

Wall, Charles J., *Shrines of British Saints*. Methuen & Co. London, 1905.  
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## CHAPTER IV [part four]

### SHRINES OF PRELATES AND PRIESTS

#### ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY

Everything connected with that very human saint, but genuine patriot, St. Thomas à Becket, is of interest to Englishmen. He had fallen in a conflict for the Church against State tyranny, and in his fall he triumphed.

Although with the changed times the laws there cannot be precisely the same contention in these days, the same principles exist. He combated the violation of the constitutions of the country, and was properly considered the martyr of national liberty. His cause placed St. Thomas in a peculiar position among the saints. As such a champion his because the most popular and revered name in the English Calendar—and not only in England—for .

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the events of the 29th of December, 1170, attracted the whole of Christendom.

During nearly four centuries—from his martyrdom to the reign of Henry VIII.—this saint's influence was so great that when that monarch determined to arrogate to himself the supreme spiritual authority he felt it necessary to break the spell of devotion to the champion of the spiritualities before he could be successful.

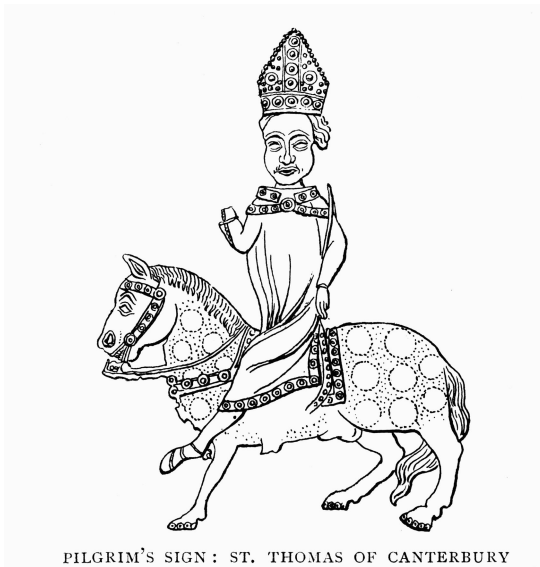


Illustration: Pilgrim's sign : St. Thomas of Canterbury.

So long as the name of St. Thomas remained in the calendar it would stimulate both the clergy and laity alike to oppose his acts of sacrilege. His name was accordingly ordered to be erased from all books on pain of heavy penalties, and his shrine—the visible monument of his courage—the continual reminder of successful opposition to tyranny—was utterly destroyed ; while his relics—the relics of one who was considered the peoples champion, whose merits would further their prayers at the

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heavenly throne, as his unflinching boldness had obtained their rights at the earthly court—were burnt and scattered.

The martyrdom of Archbishop Thomas was one of the most thrilling events in the history of England—aye, and of all Christendom. This is no place to dwell upon the tragedy, except so far as it led to the making of a series of shrines for the one slain.

It was the hour of evensong when St. Thomas fell, under the repeated blows of the four cowardly assassins, on the pavement of the north transept of the cathedral, just without the chapel of St. Benedict, the tonsured crown severed from the skull by the sword of Le Breton.

The body of the murdered man lay for some time deserted by all, but towards midnight Osbert, the archbishop's chamberlain, crept into the church and tore off a strip of his surplice to cover the mutilated head. Finding it safe to enter, the monks, with loud lamentations, collected the scattered brains and placed the body on a bier in front of the high altar, with vessels beneath to receive the blood still dropping from the wound. Round the site of the murder they placed some movable benches to keep off the crowd of townsmen, who were tearing off pieces of their garments and dipping them in the blood.

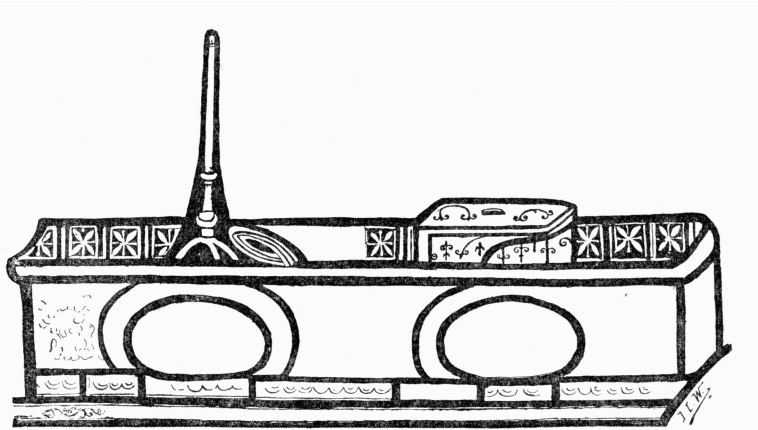
On the following morning the monks received a message from Robert de Broc, one of the assassins, forbidding them to bury the body among the tombs of the archbishops, and threatened that if they did so he would drag it out, hang it on a gibbet, tear it with horses, cut it to pieces, or throw it out to be devoured by swine. The monks hurriedly closed the doors, and carried the body to the crypt, where they had determined to give it burial.

Over the hair-cloth shirt, religious habit, and linen hose they put those vestments in which he had been

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consecrated, and which had been preserved by him for this purpose, and laid him in a new marble coffin in the old crypt behind the chapel of Our Lady Undercroft, between the altars of St. Augustine and St. John the Baptist.

The crypt remained closed until the 2nd of April, when the public were admitted and miracles were reported. This roused the anger of De Broc, who threatened to deprive them of their treasure. To avoid this the



TOMB OF ST. THOMAS  
From a window in the Trinity Chapel, Canterbury

Illustration: Tomb of St. Thomas. From a window in the Trinity Chapel, Canterbury.

frightened monks hastily removed the body into a wooden coffin, which they hid and watched through the night ; but the next day they replaced it and built walls of massive stone around the sarcophagus, leaving two oval openings through which pilgrims might touch the tomb. The remains of the brains and blood were placed in vessels on the top of the tomb.

A contemporary representation of this first shrine of St. Thomas is yet left to us in one of the cathedral windows. It shows the two oval openings—through one

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of which King Henry thrust his head and shoulders when he received the scourge in penance—the green vessel containing the brains, a taper in a candlestick and a trundle, or votive offering of a coil of wax.

After his penance King Henry offered at this tomb four marks of pure gold and a silk hanging to adorn it ; also £40 annually for lights to be kept burning around the shrine. Louis VII., the first French king to set foot on this island, came to implore St. Thomas's intercession for the recovery of his son, and presented to the shrine the celebrated jewel known as the "Regale of France," his own golden goblet, and many other gifts. Richard, after his return from the Holy Land and John after his coronation, also came here as pilgrims.

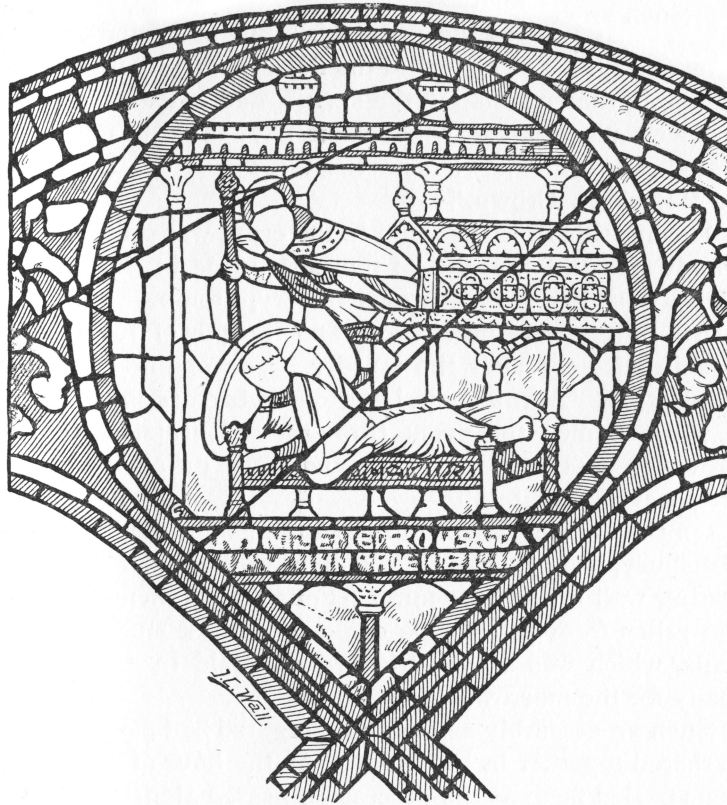
This portion of the crypt would probably have remained the most important part of the church but for the fire of 1174. A more gorgeous monument was contemplated at this place, but the fire altered the plans of the monks and presented the opportunity for greater magnificence in the design.

"The Martyrdom" in the transept was considered the most sacred spot, and in 1172 a piece of the stone in the pavement on which St. Thomas was martyred—and said to be stained with his blood—was sent to Pope Alexander III. and deposited in the church of Sta. Maria Maggiore.<sup>1</sup> In the following year Thomas à Becket was canonised—two years and three months after his death, one of the shortest periods between death and canonisation on record—but he was already canonised in the minds of the English people. In his bull of canonisation Pope Alexander bade the chapter, as soon as possible, to place the relics with great solemnity in some fitting shrine, and himself contributed two columns of pinkish marble from the ruins of ancient Carthage, which, however were not

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used for that immediate purpose, but still form part of the surrounding arcade.

As soon as the cathedral church was deconsecrated after the sacrilege, a lowly wooden altar was raised close to the



SHRINE OF ST. THOMAS  
From a window in the Trinity Chapel, Canterbury

Illustration: Shrine of St. Thomas. From a window in the Trinity Chapel, Canterbury.

scene of the murder. It was called the “Altar of the Martyrdom,” and the “Altar of the Sword’s Point,” for upon it was a tabernacle containing the point of Le Breton’s sword which had snapped off as it came in

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contact with the pavement after giving the fatal blow. Upon this casket, under a piece of rock crystal, was preserved a portion of the martyr’s brains. This was one of the minor shrines of St. Thomas at which numerous offerings were made.

Immediately after the fire, rebuilding and enlargement commenced. The chapel of the Blessed Trinity was made of ample dimensions for the shrine, and eastward of that was a circular chapel—which some have thought to be the actual Corona—known as “the Crown of St. Thomas,” or “Becket’s Crown.”

During this time the tomb in the crypt was protected by woodwork, and the site of the new shine in the church above was almost directly over the crypt tomb.

All things were now ready, and the 7th of July, 1220, the fiftieth year after the murder, was appointed for the translation. Archbishop Langton, two years

previous, had proclaimed the event throughout Europe, and free provision was made for man and beast on all the roads approaching Canterbury.

On the evening of the 6th the archbishop, the bishop of Salisbury, the prior and the monks broke down the protecting wall around the tomb. Four priests then removed the relics from the marble coffin to a chest studded with nails, which was securely locked and laid in a chamber ready for the morrow.

Such an assembly as then congregated had never before gathered together in England. At the hour of Terce the bells pealed fourth as the procession passed along the nave. It was headed by the young King Henry III., who, on account of his tender years, was not allowed to assist in carrying the feretory. Then followed Pandulf, the Legate, Archbishop Langton and the Primate of France ; four of the highest nobles of the realm bore on their shoulders the reliquary containing the martyr's bones, and on either

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side prelates carried tapers. All the bishops of England, save three, were assisting and many prelates from France.

During Mass the feretory rested beneath a canopy of cloth of gold, before an altar erected for the occasion in front of the choir screen, in sight of all the people ; and it was afterwards deposited in the shrine prepared for it.

The elevated position of the chapel containing the shrine is unrivalled in England. It is approached by two flights of steps, which were mounted by many pilgrims on their knees.

Of the shrine nothing remains save the traces in the pavement, yet it is not difficult to realise its form and beauty from two representations which are extant ; one in a thirteenth-century window on the north side of Trinity Chapel, and the other in a manuscript,<sup>2</sup> which was partially destroyed by fire in 1730. These, in addition to the description left by Erasmus<sup>3</sup> and others, leave little doubt as to its appearance.

The shrine of St. Thomas was similar in arrangement to those of St. Edward at Westminster, St. Cuthbert at Durham, and St. Alban's.

The lower part of the shrine was of stone with recesses all round, into which ailing pilgrims pressed the diseased limb, the nearest contact possible to the healing body of the saint. Above this was a wooden box-like structure or case suspended by a rope to a pulley in the roof by which it was drawn up or lowered. When raised it exposed to view the feretory containing the relics, to the accompaniment of the music of silver bells attached to the canopy, which the act of moving set ringing in the same way as at St. Cuthbert's shrine. Then was seen a magnificent sight. The feretory was covered with gold plates, and over it was a gold wire netting on which was fastened a wealth of jewels. Albert, archbishop of Livonia, said that

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he believed there was not in the whole world another shrine for value of beauty like that of St. Thomas of Canterbury.

The description left by a Venetian pilgrim about the year 1500 portrays the magnificence of this shrine.

“The tomb of St. Thomas the Martyr, Archbishop of Canterbury, exceeds all belief. Notwithstanding its great size it is all covered with plates of pure gold ; yet the gold is scarcely seen because it is covered with various precious stones, as sapphires, ballasses, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds ; and wherever the eye turns, something more beautiful than the rest is observed, Nor, in addition to these natural beauties, is the skill of art wanting ; for in the midst of the gold are the most beautiful sculptured gems, both small and large, as well as cameos ; and some cameos are of such a size that I am afraid to name it ; but everything is far surpassed by a ruby, not larger than a thumb nail, which is fixed at the right of the altar. The church is somewhat dark, and particularly in the spot where the shrine is placed ; and when we went to see it the sun was near setting, and the weather was cloudy : nevertheless, I saw that ruby as if I had it in my hand. They say it was given by a king of France.”

The very disputes between the archbishops of Canterbury and York as to the right of one to bear his cross in the province of the other assisted in the enrichment of this shrine ; for in 1354 a compromise was made, by which the metropolitan of York might have his cross borne erect before him throughout the southern province on condition that he bought the privilege within two months of his consecration by sending a golden image of the value of forty pounds to the shrine of St. Thomas, which image was to represent an archbishop bearing a cross. Under this arrangement Archbishop Booth of York in 1452, proffered an image of himself in his prolificals at the already gorgeous shrine.

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The oft-mentioned jewel given by the King of France and called a ruby by the Venetian pilgrim, is described by the Bohemian Ambassador, in 1446, as “a carbuncle that shines at night, half the size of a hen’s egg” ; but it was described as a diamond when it came unto the possession of Queen Mary in 1554. This gem, the “Regale of France,” was too well known to be confused with any other jewel, and it was probably owing to the prismatic colours given forth from this exceptional diamond in the gloom of the chapel that we have these discrepancies in name. When fastened to the new shrine the figure of an angel was made in gold, pointing to the stone to attract special attention.

The custodian with a white wand pointed out to the pilgrims the several jewels, naming the donors and mentioning the history or virtue of each.

On the top ridge of the feretory were three finials of silver gilt—evidently the cresting which cost £7 10s. in 1314—the centre one larger than the other two, and against them, in the Cottonian drawing, the weight of each is given, the center

one eighty ounces and the others sixty ounces each. Whether these finials were on the feretory or the canopy is doubtful. In the painted glass only two appear on the shrine, and it is probable that although on the feretory, the canopy was made with apertures through which the finials appeared when it was lowered ; or it may be by a stretch of imagination that the delineator has exposed these features which were enclosed by the canopy shown in his drawing.

The feretory, as represented in the window (which glass is but a few years later than the erection of the shrine), may reasonably be taken as a faithful picture, though the stone substructure in the Cotton. MS. is evidently depicted aright (allowing for bad drawing), for the architecture in the glass is altogether fanciful.

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Beneath the shrine in the MS. drawing is the chest containing the relics—the same chest in which they were deposited in 1220—and an inscription to the following effect :—

“This chest of iron *contained the bones of Thomas Becket, skull and all, with the wounde of his death and the pece cut out of his skull laid in the same wounde.*”<sup>4</sup>

In the State Papers is a letter of William Penison to Cromwell, describing the visit of the lady of Montreuil to Canterbury on her way to France :—

“By ten of the cloc, she, her gentilwomen, and said ambassadour whent to the church, where I showed her Saincte Thomas shryne, and all such other things worthy of sight ; at the which she was not litle marveilled of the greate riches therof, saing it to be innumerable, and that if she had not seen it, all the men in the wourlde could never a made her to belyve it. Thus over looking and vewing more than an owre, as well the shryne as Saint Thomas hed, being at both sett cousshins to knyle, and the Pryour openyng Saint Thomas hed, saying to her 3 tymes, ‘This is Saint Thomas hed,’ and offered her to kysse ; but she nother knyled, nor would kysse it, but still vewing the riches therof.”

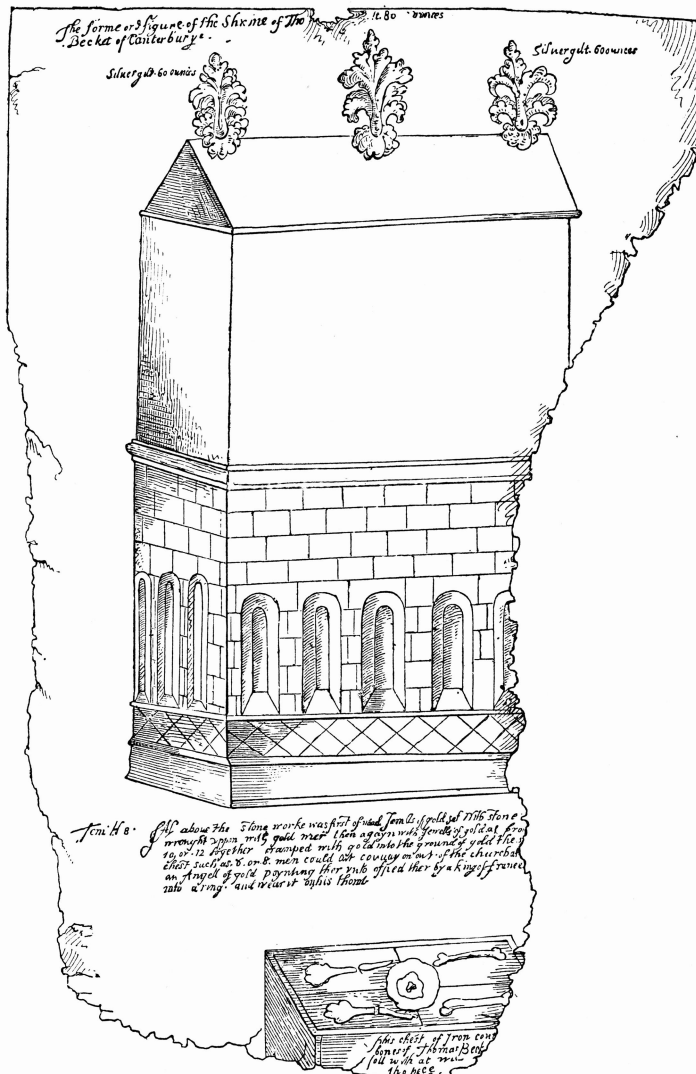
One other shrine to St. Thomas remains to be noticed, mentioned in the above quotation, the facts about which appear quite clear, although there has been much difference of opinion concerning the place of the skull and the derivation of the name “Becket’s Crown.”

In the treasury accounts for 1207—before the translation—are the amounts derived from the offerings made to the various objects associated with the passion of St. Thomas :—

From the tomb of S. Thomas . . . . .	£320	0	0
From the Martyrdom of S. Thomas . . . .	27	5	6



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THE SHRINE OF ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY  
Cottonian MS., Tib. E. viii. f. 269

Illustration: The Shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury. Cottonian MS., Tib. E. viii. f. 269.

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The year after the translation of the receipts show a great increase :—

1221	From the Crown, which have been spent on the shrine.	£71	10	0
1222	From the Crown, which have been spent on the shrine.	£90	10	0

and so on, contributing towards the completion of that shrine which was the work of that incomparable officer, Walter de Colchester, Sacrist of St. Albans, assisted by Elias de Dereham, Canon of Salisbury.<sup>5</sup>

There were four distinct places where the saint was venerated in the cathedral, each of which had its custos, or guardian, as is seen in a Book of Accounts for 1451 preserved in the Chapter Library, where the receipts from each of the guardians went into the treasury :—

From the Guardian of the Crown of S. Thomas . . . .	40s.
From the Guardian of the Shrine of S. Thomas . . . .	30s.
From the Guardian of the Crown of S. Thomas . . . .	20s.
From the Guardian of the Martyrdom of S. Thomas . . .	3 – 4
From the Guardian of the Martyrdom of S. Thomas . . .	3 – 4

Here we have the Martyrdom, the Tomb in the crypt, the Shrine, and the Crown.

In the will of the Black Prince, 1376, he bequeaths hangings “for the altar where my lord S. Thomas lies, for the altar where the head is, and for the altar where the point of the sword is,” which were of black, embroidered with white ostrich feathers, and red borders ornamented with swans having ladies’ heads. Similar bequests are made to the same places in many other royal wills, but they did not decide where the head or the crown were, or whether they were one or two distinct objects.

Some learned writers contend that the easternmost portion of the new work of the cathedral was called “The

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Crown of St. Thomas,” or “Becket’s Crown,” because it was the crowning point of the building ; other say it derived its name of Corona because it was circular and the ribs of the vault suggested a crown ; but they appear to ignore the writing of contemporary authorities.

From Erasmus we learn that in the crypt was exhibited the perforated skull of the martyr, *the forehead is left bare to be kissed, whilst the other parts are covered with silver*. This was one head reliquary ; but in the account of the visit of the Lady of Montreuil the prior, *opening S. Thomas Head*, offered it for her to kiss, so that it was evidently a different reliquary from that of the skull in the crypt where the forehead was left bare—it was “Becket’s Crown.”

Erasmus also went into the chapel at the extreme east end, where he was shown the *whole face*, “*tota facies*,” of St. Thomas, gilt, and adorned with many jewels, and speaking of the officer who had shown it to him, calls him “the attendant on the holy head.” This should be a sufficient answer to Professor Willis, who thought it meant a *full-length image* of St. Thomas which he supposed stood in the Corona, a term, he says, that refers only to the architecture.

The first known notice of the “Head of St. Thomas” is a memorandum in the Royal Wardrobe Accounts for April 18th, 1303, of the royal offerings made :—

At the Shrine of S. Thomas the Martyr, one brooch of gold.  
At the same shrine in money . . . . . 7s.  
At the Head of the same saint . . . . . 7s.  
At the Point of the Sword whereby the same saint  
underwent his martyrdom . . . . . 7s.  
At the Cloak of the same saint . . . . . 7s.  
At the Tomb of the same saint in the vault . . . . . 7s.

There is an entry in the Registers of Prior Henry de Eastry in 1314 : “For ornamenting the crown of St. Thomas with gold, silver, and precious stones, £115 12 0.”

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This again is decisive ; the head reliquaries were largely used at this time, and the Church has always regarded with special reverence that part in which a martyr suffered, which would account for the lavish use of most precious things in adorning the shrine of that part—things which would scarcely be used in the decoration of the walls of a chapel.

The chapel, unless it contained something very precious, would not have a special guardian, and if that treasure was no more than a golden image, the pilgrims would reserve their offerings for something more sacred. Besides, consider the opportunity given the monks to build up to St. Thomas after their choir had been destroyed, and their scheme will unfold itself. Many of those days seized upon opportunities which offered, whether for the glory of God, the honour of His saints, or for the enriching of their own treasury. Before they began to rebuild they had the body of the most popular saint in Europe ; they had a separate relic shorn from his crown—as the tonsured part is called—and they built for *it* ; they already had the spot where he fell and his first tomb ; they added the shrine and the crown.



PILGRIM'S SIGN : HEAD OF  
ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY

Illustration: Pilgrim's Sign : Head of St. Thomas of Canterbury.

The head reliquary of the crown was so richly adorned that it came to be known as the Golden Head. In the chapel of "Becket's Crown" are no traces of an altar, but in the raised pavement at the extreme east end are indications that there were formerly some railings so arranged as to protect some object of veneration.

The Cottonian drawing and inscription is the only obstacle to contend against, yet even this is not difficult

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to unravel. Nothing is more likely than that in the sixteenth century the Church would be robbed of the smaller reliquaries before the demolition of the great shrines : the crown might possibly be transferred to the chest of relics together with the skull from the crypt for greater safety, for no one could possibly have anticipated such action as was taken. Here, again, the wording in the Cotton. MS. must not be taken too literally, as the skull could not be perfect seeing that Roger, the warden of St. Mary's altar, was offered the abbacy of St. Augustine's Monastery if he could procure a relic of St. Thomas for that house. Roger went to St. Augustine's and took with him "a piece of his (St. Thomas') skull which was cut off." Another fragment of his skull went to Rome, and other churches possessed small relics of St. Thomas. Implicit credence cannot be placed in this drawing, as it is not clearly indicated whether it represents the actual relics, or, as Stanley suggests, only a painting on the flat lid of the chest, representing the fatal wound. In the *Declaration of Faith* it will be seen that the skull which was burnt was independent of the chest of relics. A contributor to the *Archæologia* concludes that the drawing is not reliable, as he is convinced it was not made until a considerable time after the destruction, and then drawn only from the description in the pages of Stow.

During the month of September the Royal Commission for the destruction of shrines, under Dr. John Layton and a strong military guard, arrived at Canterbury to carry out the work of sacrilege. The spoil of jewels and gold of the shrine were carried off in two coffers on the shoulders of eight men, while

twenty-six carts were employed to remove the accumulated offerings to God and St. Thomas, and the noted Regale of France was mounted in Henry's thumb ring. The crypt containing the saint's first tomb was made into a wine cellar.

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A Royal Proclamation followed on November 16<sup>th</sup> stating that :—

“Forasmuch as it now clearly appeared that Thomas Becket had been killed in a riot excited by his own obstinacy and intemperate language, and had been afterwards canonised by the Bishop of Rome as the champion of his usurped authority, the King's Majesty thought it expedient to declare to his loving subjects that he was no saint, but rather a rebel and traitor to his prince. Therefore his Grace straitly chargeth and commandeth that hence forth the said Thomas Becket shall not be esteemed, named, reputed nor called saint, but ‘Bishop Becket,’ and that his images and pictures through the whole realm shall be put down and avoided out of all churches and chapels, and other places ; and that from henceforth the days used to be festivals in his name shall not be observed, nor any service, office antiphones, collects, and prayers in his name read, but erased and put out of all books.”

In consequence of the severe penalties attached to this decree, it was so rigorously carried out that a calendar containing the name of St. Thomas unerased is a great rarity.

The cult of St. Thomas had, however, such extra-ordinary vitality that, notwithstanding the royal decrees, it was largely continued. Even to our own day the use of the term “Translation Sessions”: for the June Quarter Sessions, as a legal phrase, is a survival of the commemoration of the Feast of the Translation of St. Thomas on July 7th, 1220.

In the Bull *Cum Redemptor* issued by Pope Paul III., December 17th, 1538, against Henry VIII., the violation of the shrine is specially noticed :—

“After he (Henry VIII.) had, for the greater contempt of religion, summoned St. Thomas, the Archbishop of Canterbury, into court, and caused him to be condemned as contumacious, and to be declared a traitor, he was ordered his bones,

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which in the realm of England, for the numberless miracles there wrought by Almighty God, were kept in a golden shrine at Canterbury, to be disinterred and burnt, and the ashes to be scattered to the winds : thus far surpassing the cruelty of all nations ; for even in war, conquerors do not rage against the bodies of the dead. And in addition to this, he has usurped possession of all the offerings given by the liberality of different

kings, some of them of England, and of other princes, which were attached to the shrine, and were of immense value.”

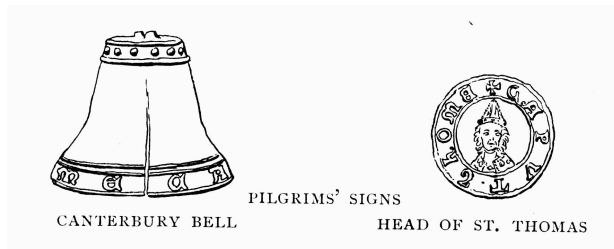


Illustration: Pilgrims' Signs.

Doubt has been thrown upon the proceedings of the king's commissioners, and the burning of the bones denied. Against the statements of Stow, Sanders, and Pallini, and of the Bull, are the assertions of Harpsfield and of William Thomas, Clerk of the Privy Council in the reign of Edward VI. The former says, "We have of late unshrined him, and buried his holy relics," and the latter, "his bones are spread amongst the bones of so many dead men, that without some greate miracle they wyll not be found agayne." In the Declaration of Faith issued by royal authority in 1539 it says : "If this hede was brent, was therefore S. Thomas brent," which is almost an acknowledgment that the skull of the saint was destroyed by fire, and is an apologia with an evident attempt to mystify what had actually occurred, and to justify the sacrilege.

The extreme popularity of St. Thomas throughout England is apparent by the numerous representations of him as archbishop and of his martyrdom, which have

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survived the sweeping decrees and indefatigable search for their destruction. Not least among these survivals are the reliquaries upon which his martyrdom is portrayed. Whether they contained relics of St. Thomas or shrines for the relics of other martyrs decorated with the scene of St. Thomas' passion is not positively determined. Such a noteworthy example as St. Thomas might fittingly be commemorated on the châsse of another saint whose acts had not received such world-wide distinction ; but the former theory is now generally accepted. One of these caskets is preserved in the cathedral at Hereford. For long it was associated with the name of St. Ethelbert, who gave his name to the dedication of the mother church of that see ; nothing, however, exists to show evidence that this had any relation to that saint, while the decoration of the exterior unquestionably represents the murder and entombment of St. Thomas of Canterbury.

The reliquary, 8 ½ inches in height, is 7 inches long and 3 ½ inches broad. It was made of oak, with a high-pitched roof, and the back opens on hinges. This casket is covered with plates of copper, gilded and enameled in the style of the thirteenth-century Limoges work. On the front of the shrine is the martyrdom. Before an altar on which are a cross, chalice, and paten, stands St. Thomas in mass vestments with a low mitre without *infulæ*. Above the altar the hand of the

Eternal Father issues from a cloud in benediction, and behind the archbishop are the three barons armed with swords and battle-axe, the foremost has brought his sword down upon the neck of the saint. The heads of these figures stand in relief.

On this side of the roof is the entombment, where the body, swathed in a diapered winding-sheet, is being placed in a high tomb. The officiating prelate, his attendance, and the two thuirifers are all nimbed [portrayed with a nimbus].

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The back of the shrine is decorated with quatrefoils, and the two gable ends are occupied with a male and female saint respectively.

The borders are of gold and enamels, the latter being of blue, light blue, green, yellow, red, chocolate, and white.

The cresting of the shrine is of copper, pierced with eight keyhole-shaped openings. The wood of the interior

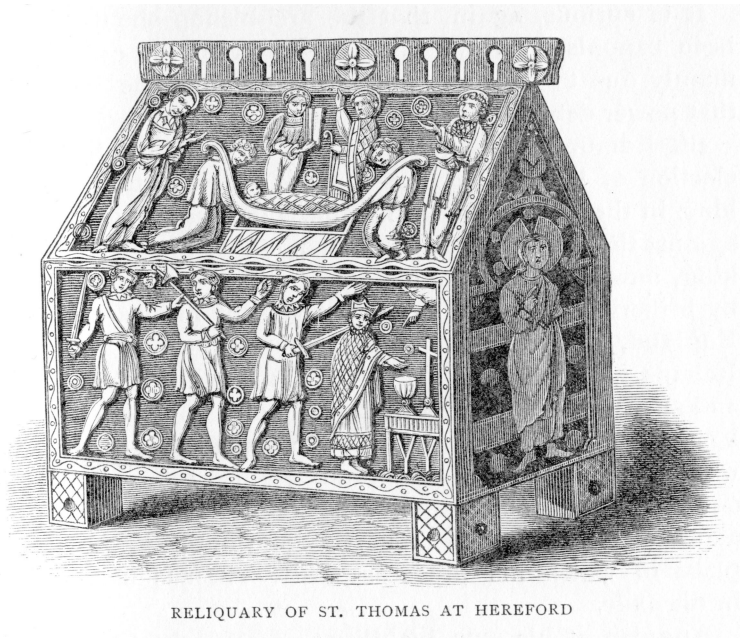


Illustration: Reliquary of St. Thomas at Hereford

is stained with what is conjectured to be blood, and on the side is a cross *pattée fitchée* painted in red, which is supposed to be a distinctive mark that the relics enshrined were those of a martyr.

### ST. EDMUND OF CANTERBURY

It is by a curious evolution of circumstance that a shrine of an English archbishop yet remains, glorious

from its sacred contents, beautiful in its workmanship, and exalted to a place of the highest honour ; but it is only through those circumstances, which caused the exile of the archbishop, that it is so, for if England had been the proud possessor of the relics of St. Edmund up to the sixteenth century, at that period they would have been desecrated.

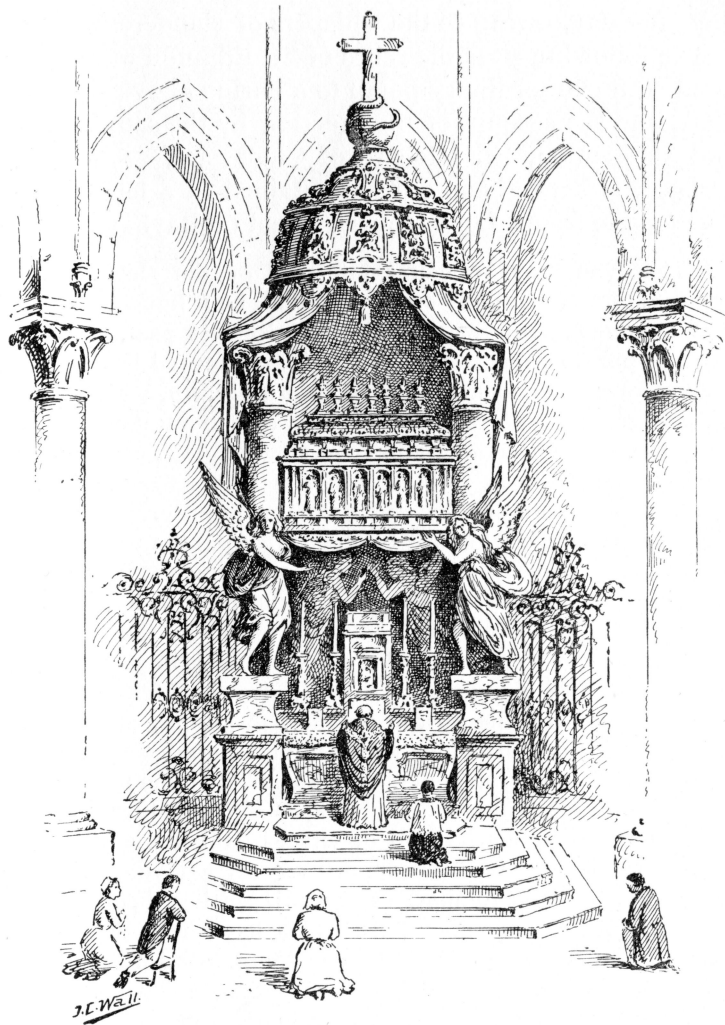
It is curious, again, that the archbishop should have been canonised by the pope, seeing that his exile was mainly due to his anti-papal protests when he thought that power detrimental to the national welfare.

St. Edmund of Canterbury was fighting for the free election of bishops against the oppressive action of the king in thrusting his own nominees into vacant sees, and against the excessive tribute demanded by the pope. The king, however, had obtained the countenance of the pope by bribery, and when Gregory IX. sent his warrants to England, demanding the provision for three hundred Italians in the first benefices which should fall vacant, and suspending the bishops from giving benefices to any English priest until they were provided for, the king would not support St. Edmund against this iniquitous demand. The archbishop left the country and took up his place in which his predecessor St. Thomas had dwelt in his exile.

Anguish at his own inability to rescue the Church of England from its perilous state was the cause of his death, which occurred at Soissy, November 16th, 1240. His heart was buried in that place, but his body, pontifically vested, was carried on a wooden conveyance to Pontigny.

The miracles attributed to St. Edmund were so numerous that, six years after his death, Pope Innocent IV. canonised him, "for he feared lest the said saint should punish him





SHRINE OF ST. EDMUND AT PONTIGNY

Illustration: Shrine of St. Edmund at Pontigny

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for neglecting to his canonisation, which he had but off day after day, owing to the whispers of slanderers.”<sup>6</sup>

The following year the relics of St. Edmund were translated with extraordinary pomp to a shrine above the high altar, and the account of the function by the saint’s friend and companion, St. Richard of Chichester, as one who assisted is here given. It is contained in a letter to his “venerable friend Lord Robert, abbot of Bayham.”

“That you may be better informed of the elevation and present state of the body of St. Edmund, be it known unto you that on the morrow of the Holy Trinity last past, when the tomb of our holy father Edmund was first opened in the evening before a few persons only who were present, we

found the body fragrant with a very sweet odour, and in a full and perfect condition. The head was still covered with hair, and the face shining, and the body with the other members sound in all its parts, and odoriferous beyond balm or incense. The nose, however, had suffered injury by pressure from the upper stone, but was not decayed ; and deservedly so, for whoever examines into his life more fully, will see that it is a sin to have doubts of his virginity. The whole body, and especially the face, as found as it were steeped in oil ; which we believe signified the grace as well of his morals also of his doctrine, for there was a grace diffused over his lips, in reading, disputing, and preaching ; God had anointed him with the oil of gladness above all other readers, teachers, and disputants of his time ; wherefore there was grace diffused over his lips. We shall find in the same some other marks also of virtues, which we will relate to you in secret when the opportunity of a favourable time shall arise, too long to allow of my now setting time down in writing. But as touching those which have been mentioned, your discretion may not entertain a doubt, for we speak and write what we know, and testify what we have seen. With our own hands we handled his holy body, and with diligence and reverence combed and arranged his head, with the hairs strong and unharmed. But on the Sunday next before the

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feast of St. Barnabas, in presence of our lord and king of France, with his mother and the counts his brothers, and many nobles besides, moreover two cardinals, to wit, the bishop of Albano, and the legate of France, with the archbishops, bishops, abbots, priors, and other venerable prelates, and many others aiding, whose number we could not learn, at Pontigny, by the divine will, with unspeakable exultation and glory, and with magnificent thanksgivings to God, was celebrated the translation our most blessed father St. Edmund, archbishop of Canterbury and confessor, to the no small augmentation of the honour of our nation.”

King Louis of France ordained that greater facilities should be given to the English to visit the shrine than to those of any other nation, and it was determined that the shrine would be honoured by offerings of lighted tapers and with elaborately worked images.

When these things became known to Earl Richard in England, he expressed regret that his brother the King of England and himself had not been present at so glorious and solemn a translation, “for he was our saint by birth, education, and promotion, although owing to our sins he withdrew from England,” and he undertook to defray the cost of a fourth part, or the front, of the shrine.

The abbey was devastated, the church burnt, and the tombs broken open by the Huguenots in 1567 ; then there were the destructive acts of the Revolution, but the relics of St. Edmund were preserved through these vicissitudes and again

enshrined. High above the altar, upheld by the hands of angels, is the golden coffer containing the body of our archbishop. A staircase at the back leads the pilgrim to a level with the shrine, which on that side is of glass, through which the relics are seen. The shrine, with the altar and canopy dates from the beginning of the eighteenth century, and is of good workmanship of that period.

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Footnotes~

1. This seems, however, to be a modern fable, originating in A. D. 1816.
2. Cottonian, Tib. E. viii. fol. 269.
3. *Peregrinatio Religiones ergo*.
4. The letters and words in italics were destroyed when the MS. was burnt.
5. Matt. Paris.
6. Matt. Paris.

-end chapter four, part four-