city, I have loved best on earth, the city where I was born and bred, where my father lies buried, where is the body of St. Julian, this, O God, to the increase of my
shame, Thou hast reft from me. I will requite as best I can. I will assuredly rob Thee of the thing Thou prizest most in me, my soul.  

They fell back towards Fresnay, with the French army at their heels. Guillaume le Maréchal unhorsed Richard to enable Henry to make his escape. The King reached Chinon, where the Marshal, and his eldest illegitimate son, Geoffrey the Chancellor joined him. The King was sick and in terrible pain due to an old sore.

An embassy from Philip Augustus arrived summoning Henry to a meeting near Tours. Painfully he made his way to Colombières, but when the French king summoned his vassal the next day, he was told that Henry was in too much pain to get up. Richard called it a ruse. Stung by the taunt, Henry, supported in the saddle, with a supreme effort, attended the parley. He conceded everything, demanding in return only a list of those who had betrayed him. The list was brought; the first name that met the Old King's eye was that of John, whose absence he had noted in the mêlée at Le Mans.

Geoffrey the Chancellor stayed with him to the end, fanning off the flies, soothing him with affectionate words, covering him with his cloak. It was to Geoffrey

that Henry gave the Plantagenet signet ring. When he
died it was found that his personal effects had been
rifled by his retainers. The funeral was a makeshift
affair. Henry was buried in the abbey of Fontevrault.
It was said that when Richard approached the bier,
blood burst from the king's nostrils to everyone's
horror.

Around 1172, Henry had undertaken repairs to the
palace of Winchester, painting frescoes on its walls.

In one chamber he for some time reserved a
bare space to be filled ultimately with a
conceit of his own. When the fresco was
at length executed, it depicted a great
eagle with spread wings set upon by four
eaglets. Two of these fledglings with
furious beak and claws wounded the pinions
of the parent bird; a third dug at his
vitals; and a fourth, perched upon his
neck, clewed at his eyes...Henry explained
that the great eagle was himself, and the
eaglets were his four sons; 'Thus will
they pursue me till I die', he said, 'and
that least one, whom I now cherish with
so much affection, will be the most
malignant of them all.'

The unnatural prognostication had been fulfilled.

64 Ibid., p.170. Also cited, Churchill, op.cit.,
pp. 168-169.
Henry the second was born in 1133, the eldest son and heir of Geoffrey the Fair, Count of Anjou - whose father Fulk had become king of Jerusalem -, and Matilda, daughter of Henry I of England and widow of the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry V. From birth, Henry was destined to rule over many peoples and his upbringing was such as would fit him for the task. "Heir of three ruling houses", says Mrs. J. R. Green, "Henry was brought up wherever the chances of war or rebellion gave opportunity. He was to know neither home nor country." He was kept in touch with all the provinces and peoples he was to rule over, spending some years in Rouen, some in Angers. At the age of about eight or nine he was brought over to England, in the midst of the Civil Wars, and installed in the household of his uncle, Earl Robert of Gloucester at Bristol. Here he was tutored with his cousin, the earl's son, by some of the best minds in Europe. Henry, thus acquired in his early years that love of learning and intellectual pursuits which distinguished him from many of his fellow monarchs, and the majority of the nobility.

His training in politics and statesmanship he received at the hands of his mother, Empress Matilda, who was said to have an extremely masculine mind in the frame of a woman. She had from the age of fourteen or fifteen been at the court of the German Emperor which was one of the most important centres of European politics. In later years, one of Henry's contemporaries wrote,

His mother's teaching, as we have heard, was this: That he should delay all the business of all men; that whatsoever fell into his hands he should retain a long while and enjoy the fruit of it, and keep suspended in hope those who aspired to it; confirming her sentences with the cruel parable, 'Glut a hawk with his quarry and he will hunt no more; show it him and then draw it back and you will never keep him tractable and obedient'. She taught him also that he should be frequently in his chamber, never in public; that he should give nothing to anyone upon any testimony but what he had seen and known; and many other evil things of the same kind. We, indeed, confidently attributed to her teaching everything in which he displeased us. 66

This is, of course, the biased attitude of an inveterate hater of Empress Matilda, but it shows the extent of her influence upon her son's character and career. He was also from an early age trained to arms and all knightly exercises.

66 Quoted, Mrs. J. R. Green, op. cit., pp. 17-18.
By the time Henry was eighteen, he had helped his father oust the house of Blois from Normandy, and done homage for the duchy to Louis VII of France. A few months later, Geoffrey of Anjou was dead of chills and fever. Henry found himself lord of a huge chunk of France, which grew to even larger proportions when he married Louis's divorced wife Eleanor of Aquitaine. Eleanor with the restless blood of the counts of Poitou in her veins had grown increasingly bored with fifteen years of marriage to the monk-king with his eternal devotions and his obsequiousness to all members of the clergy. It was said that he begged even the meanest clerk to take precedence of him.

When the young Duke of Normandy came to the French court to pay homage, she must have seen in him the rising-star of all Europe; lord of nearly half of France and destined heir of England. Moreover, his strong, stocky figure with all its charm, his bursting vitality and energy, his "fiery countenance" and undoubted air of command must have seemed like a panacea for all her ills. What passed between them historians do not say, but within a year of Henry's visit to Paris the ex-queen of France was Duchess of Normandy and Countess of Anjou.
The physical appearance, character and habits of Henry have received detailed attention from several of his contemporaries. He stands out as an extremely forceful, complex personality, but one which poses for later ages much less of a problem than his friend Becket's. Giralduus Cambrensis, one of the greatest historians of his day and a member of Henry's court, gives us a description of the king's physical traits. The King, says Giralduus,

had a reddish complexion, rather dark, and a round head. His eyes were grey, bloodshot and flashed in anger. He had a fiery countenance, his voice was tremulous, his neck a little bent forward; but his chest was broad and his arms were muscular. His body was fleshy and he had an enormous paunch, rather by the fault of nature than from gross feeding. For his diet was temperate, and indeed in all things, considering he was a prince, he was moderate and even parsimonious. In order to reduce and cure as far as possible this natural tendency... he waged a continual war, so to speak, with his own belly by taking immoderate exercise.

In times of war, says our chronicler, he took little rest. even when he could, and in times of peace he was constantly either in the saddle spending long hours in hawking and hunting, or on his feet wearying all his court with
his constant pacing to and fro. He seldom sat except
to set or play chess. Giraldus than moralizes on the
evils of anything in excess, even medicine or exercise,
and to this ceaseless activity he attributes the King's
tendency to age quickly.

When his mind was undisturbed, and he was
not in an angry mood, he spoke with great
eloquence, and what was remarkable,... he
was well-learned. He was also affable,
flexible and facetious, and, however he
smothered his inward feelings, second to
no one in courtesy.67

His dress was well enough but carelessly worn. On formal
occasions, however, he knew how to impress people with
his royal dignity. Very accessible and informal, he
habitually wore a short Angevin cape rather than the
long full-length cloaks worn by his English and Norman
nobles. This peculiarity earned for him the nickname
of 'Curtmantle'.

Henry had inherited the family traits of both his
Angevins and his Norman forbears. He had the courage,
tenacity, endurance and patience of the Angevins, and
the wisdom and politic statesmanship of the Normans.
He also had a phenomenal memory: never forgetting a
face he once saw, or anything he had heard which he

thought worth remembering. He almost never turned away from a friend once made, but never trusted one who had been his enemy. He was a loyal, affectionate friend, but a relentless foe. Although a brilliant general, he had a deep dislike of warfare and bloodshed and would try all peaceful courses before resorting to it. He was, says Mrs. Green, "stirred always by a great pity, strange in such an age and in such a man, for lives poured out in war." Giraldus Cambrænsis querulously remarks that he showed himself more tender in lamenting his dead soldiers than in consideration for the living.

His religion was that of a practical man of affairs. He attended Mass everyday but instead of paying devout attention, whispered to those around him, scribbled his instructions, and in general carried on his business. The attitude of bargain, the "hint of the marketplace" which Lady Stenton notes as the simple commonsensical attitude of medieval man to God, was extremely pronounced in Henry. If he did his own job well, God was expected to keep his side of the bargain. With all that, the King had a strong streak of superstitious awe in his nature. Mrs. Green points out moments in Henry's career when

his courtiers saw him "conscience-smitten at the warning of some seer of visions, sitting up through the night... to avert the wrath of Heaven by hastily restoring rights and dues which he was said to have unjustly taken", "bowing panic-stricken in his chapel before some sudden word of ominous prophecy; or as a pilgrim barefoot, with staff in hand; or kneeling through the night before a shrine, with scourgings and fastings and teas." 69

There was also a dark side to Henry's character. Legend claimed that he was descended from a demon, and there was something truly devilish in his sudden paroxysms of fury. His eyes would grow bloodshot and protrude from his head, and with cries and groans and violent gesticulations he would sometimes even roll on the floor, gnawing at the rushes like a wild animal. He was not particularly malicious, but was utterly vindictive towards those who turned against him.

As a statesman, Henry was ambitious on a grand scale.

69 Ibid., p.20. Anouilh uses this trait to considerable effect. The superstitious streak in his Henry helps reduce the king to sometimes infantile helplessness against which the author plays off the mature Becket's rational cynicism in the first half of the piece. At the same time, the frame-scene at Becket's shrine is dictated by the King's political expediency. His character has developed, or deteriorated, in the direction which his mentor, the Becket of the first half of the play, had indicated.
When he became King of England, his power and possessions were second only to the German Emperor's; and throughout his career his efforts were directed towards establishing a sort of dynastic empire all over Western Europe. To this end he employed political negotiations and treaties as well as his own children. At the age of three, his eldest son was betrothed to the six-month old princess of France. Among his daughters, one was married to the Duke of Saxony and mother of a German Emperor, another was queen of Castile, the third was queen of Sicily.

Apart from this, his constant efforts were directed towards the maintenance of law and order, the improvement of security and administration. "Above everything in the world that one may desire or work after, he labours for peace", wrote Peter of Blois; "all that he thinks, all that he says, all that he does is directed to this end, that his people may have tranquil days." 70

His family life was tragic. Women had always been one of his major failings, and after several years of marriage the Clifford affair proved too much for the haughty Eleanor to stomach. Although he had always been a loving father to all his children, he had consistently

used them as pawns in his dynastic schemes, arranging marriages and inheritances to suit his own convenience and ambitions. In his anxiety to secure a peaceful succession and avoid all strife and envy among his children, he took steps which brought about the opposite result.

From the comments and descriptions of contemporaries, however, we gather that Henry was a lovable man. "I loved him, I shall always love him," wrote Peter of Blois.71 This is brought out strongly in his friendships with some of the finest and most saintly men of his time such as the Carthusian St. Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln. His relationship with Thomas Becket was one of the strongest influences on his life and career.

At the end he was fated to feel that everything he had worked for had crumbled in ruins around him. His epitaph as quoted by Half de Diceto is a fitting summary of the impression he left on medieval Christendom:

I was Henry the King. To me
Divers realms were subject.
I was duke and count of many provinces.

71 Ibid., p.39.
Eight feet of ground is now enough for me
Whom many kingdoms failed to satisfy.
Who reads these lines, let him reflect
Upon the narrowness of death,
And in my case behold
The image of our mortal lot,
This scanty tomb doth now suffice
For whom the earth was not enough. 72

(v)

The picture that emerges of Henry as a man of complex
and even self-contradictory character, has never posed
for the historian the kind of problem that Becket's has.
Writers who hold views on the whole favourable to
Becket, have not found themselves obliged to denigrate
Henry. But a defence of Henry on the grounds of his
statesmanship or modernity almost always seems to
entail a derogatory judgment of Becket's character.

Thomas Becket was born in or around 1118 in London,
of Norman parents. His father Gilbert Becket had
settled in London some years after the Conquest and was
one of the fairly wealthy burgesses of the town.
Thomas seems to have had at least two sisters, Mary
and Agnes, about whom his biographers do not say much.

During the early nineteenth century, a legend

72 Quoted, Kelly, op.cit., p.246. (Italics mine). 'How much
land does a man need?' asks the title of a story by Leo
Tolstoy. The history of Henry II illustrates the perennial
theme of the futility of human aspiration, or endeavour,
or greed, in the face of something as final as death.
gained currency which represented Becket as being of a mixed Saxon-Saracen descent. It told how the Saxon Gilbert Becket went on a pilgrimage to the holy land, where he was made captive by a Saracen chieftain but released through the good offices of the chieftain's daughter who had fallen in love with Gilbert. Some time after Gilbert's return to his native land the beautiful maiden followed him all the way across Europe with the knowledge of only two words "Gilbert" and "London" to help her on the way. She finally found him, and was baptized into the Christian church. She married her Gilbert, and later gave birth to the baby Thomas. This was the ancestry provided for Becket by Augustin Thierry in his Histoire de la Conquête de l'Angleterre par les Normands, and from there taken over by Meyer and Anouilh.

The true facts, however, assert that Thomas was of a thoroughly Norman descent. His biographers, probably with the benefit of hindsight, provide a few miracles for his childhood and youth. Even so, they are extremely meagre compared to the swarm of posthumous miracles. One story was told of a coverlet for the child's bed that was too large to be opened even in the market-place; another, how Thomas' father, to the scandalised disapproval of the school-master,
had once knelt before his son; another, how Thomas was once caught in a mill-stream, and the wheel was miraculously stopped just as he was carried towards it. But another point, which the biographers mention should be borne in mind as having been an important childhood influence. Thomas was, by all accounts, extremely fond of his mother, who was a very devout lady, and from an early age instilled in the child's mind a veneration for the Blessed Virgin Mary.

He was educated first at Merton Priory in Surrey and then at St. Paul's. As he grew up he was initiated into the sports of hunting and hawking and knightly exercises by Richer de l'aigle, the lord of Pevensey, who used to be a frequent guest at Gilbert Becket's house, in London. Around the age of eighteen or twenty Thomas went as a student to Paris, where he met John of Salisbury, studied under Robert of Melun, and for a year or more was exposed to all the intellectual tumult of the most important centre of learning in Europe.

He was, however, at his mother's death recalled home. Here he found his father financially in

73 Fitzstephen, E.H.D., p.703.
uncomfortable straits. For a while Thomas was employed as a clerk under a kinsman who was an important functionary in the town government. There he must have had his first taste of politics and diplomacy, especially while Empress Matilda was in London after her brief victory over Stephen.

Owing to the favour of some of his father's friends, Thomas soon became one of the household of Theobald of Canterbury. His extraordinary diplomatic talents as well as his unfailing tact and prudence quickly made him almost indispensable to his master. There also he made one of his lifelong enemies in the person of Roger of Pont l'Evêque, who was to be Archbishop of York during Thomas' own primacy at Canterbury. His bent being rather towards practical affairs than sheer scholarship, Theobald sent Thomas for two years to Bologna and Auxerre to make himself familiar with the speedily developing studies in canon law as well as civil or Roman law. On his return he was repeatedly employed on missions to the papal curia. During one of them, he eloquently represented the Angevin claim to the English throne and procured from the pope a prohibition of the coronation of Stephen's son. When Roger, the archdeacon of Canterbury was elected
to the see of York, Thomas was ordained deacon and placed in the archdeaconry, together with which he was also given other ecclesiastical preferments.

It was thus inevitable, that when Henry of Anjou became king, the wise old Theobald who had supported him so staunchly at the papal court, should recommend Thomas for the chancellorship.

Thomas was at this time around thirty-eight years of age, handsome and pleasing of countenance, tall of stature, with a

prominent and slightly aquiline nose, nimble and active in his movements, gifted with eloquence of speech and an acute intelligence, high-spirited, ever pursuing the paths of highest virtue, amiable to all men, compassionate towards the poor and the oppressed, resisting the proud, zealous for the promotion of his fellows, not from any insincerity, but out of pure courtesy and kindness, and aiming to secure the respect of all good men. He was liberal and witty, ever on his guard against deceiving men or being deceived by them, at once a prudent child of this world and destined to become a child of light.74

The Icelandic Saga of Thomas pictures him at the age of twenty-two as

...bliththe of countenance, keen of thought,

74 Fitzstephen, E.H.D., p.704.
winning and lovable in all conversation, frank of speech in his discourse, but slightly stuttering in his talk, so keen of discernment that he could always make difficult questions plain after a wise manner. Of such wondrously strong memory was he that whatever he had heard of sentence and law-awards he could cite it at any time he chose to give it forth.75

This is not the picture of the cold, unlovable masochist as given to us by a modern writer Naota Pain in her book The King and Becket.

The close comradeship which sprang up between Becket and his young sovereign, was the most remarkable feature of his tenure as Chancellor. Except for Henry's inordinate pursuit of women as opposed to Thomas' strict and life-long celibacy, the two shared the same interests in business and pleasure. All his tact, diplomacy and political sagacity, he placed at the King's command in his attempt to give England a stable administration. In this there were times when he was obliged to place himself in opposition to ecclesiastical claims.

The splendour and ostentation of his life was also remarked on. It was the Chancellor's house, not the royal palace, that attracted the greatest foreign

dignitaries, and it was through the Chancellor that people could approach the King. He kept open house everyday for all his exalted guests. With all this, however, he was, in his religious devotions, as regular as ever.

Thomas' tenure as chancellor also brought out the soldier in him. He helped the King in restoring his continental domains to order, and when Henry wished to enforce his claim to overlordship on the county of Toulouse. On this occasion, it is said, Thomas himself levied seven hundred knights, and at their head, distinguished himself on the battlefield.\footnote{Tancred Borenius comments, "...the aspect of Becket as Chancellor which above all forces itself upon one's attention is that which shows him - another Julius or Richelieu - as taking an active part in several of Henry II's campaigns...", St. Thomas Becket in Art (New York: Kennikat Press, 1970), p.3.}

On his consecration as Archbishop of Canterbury, contrary to all expectations, Thomas' behaviour underwent a drastic change. It has been commented on by all the contemporary biographers, and proves crucial in determining the favourable or unfavourable attitudes of modern historians. "Something like the transformation which carried Henry V from a rollicking prince to the august hero-King overnight was now
witnessed in Becket", comments Churchill. The comparison is very opt in some ways, especially when we remember that no one has thought of accusing Henry V of being an actor unconsciously measuring himself to a role and playing his part to perfection. To some of his contemporaries his conversion resembled that of Saul of Tarsus. Others like Gilbert Foliot derisively commented that the King had achieved a miracle in turning a worldly statesman and soldier overnight into an exemplary archbishop. Both views seem rather naive. The most sensible attitude seems to be to accept with Mrs. Green the fact that Becket's ecclesiastical training carried the day. "Up to this time (i.e., while he was archdeacon)" says Nesta Pain, "there is virtually nothing to suggest that he had any deep religious feeling...he seemed to be pursuing his career in the Church in a more or less secular spirit." Such a comment, however, need not cancel the possibility of a religious temperament, which had from childhood been brought up to reverence the Virgin. As David Knowles points out, "it seems quite clear that he never passed


78 Plain, op.cit., p.24.
through a period of religious negligence or a crisis of doubt. Similarly, all agree that...he was throughout life entirely pure...he had therefore in a sense less excuse for his faults of vanity and extravagance and ambition, for he had not forfeited his spiritual clarity of sight. And Knowles suggests that it was perhaps guilt and remorse regarding his past as chancellor that made him adopt his intransigent stand as Archbishop.

Another fault that critical writers find in his actions is the momentary volte-face at Clarendon. In a letter to Thomas Becket during his exile, Gilbert Foliot accuses him,

It was the leader of our chivalry who turned his back, the captain of our camp who fled; our lord of Canterbury himself abandoned the society of his brethren and forsook our counsel, and making his own decision, returned to us after a space and uttered these words: 'It is the lord's will that I should forewear myself; for the present I submit and incur perjury to do penance for it later as best I may.'

Earlier in the same letter Foliot has a description of how a number of nobles rushed into the chamber with

79 Knowles, "Archbishop Thomas Becket", op.cit., p.103.
80 F. H. D., p.749.
drawn swords, threatening the whole body of bishops. Foliot's accusation seems to be one of personal cowardice as well as impetuous action. The latter was true enough; John of Salisbury himself later pointed out this habit to the Archbishop. The former accusation taken by itself is palpably absurd. For one thing, it certainly does not harmonise with the description of Becket at Toulouse; for another, the biographers tell us that Thomas had already been beset with supplications to yield from two Templars, two of his own bishops who were already in the King's black-books and frightened for their lives, and even, the Pope's almoner, the Abbot of l'Aumône, who assured Thomas that "the King wanted no more than a formal assurance to satisfy his amour-propre, and keep him in countenance with his lay barons." It was, therefore, probably with great reluctance, and a mixture of motives that the Archbishop yielded. As soon as he realised that his capitulation was to be no mere formal affair, and that he was required to put his seal to a document containing blatant encroachments on church privileges, he retracted his assent; and his later intransigence

81 D. Knowles, The Episcopal Colleagues of Archbishop Thomas Becket, p.60.
was partly due to his determination never to fall again.

We now come to the problem of Thomas' attitude to his martyrdom. The biographers leave very little doubt that at some stage in the conflict Thomas became convinced that he was destined to die for the Church. But this is not at all the same thing as saying that his pride was so great that his actions were intended to lead to his death. The climate of the age and the attitude of the people around him may have done a lot to reinforce the conviction in the Archbishop's mind.

As early as the beginning of his exile, when the Archbishop had sent two or three of his followers to report to the Pope at Sens, Herbert of Bosham quotes the Pope as having said, "Your lord yet liveth in the flesh, as ye say, yet while still living he can claim the privilege of martyrdom." Richard Winston comments, "If we remember the religious intensity of the age that built the great Gothic cathedrals...we will not find his change of heart surprising. There was nothing hypocritical about it; men do not wear a hideous hair-shirt, submit to flagellation and melt into tears at the Mass without a genuine conviction that they are 'not worthy'. In conversations with his friends, Thomas would frequently review his 'sinful' past and

82 E. H. D., p. 736.
refer to the fact that he had been transformed from
'a patron of actors and a follower of hounds to a
shepherd of souls'.'\textsuperscript{83}

The most common interpretation of Thomas's personality
that has gained currency among historians has been that
of a congenital perfectionist, the great actor who
unconsciously moulded his behaviour to suit a role and
played it to the best of his ability.

Z. N. Brooks says:

he was one of those men who, exalting to the
full the role they have to play, picture
themselves as the perfect representatives of
their office, visualising a type and making
themselves the living impersonations of it;
actors playing a part, but unconscious
actors...When he was appointed Archbishop
it needed no miraculous conversion; he
pictured himself in the part at once, and
he warned the king of the consequences...
He pictured himself as one of the Church's
heroes, patiently resisting the tyrant...\textsuperscript{84}

William Stubbs, classifies medieval ecclesiastics
into three classes; the secular prelates - exemplified by
Roger, Bishop of Salisbury under Henry I -, ecclesiastical

\textsuperscript{83} R. Winston, \textit{op. cit.}, p.130.

\textsuperscript{84} Z. N. Brooks, \textit{The English Church and the Papacy from the
Conquest to the Reign of John} (Cambridge: Cambridge
politicians — exemplified by Henry of Winchester —, and those of truly religious life like St. Anselm; he delivers a warning that the last class is the most prone to corruption. Becket, he claims, illustrates all three classes in the three phases of his career. Finally, Stubbs sums up, "he appears,...a strong impulsive man, the strength of whose will is out of all proportion to the depth of his character, with little self-restraint, little self-knowledge, no statesmanlike insight, and yet too much love of intrigue and craft. He is not a constructive reformer in the church; in the state he is obstructive and exasperating. Even on the estimate of his friends he does not come within the first rank of great men." More recently we have the view of Westa Pain which judges Becket as a cold, unlovable masochist who betrayed his king.

The trouble with all these interpretations is that the primary aim of all the writers concerned was to illustrate the benefits accruing to England and its people, from the administration and reforms of Henry II. Seen from this point of view, Becket’s stand appears as an obstacle in the way of a progressive monarch.

85 Stubbs, The Early Plantagenets, p. 80.
The surface inconsistency between the chancellor and the archbishop lends added weight to the "actor" interpretation; and in evaluating the contemporary twelfth-century commentators, the tendency of these interpretations has been to accept factual description and dismiss character judgments as naive and biased. The resulting interpretations, which fit the facts well enough, smack too much of our own age.

On the other hand, the view expressed by David Knowles in his character study of Becket makes allowances for Thomas' religious upbringing, which must have had a lot to do with the moulding of his temperament. He sees in Becket's supposed conversion an attempt to stone for the overweening worldliness of his life as chancellor. By nature tactful and prudent, his later stubbornness was "not because of an old character fault, but because he judged, rightly or wrongly, that the time had come to dismiss conciliation and neglect criticism."86

Thomas has repeatedly been compared to two other saints; to St. Anselm, who less than a century before Becket, had been engaged in a similar conflict with his king; and from the time of Henry VIII, to Sir Thomas More, who was also a Thomas, also a chancellor who

served his king faithfully and was later executed at his orders. Tancred Borenius, in his survey of the iconography of Thomas Becket mentions a seventeenth-century medallion representing a bust of the Archbishop on one side, and another based on the Holbein portrait of Sir Thomas More on the other side. He comments, "The juxtaposition of the two characters was suggested, of course, by the many analogies existing between them...indeed St. Thomas Becket experienced additional ignominy posthumously at the hands of the same King of England who caused Sir Thomas More to be beheaded."87

Compared with Anselm and Thomas More, the personality of Becket undoubtedly suffers in estimation. "He appears small indeed by the side of Anselm", says Stubbs.88 And the reason for this lies largely in the very strong impression we have of Thomas' belligerence and aggressiveness in his opposition to the king. It could sometimes even turn into vindictiveness. The courage of his opposition was not, on the whole, combined

87 Borenius, op.cit., p.30. See next chapter for Henry VIII's 'de-canonizing' proclamation.

88 Op.cit., p.80. Compare Paine: "Anselm was gentle, Anselm was charitable. It is Becket's tragedy that he was forced into a way of life which was alien to his temperament, and he brought the spirit of a politician to a struggle which called for the virtues of a saint." - op.cit., p.245.
with a meekness and patience in accepting suffering, as it was in the case of St. Anselm and Sir Thomas More. Becket's actions as reported by his contemporaries, reveal a certain pride, and even egotism which conflicts with the impression of true sanctity.