

DECEMBER XXIX.

ST. THOMAS, MARTYR,

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

[See his life by John of Salisbury, his chaplain, who attended him during most part of his exile, and was present at his death. He died Bishop of Chartres, and his learning and integrity are much extolled by Cave, *Hist. Liter.* t. ii. p. 243.]

A.D. 1170.

ST. THOMAS BECKET was born in London in 1117, on the 21st of December. His father, Gilbert Becket, was a gentleman of middling fortune, who, in his youth, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem with divers others, and falling into the hands of the Saracens, remained a year and a half a prisoner, or rather a slave, to one of their emirs, or admirals. An only daughter of this emir hearing him one day explain the Christian faith, and declare, upon the question being put to him, that he should with the greatest joy lay down his life for the love of God, if he was made worthy of such a happiness, was so touched, as to conceive on the spot the desire of becoming a Christian. This she made known to Becket, who contented himself with telling her that she would be very happy if God gave her that grace, though it were attended with the loss of every thing this world could afford. He and his fellow-slaves soon after made their escape in the night-time, and returned safe to London. The young Syrian lady privately left her father's house and followed him thither, and being instructed in the faith, and baptized by the name of Maud or Mathildes, she was married to him in St. Paul's Church by the Bishop of London. Soon after Gilbert went back into the East, to join the

crusade or holy war, and remained in those parts three years and a half. Maud was brought to bed of our saint a little time after his departure, about a twelvemonth after their marriage, and being herself very pious, she taught her son from his infancy to fear God, and inspired him with a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin. His father, after his return to England, was, in his turn, sheriff¹ of London. Fitz-Stephens assures us, that he never put money out at interest, and never embarked in any commerce, but being contented with his patrimony, lived on the annual income. His death, in 1138, left our saint exposed to the dangers of the world, at an age when the greatest mistakes in life are frequently committed. But he had been educated in habits of temperance, obedience, and self-denial, and was so thoroughly grounded in the maxims of the gospel as to stand firmly upon his guard, and to do nothing but by good advice. His father had placed him in his childhood in a monastery of canon regulars, and after his death, Thomas continued his studies in London, where Fitz-Stephens informs us there were then three very great schools belonging to the three principal churches, in which public declamations were made, and frequent literary disputations held with great emulation between both masters and scholars. Here Thomas pursued his studies till the age of twenty-one years, when, having lost his mother, he discontinued them for a year: but considering the dangers which surrounded him while unemployed, he resolved to reassume them. He therefore went first to Oxford, and shortly after to Paris, where he applied himself diligently to the canon law, and various other branches of literature. When he came back to London, he was first made clerk or secretary to the court of the city, and distinguished himself by his capacity in public affairs. He was afterwards taken into the family of a certain young nobleman in the country, who was extremely

(1) Mark x. 14 16.

(1) Vicecomes.

fond of hunting and hawking. In this situation, Thomas began to be carried away with the love of these diversions, which were become his only business; so that by this company he grew more remiss in the service of God. An awakening accident opened his eyes. One day when he was eager in the pursuit of game, his hawk made a stoop at a duck, and dived after it into a river. Thomas, apprehensive of losing his hawk, leaped into the water, and the stream being rapid carried him down to a mill, and he was saved only by the sudden stopping of the wheel, which appeared miraculous. Thomas, in gratitude to God, his deliverer, resolved to betake himself to a more serious course of life, and returned to London. His virtue and abilities gave him a great reputation; and nothing can sooner gain a man the confidence of others as that inflexible integrity and veracity which always formed the character of our saint. Even in his childhood he always chose rather to suffer any blame, disgrace, or punishment, than to tell an untruth; and in his whole life he was never found guilty of a lie in the smallest matter.

A strict intimacy had intervened betwixt Theobald, who was advanced to the archbishopric of Canterbury in 1138, and our saint's father, they being both originally from the same part of Normandy, about the village of Tierrie. Some persons, therefore, having recommended Thomas to that prelate, he was invited to accept of some post in his family. Attended only with one squire, named Ralph of London, he joined the archbishop, who then was at the village of Harwe, or Harrow. Thomas was tall of stature, his countenance was beautiful and pleasing, his senses quick and lively, and his discourse very agreeable. Having taken orders a little before this, he was presented by the Bishop of Worcester to the Church of Shoreham,¹ afterwards by the abbot of St. Alban's to that of Brat-

field¹ With the leave of the archbishop, he went to Italy, and there studied the canon law a year at Bologna; then some time at Auxerre. After his return the archbishop ordained him deacon, and he was successively preferred to the provostship of Beverley, and to canonries at Lincoln and at St. Paul's in London; the archbishop nominated him Archdeacon of Canterbury, which was then looked upon as the first ecclesiastical dignity in England, after the abbacies and bishoprics, which gave a seat in the house of lords.² The archbishop committed to our saint the management of the most intricate affairs, seldom did any thing without his advice, sent him several times to Rome on important errands, and never had reason to repent of the choice he had made, or of the confidence he reposed in him. Theobald, who had before made him his archdeacon, and by a long experience had found him proof against all the temptations of the world, and endued with a prudence capable of all manner of affairs, recommended him to the high office of Lord-chancellor of England, to which King Henry, who had ascended the throne on the 20th of December, 1154, readily exalted him in 1157. The saint's sweetness of temper, joined with his integrity and other amiable qualities, gained him the esteem and affection of every one, especially of his prince, who took great pleasure in his conversation, often went to dine with him, and committed to his care the education of his son, Prince Henry, to be formed by him in sound maxims of honour and virtue. He sent him also into France, to negotiate a treaty with that crown, and conclude a marriage between his son Henry and Margaret, daughter to Lewis the Younger, King of France, in both which commissions he succeeded to his master's desires. Amidst the honours and prosperity which he enjoyed, he always lived most humble, modest, mortified, recollected, compas-

(1) Chron. de Walden, MSS. Cotton. Titus, D. 20.

(2) Fitz-Stephens, p. 12.

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sionate, charitable to the poor without bounds, and perfectly chaste; and triumphed over all the snares which wicked courtiers, and sometimes the king himself, laid for his virtue, especially his chastity. The persecutions which envy and jealousy raised against him he overcame by meekness and silence.

Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, died in 1160. King Henry was then in Normandy, with his chancellor, whom he immediately resolved to raise to that dignity. Some time after, he bade him prepare himself to go to England for an affair of importance, and in taking leave explained his intentions to him. Thomas, after alleging many excuses, flatly told the king: "Should God permit me to be Archbishop of Canterbury, I should soon lose your Majesty's favour, and the great affection with which you honour me would be changed into hatred. For your majesty will be pleased to suffer me to tell you, that several things you do in prejudice of the inviolable rights of the church, make me fear you would require of me what I could not agree to; and envious persons would not fail to make this pass for a crime, in order to make me lose your favour." Such was the generous liberty of this man of God, and his serious desire to deliver himself from the dangers which threatened him. The king paid no regard to his remonstrances, and sent over certain noblemen into England to manage the affairs with the clergy of the kingdom and the chapter of Canterbury, ordering them to labour with the same ardour to place the chancellor in the see of Canterbury as they would to set the crown on his son's head. St. Thomas obeyed in going for England, but refused to acquiesce in accepting the dignity, till the Cardinal of Pisa, legate from the holy see in England, overruled all his scruples by the weight of his authority. The election was made on the eve of Whitsunday, in 1162; a synod of bishops at London ratified the same, and the prince, then in

London, gave his consent in his father's name, and the saint set out immediately from London to Canterbury. On the road he gave a private charge to one of the clergy of his church, to advertise him of all the faults which he should observe in his conduct; for even an enemy, by his reproaches, is often more useful to us than a flattering friend. The archbishop, soon after his consecration, received the pallium from Pope Alexander III., which John of Salisbury brought him from Rome. He had hitherto employed all his time in prayer to beg the light of heaven, and from that time began to exert himself in the discharge of his pastoral duties. Next his skin he always wore a hair shirt; over this he put on the habit of a Benedictin monk from the time he was made archbishop; and over this the habit of a canon, of very light stuff. By the rule of life which he laid down for his private conduct, he rose at two o'clock in the morning, and after matins washed the feet of thirteen poor persons, to each of whom he distributed money. It was most edifying to see him, with profound humility, melting in tears at their feet, and begging the assistance of their prayers. At the hour of prime, his almoner washed the feet of twelve others, and gave them bread and meat. The archbishop returned to take a little rest after matins, and washing the feet of the first company of poor persons, but rose again very early to pray and to read the holy scriptures, which he did assiduously and with the most profound respect. He found in them such unction that he had them always in his hands even when he walked, and desired holy solitude that he might bury himself in them. He kept always a learned person with him to interpret to him these sacred oracles, whom he consulted on the meaning of difficult passages; so much did he fear to rely on his own lights by presumption, though others admired his wisdom and learning. After his morning meditation, he visited those that were sick among his monks and clergy; at nine o'clock he said

mass, or heard one, if out of respect and humility he did not celebrate himself. He often wept at the divine mysteries. At ten a third daily alms was distributed, in all to one hundred persons; and the saint doubled all the ordinary alms of his predecessor. He dined at three o'clock, and took care that some pious book was read at table. He never had dishes of high price, yet kept a table decently served for the sake of others; but was himself very temperate and mortified. One day a monk saw him in company eat the wing of a pheasant, and was scandalized, like the Pharisee, saying he thought him a more mortified man. The archbishop meekly answered him that gluttony might be committed in the grossest food, and that the best might be taken without it, and with indifference. After dinner he conversed a little with some pious and learned clergymen, on pious subjects or on their functions. He was most rigorous in the examination of persons who were presented to holy orders, and seldom relied upon any others in it. Such was the order he had established in his house that no one in it durst ever receive any present. He regarded all the poor as his children, and his revenues seemed more properly theirs than his own. He reprehended with freedom the vices of the great ones, and recovered out of the hands of several powerful men lands of his church which had been usurped by them, in which the king was his friend and protector. He assisted at the council of Tours, assembled by Pope Alexander III., in 1163. He obliged the king to fill the two sees of Worcester and Hereford, which he had long held in his hands, with worthy prelates whom the saint consecrated.

The devil, envying the advantage which accrued to the church from the good harmony which reigned between the king and the archbishop, laboured to sow the seeds of discord between them. St. Thomas first offended his majesty by resigning the office of chancellor, which, out of complai-

sance to him, he had kept some time after he was nominated archbishop. But the source of all this mischief was an abuse by which the king usurped the revenues of the vacant sees and other benefices, and deferred a long time to fill them, that he might the longer enjoy the temporalities, as some of his predecessors had sacrilegiously done before him: which injustice St. Thomas would by no means tolerate. A third debate was, that the archbishop would not allow lay judges to summon ecclesiastical persons before their tribunals. By the zeal with which he curbed the officers or noblemen who oppressed the church or its lands, compelling them to restore some which they had unjustly usurped, or which had been given them by former incumbents or bishops who had no right to bestow them, at least beyond the term of their own lives, he exasperated several courtiers, who began first to misrepresent his conduct herein to the king. The king, however, still showed him the greatest marks of favour, and seemed still to love him, as he had done from his first acquaintance, above all men living. The first sign of displeasure happened at Woodstock, when the king was holding his court there with the principal nobility. It was customary to pay two shillings a year upon every hide of land to the king's officers, who in place of the sheriffs were employed to maintain the public peace in every county. This sum the king ordered to be paid into his exchequer. The archbishop made a modest remonstrance, that without being wanting in respect to his majesty, this might not be exacted as a revenue of the crown, adding, "If the sheriffs, their serjeants, or the officers of the provinces defend the people, we shall not be wanting to relieve and succour them" (viz., either with pecuniary supplies and recompenses, and affording them assistance by the constables and other civil peace-officers). The king replied with warmth, making use of a familiar impious oath, "By God's eyes, this shall be paid

as a revenue, or those who do not pay it shall be prosecuted by a writ of the royal exchequer." The archbishop answered that none of his vassals would pay it, nor any of the clergy. The king said no more at that time, but his resentment was the greater; and the complaints at court were only raised against the clergy, without any further mention of the laity, who were equally concerned.

Soon after he told the archbishop and bishops that he would require of them an oath that they would maintain all the customs of the kingdom. St. Thomas understood that certain notorious abuses and injustices were called by the king "customs." He therefore, in a general meeting of the bishops at Westminster, refused that oath, unless he might add this clause, "As far as was lawful, or consistent with duty." The Archbishop of York, and the Bishops of Chichester and Lincoln, were drawn from their first resolution against it, and St. Thomas, who had resisted the threats of the king, was overcome by the tears of the clergy, and complied in an assembly at the king's palace at Clarendon, in 1164. He soon after repented of his condescension, and remained in silence and tears till he had consulted the pope, who was then at Sens, and begged his absolution. His holiness, in his answer, gave him the desired absolution from censures, advised him to abstain no longer from approaching the altar, and exhorted him to repair by an episcopal vigour the fault into which he had only been betrayed through surprise. The king was extremely offended at the repentance of the archbishop, and threatened his life; but the prelate boldly said he never would authorize as custom the notorious oppressions of the church, which his predecessors, especially St. Anselm, had zealously condemned before him. The king, in an assembly of the bishops and nobility at Northampton, on the 8th of October, 1164, pronounced sentence against him, by which he declared all his goods confis-

cated. Several bishops and others endeavoured to persuade him to resign his archbishopric. But he answered with great resolution, that to do it in such circumstances would be to betray the truth and the cause of the church, by which he was bound, by the place which he held, rather to lay down his life. His persecutions daily increasing, he gave strict charge to his domestics and friends to remain in silence, peace, and charity toward their enemies, to bear injuries with patience, and never to conceive the least sentiment of rancour against any one. His cause in the mean time was evoked to the holy see, according to his appeal in the council, and he resolved privately to leave the kingdom. He landed in Flanders in 1164, and, arriving at the abbey of St. Bertin's, at St. Omer, sent from thence deputies to Lewis VII., King of France, who received them graciously, and invited the archbishop into his dominions. King Henry forbade any to send him any manner of assistance. The pope was then at Sens, in France. The bishops and other deputies from the King of England arrived there, gained several of the cardinals, and in a public audience accused St. Thomas before his holiness; yet taking notice that he acquitted himself of his office with great prudence and virtue, and governed his church truly like a worthy prelate. St. Thomas left St. Bertin's after a few days' stay, and being accompanied by the Bishop of Triers and the abbot of St. Bertin's, went to Soissons. The King of France happened to come thither the next day, and he no sooner heard that the Archbishop of Canterbury was there, but he went to his lodgings to testify his veneration for his person, and obliged him to accept from him all the money he should want during his exile. The saint pursued his journey to Sens, where he met with a cold reception from the cardinals. When he had audience of the pope, he expressed his grief at the disturbances in England, and his desire to procure a true peace to

that church, for which end he professed himself ready to lay down his life with joy: but then he exaggerated the evils of a false peace, and gave in a copy of the articles which the King of England required him to sign, and which he said tended to the entire oppression of the church. His justification was so moving, so full, and so modest, that the cardinals expressed their approbation of his conduct, and the pope encouraged him to constancy with great tenderness. In a second audience, on the day following, the archbishop confessed, with extreme humility, that he had entered the see, though against his will, yet against the canons, in passing so suddenly from the state of a layman into it, and that he had acquitted himself so ill of his obligations in it, as to have had no more than the name of a pastor; wherefore he resigned his dignity into the hands of his holiness, and, taking the ring off his finger, delivered it to him, and withdrew. After a long deliberation, the pope called him again, and, commending his zeal, reinstated him in his dignity, with an order not to abandon it, for that would be visibly to abandon the cause of God. Then sending for the abbot of Pontigni, his holiness recommended this exiled prelate to that superior of the poor of Jesus Christ, to be entertained by him like one of them. He exhorted the archbishop to pray for the spirit of courage and constancy.

St. Thomas regarded this austere monastery of the Cistercian Order, not as an exile, but as a delightful religious retreat, and a school of penance for the expiation of his sins. Not content with the hair shirt which he constantly wore, he used frequent disciplines and other austerities, submitted himself to all the rules of the Order, wore the habit, and embraced with joy the most abject functions and humiliations. He was unwilling to suffer any distinction, and would put by the meats prepared for him and seasoned, that he might take only the por-

tion of the community, and that the driest, and without seasoning or sauce. But this he did with address, that it might not be perceived. King Henry vented his passion against both the pope and the archbishop, confiscated the goods of all the friends, relations, and domestics of the holy prelate, banished them his dominions, not sparing even infants at the breast, lying-in women, and old men; and obliged by oath all who had attained the age of discretion to go to the archbishop, that the sight of them and their tears might move him. This oath they were obliged to take at Lambeth, before Ralph de Brock, whom Fitz-Stephens calls one of the most daring and profligate of men; yet into his hands the king had delivered the temporalities of the archbishopric to be kept, that is, says this author, to be laid waste and destroyed. These exiles arrived in troops at Pontigni, and the prelate could not contain his tears. Providence, however, provided for them all by the charities of many prelates and princes. The Queen of Sicily and the Archbishop of Syracuse invited many over thither, and most liberally furnished them with necessaries. The pope, and others, laboured to bring the king to a reconciliation; but that prince threatened his holiness, and committed daily greater excesses, by threatening letters to the general chapter of Citeaux, that he would abolish their Order in England if they continued to harbour his enemy. Whereupon the saint left Pontigni; but a little before this he was favoured with a revelation of his martyrdom. Whilst he lay prostrate before the altar in prayers and tears, he heard a voice saying distinctly, "Thomas, Thomas, my church shall be glorified in thy blood?" The saint asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" and the same voice answered, "I am Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, thy brother." He wept in taking leave of the monks at Pontigni. The abbot thought his tears the effect of natural tenderness; but the

saint called him aside, and, bidding him not discover it before his death, told him he wept for those who had followed him, who would be scattered like sheep without a pastor; for God had shown to him, the night before, that he should be slain by four men in his church, whom he saw enter it, and take off the top part of his head. The King of France sent him the most affectionate assurances of his protection and respect, and, rejoicing to be able to serve Jesus Christ in the person of his exiled servant, gave orders with a royal magnificence that he should be entertained at his expense at Sens. St. Thomas was received there with all possible joy and respect by the archbishop, and retired to the monastery of St. Columba, situate half a mile from the city. He excommunicated all those who should obey the late orders of the King of England, in seizing the estates of the church, and threatened that prince himself, but mildly, and with strong exhortations to repentance. The king, by his deputies, gained again many cardinals at Rome, and surprised the pope himself, who began to speak in his favour, and named two legates *à latere* who were devoted to him; which drew complaints from the archbishop. The saint, according to summons, met the legates at Gisors, on the frontiers of France and Normandy; but finding that one of them, the Cardinal of Pavia, was artfully studying to betray him, wrote to the pope. Cardinal Otho, the other legate, represented to the king his obligation of restoring to the church his unjust usurpations and revenues of the see of Canterbury, which he had received; but his majesty answered he had no scruple of that, having employed them on the church or on the poor. But the legate said, he could not answer it at the tribunal of Christ. The King of France, at the request of his holiness, undertook to be a mediator between the King of England and the archbishop. The two kings had a conference together

near Gisors. St. Thomas fell at the feet of his sovereign and was raised by him. King Henry, among many fair speeches, said, he desired no more than the rights which former holy archbishops had not contested. The King of France said nothing more could be desired; but the archbishop showed abuses were meant, which former archbishops had opposed, though they had not been able to extirpate them. If they tolerated some out of necessity, they did not approve them, which was demanded of him. The King of France thought him too inflexible, and the nobles of both kingdoms accused him of pride. The saint was insulted and forsaken by all, and set out for Sens, expecting to be also banished France. But the King of France soon after reflecting on what he had done, sent for the servant of God, fell at his feet with many tears, begging his pardon and absolution of his sin, and confessing that he alone had understood the artifices which were made use of. The archbishop gave him absolution, and his blessing, and returned to Sens. The pope sent two new legates, Gratian and Vivian, to King Henry, and after them two others; but that prince refused always to promise the restitution of the church revenues, and the like articles. St. Thomas never ceased to pray, fast, and weep for the evils of his church. No prelate had ever stronger temptations to struggle with; and certainly nothing but conscience and the most steady virtue could ever have obliged him to have renounced his own interests, and the favour of so great a king, whom he most affectionately loved, for whose service, in his wars, he furnished more troops at his own expense than could have been thought possible, and to whom he always remained most loyal and most faithful. King Henry, among other injuries done to the good prelate, caused his son to be crowned king by the Archbishop of York, in the very diocese of Canterbury, himself waiting upon him at

supper, and obliged his subjects, even by torments, to renounce the obedience not only of the archbishop, but also of the pope. But it pleased God on a sudden to change his heart, and inspire him with a desire of a reconciliation. The Archbishop of Sens conducted St. Thomas to his majesty, who received him with all the marks of his former esteem and affection, and, with tears, desired that all their differences might be buried in oblivion, and that they might live in perfect friendship. Nor did he make the least mention of the pretended customs which had been the occasion of these disturbances.

The Archbishop of York, a man whose life rendered him unworthy of that character, and the bishops of London and Salisbury, mortal enemies to the saint, began again to alienate the king from him, by renewing in his breast former jealousies. The archbishop waited on his majesty at Tours, but could obtain no more than a promise of the restitution of his lands when he should be arrived in England. In the mean time he gave leave to the officers of the Archbishop of York to plunder all the goods of his church, and the harvest of that year. Nevertheless, the archbishop having been seven years absent, resolved to return to his church, though expecting to meet the crown of martyrdom. Writing to the king, he closed his letter as follows: "With your majesty's leave I return to my church, perhaps to die there, and to hinder at least by my death its entire destruction. Your majesty is able yet to make me feel the effects of your clemency and religion. But whether I live or die, I will always preserve inviolably that charity which I bear you in our Lord. And whatever may happen to me, I pray God to heap all his graces and good gifts on your majesty and on your children." The holy archbishop prepared himself for his journey with a heart filled with the love of the Cross of Christ, and breathing nothing but the sacrifice of himself in his

cause. Many French noblemen furnished him with money and all necessaries. That he might thank the King of France, he went to Paris, and lodged in the abbey of canon regulars of St. Victor, where one of his hair shirts is still preserved. On the octave of St. Austin, their patron, he was desired to preach, and made an excellent sermon on those words, "And his dwelling was made in peace."¹ In taking leave of the French king, he said, "I am going to seek my death in England." His majesty answered, "So I believe;" and pressed him to stay in his dominions, promising that nothing should be wanting to him there. The saint said, "The will of God must be accomplished." He sent over to England the sentence of suspension and interdict which the pope had pronounced against the Archbishop of York and his accomplices in several unwarrantable proceedings, and excommunication against Renald of Broke, and certain others. The saint embarked at Witsan, near Calais, but landed at Sandwich, where he was received with incredible acclamations of joy. He had escaped several ambuscades of his enemies on the road. The Archbishop of York demanded absolution from his censures in a threatening manner; St. Thomas meekly offered it, on condition the other, according to the custom of the church, would swear to submit to the conditions which should be enjoined him. The other refused to do this, and went over to Normandy, with the bishops of London and Salisbury, to accuse the archbishop to the king, in doing which passion made slander pass for truth. The king, in a transport of fury, cried out, and repeated several times, that, "He cursed all those whom he had honoured with his friendship, and enriched by his bounty, seeing none of them had the courage to rid him of one bishop, who gave him more trouble than all the rest of his subjects." Four young gentlemen in his service, who had no

(1) Ps. lxxv.

other religion than to flatter their prince, viz., Sir William Tracy, Sir Hugh Morville, Sir Richard Briton, and Sir Reginald Fitz-Orson, conspired privately together to murder him.

The archbishop was received in London with exceeding great triumph: but the young king sent him an order to confine himself to the city of Canterbury. The saint alleged that he was obliged to make the visitation of his diocese. On Christmas-day, after mass, he preached his last sermon to his flock. In the end he declared that he should shortly leave them, and that the time of his death was at hand. All wept bitterly at this news, and the saint, seeing their tears, could not entirely contain his own: but he comforted himself with motives of holy faith, and stood some time absorbed in God, in the sweet contemplation of his adorable will. The four assassins being landed in England, were joined by Renald of Broke, who brought with him a troop of armed men. They went the next day to Canterbury, and insolently upbraiding the archbishop with treason, threatened him with death unless he absolved all those who were interdicted or excommunicated. The saint answered, it was the pope who had pronounced those censures, that the king had agreed to it, and promised his assistance therein before five hundred witnesses, among whom some of them were present, and that they ought to promise satisfaction for their crimes before an absolution. They, in a threatening manner, gave a charge to his ecclesiastics that were present, to watch him, that he might not escape: for the king would make him an example of justice. The saint said, "Do you imagine that I think of flying: no, no; I wait for the stroke of death without fear." Then showing with his hand that part of his head where God had given him to understand he should be struck, he said, "It is here, it is here that I expect you!" The assassins went back, put on their bucklers and arms, as if they were going to a battle,

and taking with them the other armed men, returned to the archbishop, who was then gone to the church, for it was the hour of vespers. He had forbidden in virtue of obedience any to barricade the doors, saying, the church was not to be made a citadel. The murderers entered, sword in hand, crying out, "Where is the traitor?" No one answered, till another cried, "Where is the archbishop?" The saint then advanced toward them, saying, "Here I am, the archbishop, but no traitor." All the monks and ecclesiastics ran to hide themselves, or to hold the altars, except three, who stayed by his side. The archbishop appeared without the least commotion or fear. One of the ruffians said to him, "Now you must die!" He answered, "I am ready to die for God, for justice, and for the liberty of his church. But I forbid you, in the name of the Almighty God, to hurt in the least any of my religious clergy or people. I have defended the church as far as I was able during my life, when I saw it oppressed, and I shall be happy if, by my death at least, I can restore its peace and liberty." He then fell on his knees, and spoke these his last words, "I recommend my soul and the cause of the church to God, to the Blessed Virgin, to the holy patrons of this place, to the martyrs St. Dionysius and St. Elphege of Canterbury." He then prayed for his murderers, and bowing a little his head, presented it to them in silence. They first offered to bring him out of the church, but he said, "I will not stir; do here what you please, or are commanded." The fear lest the people, who crowded into the church, should hinder them, made them hasten the execution of their design. Tracy struck at his head first with his sword; but an ecclesiastic who stood by, named Edward Grim or Grimfer (who afterwards wrote his life), held out his arm, which was almost cut off; but this broke the blow on the archbishop, who was only a little stunned with it, and he held up his head

with his two hands as immovable as before, ardently offering himself to God. Two others immediately gave him together two violent strokes, by which he fell on the pavement, near the altar of St. Bennet, and was now expiring, when the fourth, Richard Briton, ashamed not to have dipped his sword in blood, cut off the top part of his head, and broke his sword against the pavement; then Hugh of Horsea inhumanly, with the point of his sword, drew out all his brains, and scattered them on the floor.¹ After this sacrilege, they went and rifled the archiepiscopal palace, with a fury which passion had heightened to madness. The city was filled with consternation, tears, and lamentations. A blind man recovered his sight by applying his eyes to the blood of the martyr yet warm. The canons shut the doors of the church, watched by the corpse all night, and interred it privately the next morning, because of a report that the murderers designed to drag it through the street. St. Thomas was martyred on the 29th of December, in the year 1170, the fifty-third of his age, and the ninth of his episcopacy.

The grief of all Catholic princes and of all Christendom, at the news of this sacrilege, is not to be expressed. King Henry, above all others, at the first news of it, forgot not only his animosity against the saint, but even the dignity of his crown, to abandon himself to the humiliation and affliction of a penitent, who bewailed his sins in sackcloth and ashes. He shut himself up for three days in his closet, taking almost no nourishment, and admitting no comfort: and for forty days never went abroad, never had his table or any diversions as usual, having always before his eyes the death of the holy prelate. He not only wept, but howled and cried out in the excess of his grief. He sent deputies to the pope, to assure him that he had neither commanded nor intended that execrable murder. His holiness excommunicated the assassins,

(1) Bened. Abbas in vitâ Henry II. t. i. p. 12.

and sent two legates to the king into Normandy, who found him in the most edifying dispositions of a sincere penitent. His majesty swore to them that he abolished the pretended customs and the abuses which had excited the zeal of the saint, and restored all the church lands and revenues which he had usurped; and was ordered for his penance to maintain two hundred soldiers in the holy war for a year. This miraculous conversion of the king, and restitution of the liberties of the church, was looked upon as the effect of the saint's prayers and blood. Seven lepers were cleansed, the blind, the deaf, the dumb, and others sick of all kinds of distempers were cured by his intercession, and some dead restored to life. Pope Alexander III. published the bull of his canonization in 1173. Philip, afterwards surnamed Augustus, son to Lewis VII. of France, being very sick and despaired of by the physicians, the king his father spent the days and nights in tears, refusing all comfort. He was advertised at length three nights in his sleep by St. Thomas, whom he had known, to make a pilgrimage to his shrine at Canterbury. He set out against the advice of his nobility, who were apprehensive of dangers: he was met by King Henry at the entrance of his dominions, and conducted by him to the tomb of the martyr. After his prayer, he bestowed on the church a gold cup, and several presents on the monks, with great privileges. Upon his return into France, he found his son perfectly recovered through the merits of St. Thomas, in 1179.

God was pleased to chastise King Henry as he had done David. His son, the young king, rebelled, because his father refused the cession of any part of his dominions to him during his own life. He was supported by the greatest part of the English nobility, and by the king of Scotland who committed the most unheard-of cruelties in the northern provinces, which he laid waste. The old

king, in his abandoned condition, made a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas, walked barefoot three miles before the town, over the pebbles and stones, so that his feet were all bloody, and at the tomb his tears and sighs were the only voice of his contrite and humbled heart before God. He would receive a stroke of a discipline from all the bishops, priests, and canons, and spent there that whole day and the night following without taking any nourishment, and made great presents to the church. The next morning, whilst he was hearing mass near the tomb, the King of Scotland, his most cruel enemy, was taken prisoner by a small number of men. Soon after, his son threw himself at his feet and obtained pardon. He indeed revolted again several times; but, falling sick, by the merits of St. Thomas, deserved to die a true penitent. He made a public confession of his sins, put on sackcloth, and a cord about his neck, and would be dragged by it out of bed as the most unworthy of sinners, and laid on ashes, on which he received the viaticum, and died in the most perfect sentiments of repentance. As to the four murderers, they retired to Cnaresburg, a house belonging to one of them, namely, Hugh of Morville, in the west of England, where, shunned by all men, and distracted with the remorse of their own conscience, they lived alone without so much as a servant that would attend them. Some time after they travelled into Italy to receive absolution from the pope. His holiness enjoined them a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where three of them shut themselves up in a place called Montenegro, as in a prison of penance, as the pope had ordered them, and lived and died true penitents. They were buried before the gate of the Church of Jerusalem, with this epitaph: "Here lie the wretches who martyred blessed Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury." The other, who had given the first wound, deferred a little to commence his penance,

and stopping at Cosenza, in Calabria, there died of a miserable distemper, in which his flesh rotted from his body, and fell to pieces. He never ceased to implore with sighs and tears the intercession of St. Thomas, as the bishop of that city, who heard his confession, testified. All the four murderers died within three years after the martyrdom of the saint.

The body of the martyr was first buried in the lower part of the church: but shortly after taken up and laid in a sumptuous shrine in the east end. So great were the offerings thereat, that the church all round about it abounded with more than princely riches, the meanest part of which was pure gold, garnished with many precious stones, as William Lambarte¹ and Weever² assure us. The largest of these was the royal diamond given by Lewis, King of France. The marble stones before the place remain to this day, very much worn and hollowed by the knees of the pilgrims who prayed there. The shrine itself is thus described by John Stow.³ "It was built about a man's height, all of stone; then upward of plain timber, within which was an iron chest, containing the bones of Thomas Becket, as also the skull, with the wound of his death, and the piece cut out of the skull laid in the same wound. The timber-work of this shrine on the outside was covered with plates of gold, damasked and embossed, garnished with brooches, images, angels, chains, precious stones, and great oriental pearls; the spoils of which shrine in gold and jewels of an inestimable value, filled two great chests, one of which six or eight men could do no more than convey out of the church; all which was taken to the king's use, and the bones of St. Thomas, by command of Lord Cromwell, were there burnt to ashes, in September, 1538, of Henry VIII. the thirtieth." His hair shirt is shown in a reliquary in

(1) Lambart, in his *Perambulation of Kent*, anno 1565.

(2) Weever's *Funeral Monuments*, p. 202.

(3) Stow's *Annals in Henry VIII.*

the English college at Douay; a small part in the abbey of Liesse; a bone of his arm in the great church of St. Walde-trude, at Mons;¹ his chalice in the great nunnery at Bourbourg; his mitre, and linen dipped in his blood at St. Bertin's, at St. Omer; vestments in many other monasteries, &c., in the Low Countries, &c.

Zeal for the glory of God is the first property, or rather the spirit and perfection of his holy love, and ought to be the peculiar virtue of every Christian, especially of every pastor of the church. How is God delighted to shower down his heavenly graces on those who are zealous for his honour! How will he glorify them in heaven, as on this account he glorified Phinehas even on earth.² What zeal for his Father's glory did not Christ exert on earth! How did this holy fire burn in the breasts of the apostles and of all the saints! but in the exercise of zeal itself how many snares are to be feared! and how many Christians deceive themselves! Self-love is subtle in seducing those who do not know themselves. Humour, pride, avarice, caprice, and passion, frequently are passed for zeal. But the true conditions of this virtue are, that it be prudent, disinterested, and intrepid. Prudent in never being precipitant, in using address, in employing every art to draw sinners from the dangerous paths of vice, and in practising patience in instructing the most stupid, and in bearing with the obstinacy and malice of the impenitent. It is a mistake to place holy zeal in an impetuous ardour of the soul, which can be no other than the result of passion. Secondly, it must be disinterested or pure in its motive, free from all mixture of avarice, pride, vanity, resentment, or any passion. Thirdly, it must be intrepid. The fear of God makes his servant no longer fear men. John the Baptist feared

not the tyrant who persecuted him; but Herod stood in awe of the humble preacher.¹ The servant of God is not anxious about his own life; but is solicitous that God be honoured. All that he can suffer for this end he looks upon as a recompense. Fatigues, contempt, torments, or death, he embraces with joy. By his constancy and fidelity he conquers and subdues the whole world. In afflictions and disgraces his virtue makes him magnanimous. It accompanies him in all places and in every situation. By this he is great not only in adversity, being through it firm under persecutions and constant in torments, but also in riches, grandeur, and prosperity, amidst which it inspires him with humility, moderation, and holy fear, and animates all his actions and designs with religion and divine charity.



(1) Brasseur, *Thes. Reliquiarium Hannoniæ*, p. 199.

(2) *Numb. xxv.*