THE LIFE AND MIRACLES OF ST. WILLIAM OF NORWICH

Thomas of Monmouth

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INTRODUCTION.

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CHAPTER I. THOMAS OF MONMOUTH.

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The writer of the following book gives no account of his own early life or parentage, nor do we know anything more of him than may be gathered from the book itself. He calls himself Thomas Monemutensis, or Thomas of Monmouth, and he first appears as one of the monks in the great monastery which Herbert of Losinga had founded at Norwich at the close of the llth century, when, as he tells us, a vision appeared to him in the early morning of Tuesday, in the first week of Lent, 1150.

It is at first sight difficult to understand how a Monmouth man should have found his way to so distant a part of the country as Norwich. But it is noticeable that it was a few years before this that Geoffrey of Monmouth had established a school, which soon became famous, at Llandaff, and that it was apparently in the autumn of 1147 that he issued the final draught of his famous *Historia regum Britannice*.

The publication of this edition must have brought Geoffrey to consult with his literary friends and patrons in England, and it is far from improbable that our Thomas may have been one of the scholars who accompanied their master when that master was looking out for the preferment, which he evidently was bidding for when he

addressed his *Vita Merlini* to Robert Chesney, Bishop of Lincoln, in 1149. Geoffrey himself was consecrated Bishop of St Asaph, at Lambeth, in February 1152. Thomas had already before this time been admitted a monk at Norwich. He had certainly received a scholar's training in his youth; his Latinity is correct and fluent; it is less crabbed and pretentious than that of Geoffrey; he was familiar with the Latin poets; he quotes Vergil and Horace, seems to have read the Thebais of Statius and could fortify himself with scraps of other classical writers; his allusions indicate quite a wide range of study for the times in which he lived; he had the Vulgate at his fingers' ends, he delights in drawing upon the lives of the saints afterwards comprehended in the *Legenda Aurea*; I am inclined to believe that he was acquainted with Jonas' life of S. Columban of Luxeuil, and he was certainly a diligent reader of Gregory of Tours. It is not too much to say that in writing the life of the boy saint of Norwich he must have had Gregory's books at his elbow and freely used them for his own purposes.

It is to be noted that all the incidents related in the first two books are confessedly reported on hearsay evidence, from whence we must infer that Brother Thomas was admitted into the monastery during the time that Elias was prior (1146 1150). All this time the story of the martyrdom had made very little way. The Rose had bloomed in the winter of 1144-5. Next spring the man Lewin saw his vision away there in the fens; but the Norwich people had taken so little notice of the story of the martyrdom that they had almost forgotten it. The Easter Synod met again in 1145 and Godwin Sturt got up to make a speech once more. This time it is evident that he produced no impression. Nay! I suspect that Brother Thomas' silence indicates that the priest was listened to with jeers and ridicule. Then, however, he and

Lewin played into one another's hands and Lewin's son was cured by a miracle. Even so, nobody seems to have paid much attention to the matter. The man went home with his boy and we hear no more of him. Then came another vision which again Thomas tells on hearsay: he does not venture to give the name of the girl from Mulbarton; what he expressly calls the first notable miracle is again given from the report of others. At last the story of the hysterical young lady at Dunwich attracted attention and we are told that " the memory of the blessed martyr revived, for *it had gradually been waning, yea, in the hearts of nearly all it had well-nigh entirely died out*."

It was just at this point that the outrageous assassination of the Jew Eleazar by the followers of Sir Simon de Novere brought on a crisis. The Jews demanded that the crime should be punished and laid their charge before the king during one of his visits to Norwich. Bishop Turbe acting in the interest of the accused, who was one of his own *mesne tenants*, took up the defence with great energy, and in answer to the claim for redress he brought up again the case of the boy William, who, he affirmed, had been murdered by the Jews five years before, and he demanded that justice should be done in the earlier case before any enquiry were proceeded with in the second. If Thomas had himself been present he would certainly have told us so. On the contrary he calls his account of the trial before the king *conjecturalis causa*. It seems to me that this elaborate report of the speech for the defence was drawn up by Bishop Turbe himself. It is a mere specimen of the ordinary rhetorical exercise.

With this the second book ends, and when the third book begins we find ourselves in the year 1150 with Elias still prior of the monastery and Brother Thomas one of the

monks, and a most entire partisan of the bishop and supporter of the story of the martyrdom. Six years had passed since the first Synod, and the story so far from gaining any general acceptance had been discredited by all but a very few. There lay the body of the murdered boy in the monks' cemetery, but the excitement had long ago ceased, and every attempt to create a belief in the reality of the martyrdom had failed. Prior Elias steadily set himself against making capital out of what he evidently regarded as a mere imposture; the bishop and his satellite, however, were not to be gainsaid.

On Tuesday, in the first week in Lent 1150, Brother Thomas saw his first vision. The great founder appeared to him and gave him two messages to deliver, one to the bishop and the other to the prior, ordering them to arrange for the removal of 'the Martyr' to a worthier resting place: he was to be laid in the Chapter House in a place of honour. The prior's health was by this time failing, the bishop was as importunate and resolute as ever; Elias reluctantly gave way. The body was placed in the new tomb; and it looks suspiciously as if some trick had been played whereby l5he grave was not dug deep enough and consequently the slab that covered the stone coffin stood above the floor of the Chapter House. But when Thomas presumed to take too much upon himself he was promptly reproved for his impertinence, and it required another vision to bring about the fixing a light upon the tomb which signified that extraordinary respect was due to the memory of the dead. Just then Prior Elias died, and was succeeded by Richard de Ferrariis, himself a zealous upholder of the martyrdom and a staunch supporter of Thomas and the bishop. After this the cultus of the saint began to spread with amazing rapidity, and when Prior Richard, not content with the saint's body

being left in the Chapter House determined that it should be once more taken up and placed in the Cathedral, and when Bishop Turbe warmly seconded him, and with a pompous function and ceremony St William was carried from the cloister and laid by the side of Bishop Herbert's own tomb near the high altar, there was at last a great outburst of enthusiasm. Miracles and visions began to occur from week to week, until the crowds that came to make their offerings at the shrine were found to be a serious inconvenience, and on the oth of April, 1154, just ten years after the discovery of the body in Thorpe Wood, the last removal took place, viz. to the chapel formerly called the Chapel of the Holy Martyrs, and subsequently, as it appears, the Jesus Chapel. Of any subsequent removal we have no record, but the chapel of St William in later times is found on the northern side of the screen which Bishop Lyhart erected in the 14th century, and the remains of that altar may be seen at the present day.

The general acceptance of the story of the martyrdom and the recognition of St William as a real saint undoubtedly date from the time of his removal into the Cathedral. After this the Norfolk gentry began to vie with one another in offering their homage at the new shrine, and all classes followed their lead. It is only necessary to glance at the names of the local magnates to see that quite a *furore* existed at the end of King Stephen's reign in favour of the boy saint. Norfolk by this time proudly claimed him as her own. The cult was firmly established in East Anglia before the 12th century closed and how the story spread, was borrowed from, plagiarised, and continued to exercise its influence upon the popular beliefs and superstitions of men even in far distant countries must be dealt with by another.

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Our readers will expect some expression of opinion upon the serious question of the credibility of the story and the good faith and honesty of Brother Thomas.

One fact seems certain, namely, a boy's dead body was found in Thorpe Wood on the 24th March, 1144. How it got there, there is not a particle of evidence to show. When Henry de Sprovvston found the corpse he first wished to take it to Sprowston and get it buried in the churchyard, but he changed his mind and buried it where he found it.

Godwin Sturt, the priest, now appears upon the scene, and through his instrumentality the corpse is recognised as the body of his wife's nephew. On his telling his wife of the discovery, she has at once a vision to relate, about which she had never said a word till now. Everything follows intelligibly enough, and I must needs add suspiciously enough: the evidence of the Jew's servant is wholly incredible, and one cannot but think invented years later. The testimony of the Jew, Theobald, is obviously a fabrication and the same must be said of the information asserted to have been given by Sir William Hastings. It is incomparably more probable that Hastings never said anything of the sort; more credible in fact that Brother Thomas lied in giving him the credit of this astounding assertion, than that the Jews should quite gratuitously have borne this damning witness against themselves and volunteered a confession so suicidal. Almost equally improbable, or at any rate very suspicious, is the story of AElward Ded; the story of the birds that would not settle on the body is obviously borrowed from an incident in Jonas' *Life of St Columban*, § 27.

On the other hand, it is certain that Brother Thomas did not invent the story; it was current when he first became a monk at the priory. The priest Godwin was, one cannot help suspecting, the originator of the accusation and he comes out of it very badly. He not only got hold of the *teazle*, which he affirmed was the very instrument with which the Jews had tortured their victim, but he made merchandise of it for years, playing upon the credulity of simple people to extort money from them.

Robert, the martyr's brother, became a person of consideration by reason of his relationship with the saint, and the same may be said of his mother Elviva.

When we come to look into the character of Brother Thomas again, we find it very far from blameless. He appropriated candles, and assures us he forgot all about them; he stole the martyr's shoe and hid it away; he filched his teeth and told lies about them. Only when somebody else was informed of his pilferings in a vision did he go any way towards making restitution. There is some reason for suspecting that he got his office of sacrist to the martyr by revelation, and there is only one hint of his having been promoted to any of the more important offices in the priory, though at the time his book was written he had been member of the convent for more than 20 years. That indicates pretty clearly that he was not trusted by the brethren, and that successive priors, in whose hands all the patronage of the monastery lay, kept him at arm's length, and did not promote him to any responsible office. Yet it would be rash and unwarrantable to insinuate that he was from first to last a cunning and designing rogue. In an age of measureless credulity, when doubt is reckoned devil-born, and unquestioning acquiescence in the dominant beliefs of the day is apt to be regarded as more meritorious than the

practice of the lowly virtues of uprightness and tolerance, even good and fervent men, and much more those who are very zealous for what they hold to be a great cause, can easily persuade themselves to accept without hesitation or demur the conclusions of those in authority. Unconsciously they get to subject their reason to their interest or their inclinations, till their mental condition becomes one of miserable intellectual torpor, and the critical faculty being paralysed they lose the power of distinguishing truth from falsehood. It is very easy to call such men impostors; it is wiser to remember that in every age there have been examples of this type, men and women of whom it has been said that they are " deceivers and being deceived "; and yet it would be hard, perhaps impossible, to say when and how the one merged into the other. Perhaps the two processes may be at work simultaneously. A man may start by wishing for truth without going the right way to arrive at it, and may end by embracing falsehood till he cannot bear to part with it.

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"Les vies de saints sont aussi de l'histoire," says a great historian. "Ce qu'il y faut chercher," he adds, "ce sont les habitudes, les faits ge'ne'raux et permanents, et l'hagiographe n'avait aucun inte'ret a les altdrer. Il peut inventer un miracle, il n'en invente pas les circonstances."

Hagiography, or as it may be called Christian mythology, has few attractions for the general reader of the nineteenth century; his aversion to this kind of literature is at least excusable, but the contemptuous ridicule with which he speaks of it does not prove his superior wisdom. When we can get over the long lists of miracles, which even in their

nauseous details have all a strong family likeness to one another, there still remains a very valuable element of social history imbedded in the most extravagant lives of saints that have come down to us. Brother Thomas had little thought of supplying us with information regarding the beliefs or the daily life of his contemporaries, and yet he could not help doing so. Unconsciously he furnishes us with some valuable side lights which give us here and there a glimpse of the habits and manners and superstitions and religious observances of various classes of people in the 12th century. The monk in his cloister was living a life apart, but he could not for all his seclusion be ignorant of what was going on in the outer world. To begin with, he must needs have been brought into relations with the secular or parochial clergy, and he has to speak of them rather frequently in his narrative.

i. It is observable that every priest whom Thomas names is a married man. Wlward. St William's grandfather, Godwin Sturt, who had married his mother's sister, Edwin, the priest of Taverham, husband of her first cousin, and others who are incidentally mentioned are all husbands and fathers, and there is no indication that they were held in less esteem on that account. The attempt to enforce celibacy upon the secular clergy in the diocese of Norwich had never met with any success. How should it when the three immediate predecessors of Bishop Herbert were almost certainly married men? In despite of all papal legislation, decrees of councils, pressure exercised by bishops or heavy taxation imposed upon the married clergy by Henry I. and King John, the secular priests went on taking to themselves wives till late in the 13th century, and in the 12th this was evidently the rule rather than the exception among the English clergy.

ii. When Thomas wrote his book the practice of Auricular Confession had not yet been made obligatory, nor had the Indicative formula of Absolution been introduced into the Church. In the Monasteries, the ancient custom had been for the brethren to make public confession of their faults and sins in the Chapter House and to submit to such penance as might be imposed upon them. Slowly, very slowly, the general confession of guiltiness and sinfulness in which a whole congregation joined audibly, developed into the private confession to a priest, and this was first imposed upon all the faithful by the famous canon, *Omnis tttriusque seams*, of the Lateran Council of 1216. We hear several times of Confession in the following pages: but the reader must be reminded that we are engaged with the 12th century and not with the 13th. When we read that Wicheman, one of the monks, was appointed the bishop's deputy for receiving confessions, it should be borne in mind that the duties of this office did not consist in extorting secrets from the penitent, or in giving absolution even in the *precatory* form. He had to hear what the sinner had to tell against himself and to adjudge such penance as the case in his judgment demanded, or in a matter of difficulty to report it to the bishop, who would deal with it in his discretion. Secrecy was not of the essence of confession in those days, and no scruple would be felt in reporting what a dying man had revealed in his last moments. The doctrine of the *Seal of Confession* had not yet been heard of; it was the inevitable result of the enforcement of auricular confession in a later time. This will explain how Thomas can have known what only could be reported by a priest who had heard the penitent's story. At the point of death men and women then, as now, yearned to unburden their consciences of a load that was heavy to bear, but there was

no necessary obligation to conceal what it might in many cases be only a matter of right and duty to make known. The comfort ministered by the priest took the form of an intercessory prayer: and there is no trace in the narrative we are concerned with of any other absolution except that which was pronounced by the bishop on *Absolution* Day, as the Thursday in Passion Week had by this time got to be called.

Morinus has given some interesting illustrations of this very ancient ceremony. When auricular confession was made obligatory on all and *private* absolution became universally prevalent, the old public solemnity tended to become obsolete; yet it was still kept up in his own time in many of the French churches, and especially in the diocese of Paris, where among the laity it was called *l'Absoute*. As far as my own reading has extended I have not met with any instance of the kind in England, later than this in Brother Thomas' narrative.

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There are still some matters alluded to or mentioned in our narrative to which the attention of the reader should be directed.

(i) It appears there was much more education of a certain kind among all classes than one would have expected. The little William, we are told, was taught by his mother: the hysterical girl at Dunwich appears to have been fond of learning: Robert the Carpenter carried about a psalter in his pocket: Thomas himself loses a psalter which he had written for his own use, but it was stolen from him by someone who certainly regarded it as a saleable article.

(ii) There seems to have been a great deal of money changing hands. Two *monetarii* are named who cannot have been the only licensed coiners in Norwich. In the Confessor's days we know that there were seven "Moneyers" at Chester, and the trade of Norwich more than a century later must have required a good deal of the circulating medium. Moreover, everybody seems to have been able to command threepence for masses or offerings or candles; and the people generally appear to have been fairly well to do. Beggars there were who lived upon alms, but one hears surprisingly little of poverty, while we do hear of a lady who wore many rings on her fingers, and of people wandering about on pilgrimage; moreover the hatred that was felt against the Jews implies that they were living upon the necessities of the traders and artisans, that is, that trade was flourishing, however bad the finance of the traders may have been.

(iii) It is evident that surnames were far more common in East Anglia during the 12th century than some would have us believe. In the following pages the reader will meet with surnames of all kinds and their general prevalence indicates that they must have been in most cases inherited. This will throw us back even to the llth century. Some of these surnames are no more than descriptive of a man's trade or occupation, as Robert Palmarius, Reginald Vacarius, Edward Piscator. Some refer to the place from which the bearer came, as Richard de Needham, but many can hardly be other than patronymics, the original form of which has become so *obscured by wear* that it is difficult to assign any meaning to them. Such are *AElward Ded*, Walter Flotberd, Stannard Wrancberd, Godwin Sturt and others, which will be found collected in the index (Surnames).

(iv) As to the superstitions and beliefs of the people, of which the book contains many illustrations, I have not thought it necessary to dwell upon them. Students of folklore will I doubt not find more than one curious passage which will for them possess special interest.

CHAPTER II.
THE BENEDICTINE PRIORY AT NORWICH.

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When the body of the dead boy was found in Thorpe Wood, the monastery at Norwich had not been opened much more than forty years, and it was little more than twenty-four years since Bishop Herbert had died. The founder had contemplated a convent of sixty monks, but it may be doubted if at any time the full complement of brethren was reached. It is hardly probable that as many as fifty can have been admitted to the house during Herbert's lifetime. In the year 1144 there must have been many among the brethren who remembered and had known him well. Nor can the Prior, William Turbe, have been the only member of the community who had been actually trained under Herbert's eye and educated by him in the routine of monastic discipline. Under a Prior whose life from boyhood had been passed in the rigorous discipline of a strict Benedictine house, we may be sure there would be small toleration of laxity. The Cluniac rule, which was intended to revive the ascetic life, or at least to restore the old rigour, had been introduced into the Norwich diocese by the foundation of the Cluniac priories of Castle Acre and Thetford; and the influence of this reform cannot but have made itself felt in the older religious houses. Everything in Brother Thomas' narrative goes to show that the Benedictine rule was somewhat scrupulously enforced at Norwich. There had

scarcely been time enough for any bad tradition to grow up in the cloister.

From the monks' choir (the limits of which extended westward, nearly as far as the still existing twisted pillars in the nave; and eastward comprehended all the choir with its chapels–the transepts being probably screened off) the laity were excluded; an altar–the altar of the Holy Cross–being provided for them, at which mass was duly said. The whole convent were required to attend the midnight services, and lamps were lit in the cloister to lighten the darkness. The old rule of silence was observed, and apparently the language of signs was still in use upon occasion, for when Brother Thomas had seen his vision of the founder in 1150, he did not venture to tell it to ihe Prior until, in obedience to the rule, he had first gained permission to speak (ubi juxta ordinem loquendi daretur facultas). The vision itself too was granted when Thomas was lying upon his bed after matins, at which time it was usual for a monk to remain in the dormitory. The sacrist slept not in the dormitory, but in the church, a duty which in later times was often shirked as irksome and disagreeable.

The schoolboys were taught in the eastern walk of the cloister, and they seem to have actually had seats in the Chapter House at the daily meeting of the convent in Chapter. Unless indeed we are to infer no more than that the school was kept in the Chapter House: in either case, however, the practice was very unusual of the boys having any recognised place in that building. There appear to have been fourteen boys educated in the school originally.

The story of the black pig that made its way into the precincts during the night shows that there was some access to the cloister from the outside through the "dark entry" which I think must have been the ordinary passage to

the latrines; and the people who flocked to see the martyr's tomb when he lay in the Chapter House can only have entered by this approach, which in the nature of things could not always be kept closed. The infirmary buildings which extended from the dorter in the direction of the river protected the monks' cemetery to a great extent from intrusion.

The ordinary way of approach from the cloister to this cemetery was through the undercroft over which the dorter was built. The slype or passage through which a dead monk was carried to his burial lay between the Chapter House and the Church, and the doorway to this slype may still be seen in the eastern alley of the cloister, as may the steps which led up to the dormitory.

Of the twelve or thirteen monks named by Brother Thomas, six are *Obedientiaries* or office-bearers in the priory, viz., the Prior, Sub-Prior, Sacrist, Chamberlain and the Cantor or Precentor. Brother Thomas has enabled us to correct some mistakes which Blomefield was led into by the authorities which alone he had access to in his day.

William Turbe appears to have succeeded Ingulf as Prior sometime in 1121, that is about two years after Bishop Herbert's death, and of course vacated this office on his election to the Bishopric in 1146. The convent elected Elias to succeed him, and it is abundantly evident that Prior Elias set himself firmly against giving unquestioning credence to the story of the martyrdom. Indeed I cannot resist the suspicion that when William Turbe as Prior was doing his utmost to induce the monks to accept the tale with unquestioning credulity and to turn it to account, there was a strong party in the convent who set themselves against the whole business, and that of this party Elias was the head. If it were so, we must infer that the election of Prior

Elias turned mainly upon the question of recognising the dead boy as indeed the victim of the Jews, and so as a saint and martyr, and that at this early stage the sceptical party among the monks was the stronger and carried their man.

Prior Elias, however, evidently found Bishop Turbe's continued presence at Norwich and his fanatical determination to glorify the boy saint too strong to resist, and when the body had lain in the monks' cemetery for six years and brother Thomas was allowed to tell his vision in open chapter and received the strong support of the bishop, the little saint–for by this time he had begun to be spoken of as such–was taken up from his grave in the cemetery and removed to the new sarcophagus in the Chapter House; but March when Thomas, presuming upon his success in obtaining the removal, and confident of receiving the bishop's countenance and support, presumed to provide a carpet to be spread before the new tomb, and a taper to be kept burning there, Prior Elias promptly ordered the removal of these things. Only a new outburst of miracles and visions availed to bring about the restoration of the light, Elias evidently having given way with no little reluctance.

The formal appointment of Thomas as sacrist to the martyr, means apparently that somebody by this time had been told off to account for the offerings made at the shrine by pilgrims and visitors, but I suspect that the new office was created by the bishop and not by the prior.

Prior Elias is said by Blomefield to have died 22 Oct. 1149. It is clear from the narrative of Thomas that his death took place in 1150. Elias was succeeded in his office by Richard de Ferrariis, then sub-Prior, a man of high birth, and to all appearance an uncompromising supporter of Brother Thomas and his story. He was no sooner elected than he showed his zeal for the martyr by restoring the carpet which

Prior Elias had caused to be removed, and in July next year the body was removed for the third time from the Chapter House into the Cathedral, without any ceremonial, and placed in a position to the south of the high altar and protected by an iron grating. By this time the name of the boy saint had travelled far and wide. The story had gained general acceptance, and pilgrims began to flock to Norwich from all parts of the country. Finally, on the 5th April, 1154, the saint was removed to the apsidal chapel on the north of the high altar now known as the Jesus Chapel, but then designated as the Chapel of the Holy Martyrs. This time Bishop Turbe took a prominent part in the dedicatory services. He had got the desire of his heart, and no further removal was carried out till later times.

Blomefield interpolates a certain prior named Ranulph, of whom I can learn nothing, as the successor of Prior Richard, and he says the next prior, John, succeeded 'about 1170.' Inasmuch as there is a letter from John of Salisbury, which belongs to the year 1168, addressed to John the prior of Norwich, it is plain that Prior Richard must have died before this year. Finally on the 27 April, 1168, Bishop Turbe built and consecrated a chapel to S. William in Thorpe Wood, on the spot where the body was said to have been found 24 years before; and the foundations of this chapel may be traced even to the present day, if indeed the place which tradition has assigned to it be correct. A special service of commemoration of S. William was in use in the 14th century, which has been printed in Dean Goulburn's work from a transcript made by the late Henry Bradshaw.

It was not to be expected that any but incidental mention should be found in the following pages, of the names of the Norwich monks during the period with which the narrative of Brother Thomas is concerned.

Of the monks named, two at least were gentlemen of high birth, and a third was of the kindred of one of the leading families in Norwich.

Peter Peverell and Richard de Ferrariis were both scions of distinguished Norman houses. In the 12th century the monasteries were very different places from what we find them four centuries later. By that time they had to a very great extent ceased to be the homes of disciplined devotion and were no longer places of retirement for men of high birth desirous of spending their last days in seclusion and preparation for the next life among a brotherhood of unworldly ascetics keeping up continual exercises of prayer and praise. In the 12th century, however, the monasteries were still regarded as, and they actually were, the houses and the schools of holiness, and it was only what we should expect that Bishop Herbert's priory offered attractions to men of gentle blood young and old who at this time joined the community and who found a refuge there from mundane cares and anxiety and hoped to find a refuge too from the temptations and proclivities which they had learnt to dread and abhor.

Nevertheless there was doubtless a plebeian element to be found in a great monastery from the first–though it by no means preponderated so largely as it undoubtedly did in later times.

There was always a career open to a lad of promise educated in the monastic schools, and it was never difficult for a *clerk* wherever educated to gain admission–sometimes too easy and too early admission–into a religious house, if he had shown decided talent and an inclination to enter the monastic profession, even though he were a poor man's son and could contribute nothing to his own support. The time might come when he would bring credit and honour to the

house which had received him; and there was exactly the same competition for a young fellow who had the making of a bishop in him among the monasteries as there is now among the schools and colleges for a lad with a brilliant future before him.

Robert, the martyr's brother, who plays such a suspicious part in getting up the story, was received as a monk into the priory, though he can hardly have been other than a poor man; but at any rate he had shown himself a valuable partisan–he was already in minor orders; which means that he had received some education–and in the sequel he became a prominent personage among the hierophants of the new *cult*. Even he however had apparently to wait some time before he was accepted and admitted as a member of the community. There was, and there must have been, some educational, moral, and, in many monasteries, even a social standard which any postulant for admission would have to attain to over and above the real or pretended *vocation* which was put to rather severe tests during the period of the noviciate.

There are indications in the narrative of Brother Thomas that the adoption of St William as a kind of patron saint of the priory did a great deal more harm than good to the community. From the first there had been something like bitter dissension in the convent, and even to the time when Thomas wrote his book there was almost acrimonious feeling between him and the sceptics who evidently did not make any secret of their doubts.

The intrusion of sightseers into the cloister, even into the very Chapter House, and the crowds that made their way into the precincts–not always, we may be sure, in a respectful and acquiescent frame of mind–must have been disturbing to the quiet and order of the house, and the

burial of the martyr's mother in the Monks' Cemetery must have shocked the feelings of many of the brethren, and can hardly have been agreed to without some protest from the minority. Bishop Turbe died in January, 1175. His successor was a man of a very different temper and cast of mind. He was much away from Norwich during the 25 years of his episcopate. He had no sympathy with the monastic life, and the Norwich Monks probably were, as far as he was concerned, left to their own devices. But it is idle to indulge in conjecture where we have no evidence to deal with. Thomas lifts the curtain: when he drops it we are left without a glimpse of what might still be revealed if another had taken up the tale.

CHAPTER III.
EAST ANGLIA IN THE REIGN OF KING STEPHEN.

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We are told that the boy William was twelve years of age when he was put to death by the Norwich Jews, just before the Easter Festival of 1144. This fixes his birth to the year 1132. The last event mentioned by Thomas appears to belong to 1172. We are therefore concerned with a period of 40 years, a period which covers the whole reign of Stephen and well-nigh twenty years of the reign of Henry II. Contemporary sources for the history of the former reign are so very few, and our knowledge even of the sequence of events—much less of the life of the people during these miserable years—so scanty, that a brief review of English affairs so far as may be necessary to explain some passages in the following narrative, and so far as the narrative itself throws light upon the general history of the country during the times we are concerned with—will not, I trust, be regarded as useless for the general reader. Of scholars I crave some indulgence for the introduction of matter which by them perhaps may be regarded as superfluous.

With the death of Henry I. on the 1st of December, 1135, the family of William the Conqueror, in the male line, came to an end. By the foundering of the White ship in 1120, Henry had lost his only legitimate son. The "good Queen Maud" had died in 1118. In January, 1121, the king married Adela of Louvain, but there was no issue from this second marriage. There remained to him one legitimate daughter,

Matilda, who in 1114 had become the wife of the Emperor, Henry V. In 1125 the Emperor died, and next year the Empress returned to England.

At the Christmas festival of 1126 the Prelates and Barons of the realm were required to swear fealty to Matilda and accept her as the heir to the throne and to all her father's dominions in England and Normandy. Two years later (17 June, 1128), she was married to Geoffrey Plantagenet, and six weeks after this event William, surnamed Clito, the Conqueror's only surviving grandson, died. His luckless father Duke Robert closed his miserable career at Cardiff 3rd February, 1134, and in the following December, as has been said, Henry the king followed his brother to the grave.

Though Matilda had borne no children to her first husband, the Emperor, yet before her father's death she had two sons by her second husband, the elder of whom, bom on the 5th March, 1133, was the future king Henry II., who at his grandfather's death was in his third year.

But when that event occurred a daughter of the Conqueror, and so a sister of Henry I., was still living. Adela or Adeliza was perhaps the most gifted woman of her age. She had manied Stephen Count of Blois, in 1080, and by him had been the mother of a large family. Her husband was slain in 1101: she herself took the veil at the Cluniac Priory of Marcigny in 1109. None the less however did she continue to be a strong and influential personage in European politics till her death in 1137.

The third son of this illustrious lady, Stephen, the Conqueror's grandson, and therefore first cousin to the Empress Matilda, was sent as a youth to be educated at the court of his uncle Henry I., and for twenty years was a conspicuous figure among the barons. He was virtually the king's adopted son, and as early as 1126 was recognised as

the first layman in the kingdom after the sovereign. Nevertheless at his uncle's bidding, he, with the rest of the nobility and the bishops had on two occasions sworn fealty to the Empress Matilda as heir to the crown; and from anything that we know to the contrary he had never put forth any claim to the succession or been suspected of any treasonable or ambitious designs.

He held his peace and made no sign; but when Henry died, his prompt action secured to him the throne. He was elected to the kingdom by the citizens of London; accepted at Winchester, where he possessed himself of the royal treasury; and was crowned at Westminster at the end of December, 1135.

The Empress Matilda at once appealed to Rome; her contention being that Stephen had defrauded her of her right and had forsworn himself by breaking his oath of fealty. The decision was pronounced with very little delay and was in Stephen's favour. Meanwhile, though the Empress had her hands full on the other side of the Channel, Stephen had a difficult part to play with the disloyal factions at home.

The invasion of David king of Scotland, uncle of the Empress, ended in a kind of peace; but in that same year, 1136, the rebellion of Hugh Bigod—the first revolt on the part of his nominal supporters—disturbed the comparative quiet. After the suppression of this outbreak Stephen's position in England was a strong one. Unhappily he lacked all the necessary qualities of a ruler of men. In 1137 he crossed over to Normandy, where Matilda was unable to hold her ground. At the close of the year he was back again. Then followed the second invasion of the Scots and the decisive *Battle of the Standard* on the 22nd August, 1138. The triumph proved of very little use to Stephen, who, as

usual, threw away his opportunities. During the next year, 1139, he contrived to put himself wrong with every class in the kingdom, the Church, the baronage, the traders, the administrators of justice and finance; and before the year 1140 was ended the long anarchy had begun.

Meanwhile Matilda the Empress had landed at Arundel on the 30th September, 1139, and been received into the castle there by Adela, the widowed Queen of Henry I. Matilda had failed to keep her hold on Normandy—perhaps the time had come to wrench England from the grasp of the usurper.

But Matilda was almost as little fitted for dealing with the difficult position in which she found herself as Stephen himself was. At the battle of Lincoln, 2nd February, 1141, the king was made prisoner after fighting like a hero. A week later Matilda was recognised 'Lady of England' at Winchester; and though she was never crowned she exercised for awhile all the functions of sovereignty. In May she was met at St Alban's by the citizens of London, and thence was conducted in a grand procession to Westminster, and confirmed the recent election of Robert, a monk of Reading, as bishop of London. Her triumph was short; the citizens of London soon rose against her and drove her out. In August she was again at Winchester: she occupied the castle while the city was being reduced to flames, for wherever she moved, horror and ruin followed in her train.

On the 14th September she was once more a fugitive, riding as men ride (*usu masculine*) to Devizes, and when subsequently she reached Gloucester she was carried on a bier and wrapped about with grave-clothes, for she could not trust her very followers. Meanwhile Earl Robert of Gloucester endeavouring to escape from the city by another

road fell into the hands of the king's mercenaries at Stourbridge, where it seems Stephen's queen, the other Matilda, had her headquarters. The Earl was at once handed over to William of Ypres, and confined in the castle of Rochester. The fortunes of war had changed rapidly indeed. The two Matildas had now each lost her absolutely essential chief and leader. Matilda the Queen was clamouring for her husband the king; Matilda the Empress was helpless without the support and championship of her half brother the Earl. Fierce and stubborn as ever, the Empress would hear of no compromise, but she had to yield at last, and at the beginning of November the two prisoners were exchanged, and there was a pause. The exhaustion of both parties stopped hostilities for awhile, but Stephen was clearly gaining ground and Matilda was losing it. In December, 1141, Henry Bishop of Winchester called a council at Westminster, at which the king attended, and there Stephen was once more proclaimed the lawful king of England, to whom obedience was due, and excommunication was pronounced upon all who should support Matilda's claims to the crown. Almost the whole of 1142 passed away without any decisive passage of arms between the two parties. In December Stephen, acting with great vigour and skill, besieged the Empress at Oxford, and pressed her so hard that she escaped with great difficulty by another romantic flight at night time through the snow.

Already in the spring of 1143 her cause must have seemed to herself well-nigh desperate. She had almost played her last card, when she made her bid for the support of Geoffrey de Mandeville. But when that faithless adventurer's devastation of the Isle of Ely, of Ramsey Abbey, of Cambridge and the country round, came to an end by his death in August, 1144, there was no help for

Matilda and her party, if party it might be called, in which every one was working for his own ends. There was no place for loyalty or patriotism or honour in the hearts of men possessed by the sordid passion of greed.

When Stephen kept his feast at Lincoln and wore his crown in the Minster on Christmas Day, 1146, he may well have felt that he was more a king than he had ever been before, though he was still very far from being a sovereign ruler; that he could never be in the England where he had been for eleven years a lord of misrule.

The close of the year 1147 is memorable for the death of Robert, the great Earl of Gloucester, 3rd October, half brother of the Empress and her most powerful supporter. Then at last she gave up the hopeless struggle, and in the spring of 1148 she slipped away from England never to return: the port from whence she sailed, and the exact date of her departure, are unknown.

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In May, 1149, young Henry made a fruitless expedition into England; he met with little support, he was only 16 years old, his time had not yet come. He went back to Normandy in January, 1150; he could afford to wait; others were doing his work, by doing their own work so very badly, and preparing his way before him. In 1152, Stephen proposed at an assembly of the bishops that his son Eustace should be crowned and associated with himself in the kingdom. At the bidding of the Pope (Eugenius III.), Archbishop Theobald refused to perform the ceremony, and in his refusal was supported by all his suffragans. Stephen flung them all into prison, and then, as usual, set them free again. Meanwhile disorder seems to have prevailed extensively. The robber