

## CHAPTER XX.

Department of Becket as Archbishop.—State of the Secular Law.—Clerical Exemption from Secular Law.—Council of Clarendon.—Constitutions of Clarendon.—Becket arraigned at Northampton.—Becket's Flight from England.—Excommunication.—Punishment of Heretics.—Henry and Becket meet at Touraine.—Becket returns to England.—His Murder at Canterbury.—Consequences of Becket's Murder.—The Shrine of Becket.

IN the June of 1162, Becket was elected archbishop of Canterbury by the suffragan bishops and the prior and monks of Canterbury, assembled at Westminster. In this proceeding there was nothing beyond the pretence of election; for Henry had sent his justiciary from Normandy, to bear his royal mandate for the elevation of his chancellor to the primacy. No churchman dared to raise an objection to this arbitrary command. One only, the bishop of Hereford, ventured to express his opinion, in saying that the king had worked a miracle, for he had turned a layman and a soldier into an archbishop. Becket was then, at Canterbury, ordained a priest; and afterwards consecrated with extraordinary magnificence. But the mandate of Henry had worked a more miraculous transformation than that described by the bishop of Hereford—a metamorphosis as unexpected by the king as by the church. The man who had displayed before the astonished people the most extravagant luxury, with nobles in his train and belted knights for his body-guard, now wears a monk's frock and a hair cloth next his skin; feeds the poor daily in his private chambers, waiting on them, and washing their feet; entertains the great in his hospitable halls, but allows no one to sit at his own table except monks and other ecclesiastics; hears a Latin book read aloud, instead of listening, as was his wont, to the music of the banquet; and when, in the holiest office of the cathedral, he kneels before the altar, weeps and groans as the most afflicted of penitents. The king is astonished that Becket should have resigned the chancellorship. He comes to England, and is met by the primate at Southampton. Henry now knows that the predictions of his

mother were not altogether vain. He calls up that lightning of his eyes which Peter de Blois describes, and requires the archbishop to give up his archdeaconry, which he had continued, illegally, to retain. Becket is obliged to yield. The old friendship is gone.

The next year the archbishop, with most of the other dignitaries of the church, proceeded to a great council at Tours, to meet Pope Alexander and his cardinals. It was here determined that a severe canon should be made against all who usurped the goods of the Church. Upon his return to England the archbishop demanded from several barons, and even from the crown, the restoration of manors and castles which had belonged to the see of Canterbury. The claim of resumption went back to the time of William I., Becket maintaining that no length of possession could establish the property of the church as a lay fee. Henry was not deterred, by this spirit in him who had been the creature of his bounty, and upon whom he had reckoned as the most effective minister of his will, from proceeding in a course which he knew was essential to the well-being of his people.

The separation of the secular and the ecclesiastical jurisdictions, which had been effected in the reign of William I., had made an important revolution in the administration of justice. That great innovation was announced by William as having been made in the common council with the advice of the archbishops, bishops, and abbots, and of all the chief men of the kingdom.\* From the period of this separation, the administration of civil justice had been gradually becoming more essentially connected with the kingly office; whilst under the Saxons no man was to apply to the king in any suit, unless he at home might not be law-worthy, or could not obtain law. By "at home" was meant the local courts, whether of the manor or the county. The Curia Regis,—the Court of King's Bench,—is held to have been "confirmed and fully established by Henry II., if not originally instituted by that prince."† There were itinerant justices of assize, with occasional commissions, in the reign of Henry I.; but in the 22nd year of Henry II. they regularly went their circuits. When this active and sagacious king had been on the throne ten years, he had, in a great degree, brought all his lay subjects under the equal rule of the laws. The country was rapidly recovering from the miseries of the time of Stephen, and the people were increasing in numbers as their profitable industry also increased. The old Saxon

\* Allen, in "Edinburgh Review," vol. xxxv. p. 15. † Ibid., p. 8.



principle of "bot," or pecuniary compensation for crime, had, for the most part, been superseded by criminal laws, administered with stern severity. At this period, Trial by Jury,—although the duties of a juror were, in many respects, different from those of modern times,—was coming into general use; and in 1176 a precise enactment established the jury as the usual mode of trial: "The justices, who represented the king's person, were to make inquiry by the oaths of twelve knights, or other lawful men, of each hundred, together with the four men from each township, of all murders, robberies, and thefts, and of all who had harboured such offenders, since the king's accession to the throne."\* But these twelve knights, or other lawful men, were not before the king's justices to decide upon the credibility of evidence, or to hear questions of law and fact discussed and argued. They were often called "recognitors." They were essentially witnesses. Mr. Hallam, speaking of the learned investigations of Sir F. Palgrave on this question, says, "This theory is sustained by a great display of erudition, which fully establishes that the jurors had such a knowledge, however acquired, of the facts, as enabled them to render a verdict without hearing any other testimony in open court than that of the parties themselves, fortified, if it might be, by written documents adduced."† Mr. Hallam points out that several instances of recognition—that is, of jurors finding facts of their own knowledge—occur in the "Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond." We give one instance, in 1191, upon a question whether certain lands were the frank fee of the church or not: "And when there was summoned an inquest of twelve knights to make inquest in the king's court, the inquest was taken in the court of the abbot of Harlow, by the licence of Ranulf de Glanville; and the recognitors swore that they never knew that land at any time to be separated from the church."‡ It is unnecessary to pursue this subject to show, at this point of our history, how the administration of justice, criminal and civil, was undergoing many important changes connected with the changes of society, and was approaching, by gradual steps, to that state in which the "inquest by the country" became the great safeguard of life and property. Mr. Hallam has truly said, "In its rudest and most im-

\* Sir F. Palgrave, "English Commonwealth."

† "Middle Ages," vol. ii. p. 393; ed. 1855.

‡ The original of this Latin Chronicle of the Monk of Bury was published by the Camden Society, and is translated by T. E. Tomlins, Esq.

perfect form, the trial by a sworn inquest was far superior to the impious superstition of ordeals, the hardly less preposterous and unequal duel, the unjust deference to power in compurgation, when the oath of one thane counterbalanced those of six ceorls, and even to the free-spirited but tumultuous and unenlightened decisions of the hundred or the county.\* That the recognitors were generally very ignorant, and too frequently corrupt, was unavoidable, in an age when knowledge was chiefly confined to the clergy, and oaths, as we have often seen, were held of light account. Jocelin de Brakelond gives a curious instance. Five knights came to the abbot of Bury, having been summoned upon an inquest respecting an advowson, and "tempting the abbot," asked what it was they ought to swear. But the abbot would neither give, nor promise them anything, but said,—“When the oath shall be administered, declare the right according to your consciences.” The honest abbot of course lost his suit.

We have thus indicated, without attempting to enter upon any elaborate examination of controverted points, the general state of the English secular law in the time of Henry II. We have done so to show that, however imperfect were the securities against the escape of the guilty or the oppression of the innocent, justice was systematically administered under the royal authority; and that the barbarous violence of the early days of feudal tenures was passing rapidly away. The position of the Church presented an insuperable obstacle to the equal administration of the laws. The clergy claimed an exemption from all secular judicature. Whilst the murderer and the robber were punished with death if tried in the courts of the crown, the vilest offender, if a clerk, escaped the extreme penalty of his offence, and was often freed from all consequences except that of pecuniary compensation. The number of persons in holy orders was enormous. The vast extension of religious houses, and the general increase of the revenues of the ecclesiastics, had opened the doors of the Church even to the Saxon serf; and to many the profession of a clerk, if it brought no endowment or regular provision, offered a security against want in the alms of the pious, and a protection against the oppressions of the lay-barons. Called upon for knight-service, the bishops and abbots had men in their retinues who were half-priest and half-soldier; and whose habits of life had little of the purity and peacefulness that belonged to the more educated and better principled

\* "Middle Ages," vol. ii. p. 405.



of the order. It has been stated that in the first year of Henry II. there were reckoned nearly one hundred homicides that had been perpetrated by priests then living. After the appointment of Becket to the primacy, a priest of Worcestershire committed the infamous crime of murdering a father, that he might be undisturbed in a guilty intercourse with his daughter. Even such a crime would not, under any circumstances of atrocity, have been punished with death in the church-tribunals. This offender was required to be delivered up for trial in the king's courts. Becket interposed the shield of the Church between the criminal and the outraged laws; and passed upon him a sentence of degradation only, contending that the degraded priest could not be a second time brought to trial for the same offence. Henry called an assembly of prelates at Westminster, and earnestly asserted the public necessity of putting an end to such hideous compromises as the archbishop had maintained. He asked them, "whether they were willing to submit to the ancient laws and customs of the kingdom?" The reply, framed by Becket, was that they would observe them "saving the privileges of their order." The king was indignant; and immediately deprived the archbishop of the temporal appointments which he held at the pleasure of the crown. Some of the friends of Becket counselled his submission; but he said that if an angel should come from heaven, and advise him to abandon the saving clause, he would anathematise him. Yet the passionate man, at the instance, it is stated, of the pope's almoner, ultimately went to the king and gave his unconditional assent to the demand. But Henry required a more formal assertion of the principle which he maintained, of the equality of the clergy and the laity before the law, than he could obtain from the personal submission of the dangerous archbishop. He called a great council at Clarendon, near Salisbury; and thither came the eminent men of the realm, whether lay or ecclesiastic, who ordinarily sat with the king in this incipient parliament. A series of resolutions were proposed which have since been known as "The Constitutions of Clarendon." These, when passed, were essentially a statute, and had the force of law. They were earnestly debated for three days; and were ultimately carried, even with the consent of Becket. That some force was used to compel his submission is unquestionable. We are scarcely, in our times, in a temper to judge of the exact nature of the particular clauses to which the archbishop, feeling himself in the position of the assertor of the rights of the Church, might

honestly object. Taken altogether, they were a formidable attack upon the power of the clergy at home, as well as upon the interference of the papal see with the affairs of the English Church. The preamble to the "Constitutions" declares that they were a record and recognition of the ancient laws and customs which ought to be observed in the kingdom. By this statute, the great point of contest,—that of clerical exemption from the secular arm,—was thus decided: "Ecclesiastics arraigned and accused of any matter, being summoned by the king's justiciary, shall come into his court, to answer there, concerning that which it shall appear to the king's court is cognisable there; and shall answer in the ecclesiastical court, concerning that which it shall appear is cognisable there; so that the king's justiciary shall send to the court of holy Church, to see in what manner the cause shall be tried there; and if an ecclesiastic shall be convicted, or confess his crime, the Church ought not any longer to give him protection."\* Pleas of debt, also, whether they were due by faith solemnly pledged, or without faith so pledged, were to belong to the king's judicature. Rights of advowson, and questions of the tenure of property between ecclesiastic and layman, were to be heard before the king's justice and twelve lawful men. These were the most important conditions that related to the great questions in which the body of the people were interested. It would be difficult to understand the opposition of a strong and cultivated mind like that of Becket to such reasonable propositions, if we did not consider how zealously men, in times of more established principles, will battle for points in which the interests of their order, as well as their personal pride, are involved. Equally reasonable appears the clause that no dignified ecclesiastic should leave the realm without licence of the king, who might demand security that he would not procure any evil to the crown or kingdom. Nor are those unreasonable which regulate the excommunication of the king's chief tenants or officers. The clauses which enabled the king to send for the principal clergy of a Church, upon the vacancy of a bishopric or abbacy, and, with the advice of such prelates as he should choose, should give his assent or otherwise to the election, and receive homage, was a distinct assertion of the principle for which Henry I. had contended against Anselm; and we may believe that the prelates who regarded the pope as

\* It is singular that Lord Campbell should mis-state this well-known clause,—which as Mr. Callam truly says, "is gently expressed,"—by vaguely saying of the Constitutions, "they provide that clerks accused of any crimes should be tried in the king's courts."



their spiritual head would be indignant at such a claim. Yet, in spite of Henry's subsequent abandonment of some of the enactments of the Council of Clarendon, we have distinct evidence that his consent to the election of the great ecclesiastics was no idle assertion of authority. We turn to the "Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond," and read how the prior of Saint Edmundsbury, with twelve of his brethren, stood before Henry II. at Waltham, in 1182, who commanded that they should nominate three members of the convent, as candidates for the election; and afterwards that they should nominate three members of other convents; as well as three more of their own. Then the lists were gradually reduced to two of Saint Edmund's, the prior and Sampson. After much hesitation, the bishop of Winchester saw that the good fathers preferred the active and clever subsacrist, to the somewhat indolent prior. "Sampson was then named to the king, and, after a brief consult with those about him, we all of us were called in; then the king said, 'Ye present to me Sampson,—I know him not; had ye presented to me your prior, I should have accepted him, because I have known and am well acquainted with him: but now I will do as you desire. Take heed to yourselves: by the very eye of God, if ye act unworthily, I shall call you to severe account.' And he inquired of the prior, whether he assented to this choice, and agreed thereto; who replied, that he was well content it should be so, and that Sampson was much more worthy of the dignity. Sampson being thus chosen, and falling down at the king's feet, and kissing him, hastily arose, and forthwith went towards the altar, singing, 'Miserere mei Dominus,' together with his brethren, erect in gait, and with unmoved countenance. The king observing this, said to the bystanders, 'By the eyes of God, this one that is chosen seems to himself worthy of keeping the abbacy.'"<sup>\*</sup>

The great questions at issue in the memorable controversy connected with the Constitutions of Clarendon must be steadily kept in view, however absorbing may be our interest in the personal conflict between Henry and Becket. On one side was an energetic, determined, and sagacious king, bent upon establishing the regal authority without respect of persons, and enforcing this authority by an assertion of absolute power, founded, in reality, upon physical force. On the other side was a primate, endued with surpassing ability, of a temper as unbending as that of the king, and resolved to establish the domination of the Church over the secular power.

<sup>\*</sup> "Jocelin de Brakelond," translated by Tomlins, p. 7.



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The contest was not so unequal as it at first appears. Becket ran the risk of being struck down by some outbreak of rage on the part of the king, or by some tumultuous assault of the men at arms, who were leagued against him. The vacillation which first induced him to accept the Constitutions of Clarendon, and then to withhold his seal from them, was a natural result of the alternations of confidence and alarm. So was his subsequent oath to observe them, and then his self-imposed penance for having taken that oath. The Constitutions were sent to the Pope for confirmation, and Alexander refused his consent to ratify them. Then began a course of determined hostility on the part of the archbishop that appeared to shut out all hope of a compromise. He twice endeavoured to leave the kingdom, but was intercepted. Henry saw him after this attempt, and quietly asked him if he thought the same land could not contain them both. Becket, returning to his see, then boldly set about acting in defiance of the statute he had consented to pass. He was arraigned as a traitor, at Northampton, and being held as guilty, his possessions were decreed to be at the king's mercy, which means that the king had absolute power over them. Henry appears to have acted with little magnanimity, and to have resolved upon his ruin, by raising extravagant demands upon him connected with his period of favour as chancellor. The heroic attitude of this extraordinary man now claims our wonder and almost our admiration. Having preached at the morning service from the text, "Princes sat and spake against me," he went in solemn procession to the king's palace, bearing the archiepiscopal cross in his own hands. As the primate entered the king's hall in this unusual pomp, the king retired; and there he sat, with a few of the humbler clergy only around him, whilst the bishops and nobles had followed the sovereign. Henry was in great anger; and the bishop of Exeter came out, and throwing himself on his knees before Becket, besought him to have pity on himself, and upon his brethren. His answer was, "Fly, then, thou canst not understand the things that are of God." The bishops then came out, and renounced their obedience to him, on the score that he had sworn falsely to observe the Constitutions, and had then resisted them, and broken his fealty. "I hear what ye say," was his only reply. The barons then pronounced a sentence of imprisonment against him, and the earl of Leicester came into the hall to read the sentence. The archbishop interrupted him with, "Sir earl, hear you first;" and then, after a defence of himself, concluded by dis-



claiming the king's judgment, and that of the peers, "being only to be judged under God, by our lord the Pope." He then cited the bishops, who, he said, had chosen to obey men rather than God, to appear before the presence of the pope. As he rose to depart, some called him traitor. The ancient spirit of the warrior was roused, and he exclaimed, "If my holy office did not forbid it, I would make answer with my sword." And so Becket went out of the king's hall into the outer court; but the gates were closed. His servants then thought that he was in the hands of his enemies, and that he would be held a prisoner. The minute chronicler, having told us that the Almighty delivered him, adds, "For Peter de Muntorio, one of his servants, espied a number of keys hanging on a nail near the gate, and taking them down, opened it, the king's porters standing by, and uttering not a word."\* He then mounted his horse, with crowds following him; and, to close this extraordinary day, he sent out his people to gather the paupers and wayfarers to come into the house where he abode, there to feast and make merry. But in the dead of the night he left the town, in the garb of a monk, with only two attendants. One of them, Herbert de Boseham, left an account of this flight. They rode to Lincoln, and then went by water to a hermitage in the fens. Onwards they travelled on foot to Estrey, near Canterbury, where Becket was concealed by a priest. At the end of fifteen days they embarked in a small fishing-boat at Sandwich, and were set on shore near Gravelines. His escape was a very doubtful issue of his flight, for Henry had given orders that all the sea-ports should be watched. After some adventures under the name of Friar Christian, he finally passed from the territories of the court of Flanders into France; and was at length luxuriously established, by the influence of the pope, in the abbey of Pontigny, in Burgundy, after an interview with the pontiff at Sens. Henry pursued his ancient friend with a miserable revenge, by banishing all those who were connected with him by any ties, either of blood or affection. The expatriated prelate was less subdued than even in the early days of this great contest. In 1166 he proceeded from Pontigny to Vezelay, near Auxerre; and, on the festival of the Ascension, mounting the pulpit, denounced all those whom he called the enemies of the Church. Then, the bells tolled, the crosses were inverted, the priests stood around with lighted torches; and the horrible form of excommunication was pronounced against John of Oxford, and

\* Hoveden.

certain dignitaries of the Church; against Jocelin de Baliol, the chief justiciary; and against all who should abet, enforce or obey the Constitutions of Clarendon. The sentence was not pronounced by Becket against Henry himself; but the king was called upon, by name, to repent, and atone for the usage he had offered to the Church, for otherwise the same malediction, should fall upon him, and he should be cursed, as those already denounced as evil-doers, to whom the heavens should be as brass and the earth as iron,—whose goings-out and comings-in, whose sleeping and waking, should be equally accursed,—who should be visited with hunger and cold, with sickness and blindness,—whom none should compassionate, and for whom even prayers should be turned into curses. At the conclusion of this miserable scene of a blasphemous superstition, the torches were extinguished, even as the souls of those delivered to perdition should be quenched in eternal darkness. Such denunciations look like the ravings of madness, as impotent as they are wicked. They were dreadful realities. The offender threatened was pursued as unrelentingly by public opinion as the wretched victim of the old Druidical laws:—

"cut off by sacerdotal ire  
From every sympathy that man bestow'd."

We should totally mistake the character of that age if we were to conclude that the great battle between Henry and Becket was carried on by the civil power in the spirit which we understand as an assertion of religious liberty. The ecclesiastical and secular authorities were equally ready to repress and punish what were called heretical opinions. In 1166, a synod was convened by Henry at Oxford, to inquire into the proceedings of some families who had come over from Germany, in all about thirty men and women, who had settled at Oxford, having a sort of leader in temporal and spiritual affairs of the name of Gerard. Their lives were perfectly blameless; and their opinions, whatever they might be, were not very attractive, for they had obtained only one English proselyte, a woman of humble station. These inoffensive people were brought before the synod, and were required to make a solemn profession of their faith. They replied, by their leader, that they were Christians, and venerated the doctrines of the Apostles. But, upon minute questions as to the articles of their belief, "they answered perversely and erroneously concerning the sacraments."\* In these poor foreigners we recognise the pre-

\* William of Newbury.



cursors of the Albigenses, the Waldenses, and other sects, who gradually spread through Europe, and were persecuted by imprisonment and death, under inquisitions, and by terrible massacres by bigoted princes. The Germans of Oxford were condemned as obstinate heretics, and were delivered over to the king for punishment. They appear to have had one advocate in John of Oxford, whom Becket excommunicated on that account. This was the first ebullition of heresy in England since the differences of the days of Augustin. An example was to be made; and the wretched exiles were branded, whipped, and turned out naked and bleeding into the fields, in the depth of winter. None dared to succour them, none to pity, and they all miserably perished.

The personal contention between the king of England and the archbishop of Canterbury had proceeded for five years with unabated virulence. Becket, coming forth from his retreat at Pontigny to denounce the vengeance of the Church against the supporters of the Constitutions of Clarendon, offers a no less pitiable example of unchristian anger than Henry, threatening that he would confiscate all the estates of the Cistercians in England if Becket were still harboured in a Cistercian monastery. The threat had its effect; and the fugitive archbishop, not to bring trouble upon his friends, repaired to Sens, where Louis of France appointed him another asylum. A petty war was proceeding between this king and Henry, sometimes ending in a hollow reconciliation, and again breaking out into new jealousies and revenges. When the two kings were hostile, Louis made Becket an instrument of annoyance to Henry; and Becket himself, whether at Pontigny or Sens, was indefatigable in the unvarying assertion of the justice of his cause, by the most elaborate addresses to the sovereign pontiff, to the king of England, and to various English prelates. Henry lived in constant terror of an interdict, by which the allegiance of his subjects might have been shaken; and the greatest watchfulness was exercised to prevent such an instrument arriving in England. But Henry, also, managed to conciliate the court of Rome by unanswerable arguments, more potent than the bitter letters of Becket to the pontiff, in which the king was called a malicious tyrant. The mortified archbishop implied that he had been deserted for gold, when the pope withdrew the commission by which he had been appointed legate, and prohibited him from excommunicating any person in England, or of using letters of interdict against the kingdom. At last, it was settled that Henry

and Becket should meet in a solemn conference, in which the king of France should be present. Terms of agreement were proposed, to which the king assented, with this reservation, "saving the honour of my kingdom." The archbishop assented, "saving the honour of God and the Church." Henry maintained that under this reservation, Becket would interpret everything that was offensive to himself as therein included; and added, "What the greatest and holiest of his predecessors did unto the least of mine, that let him do unto me, and I am contented." The haughty churchman held to his point, and there was an end, for a time, to any prospect of adjustment. At last, in 1170, on the 22nd of July, a solemn meeting took place near Touraine. Under a bright summer sky, in a pleasant meadow, the king of England waited for the archbishop; and as the prelate advanced to the royal tent, Henry rode forward to meet him with veiled bonnet. They long discoursed apart; and to all appearance they were reconciled. But the king withheld "the kiss of peace"—that token of amity, which, originating in the pledges by the early Christians of their common affection, had a peculiar solemnity when given by the lips of a king in the feudal times.\* Henry held Becket's stirrups when he mounted his horse, but he would not give him the kiss of peace. The archbishop was to be restored to his see, with all his lands, livings, and privileges; and Henry was content with Becket's agreement to love, honour and serve him, "in as far as an archbishop could render in the Lord service to his sovereign." But they parted without the kiss of peace. Becket anticipated danger, and he was repeatedly warned against going to England. This remarkable man, in the promptings of his enthusiasm, was lifted not only above all fear, but above all common discretion. Although Henry, it is alleged, had not sent him money for his journey, as was promised, he had certainly kept faith with him in essential matters. The eldest son of the king had been crowned, and acted in England with royal authority. To his son prince Henry, the king sent a brief letter, dated from Chinon, to this effect,—“Know you that Thomas, archbishop of Canterbury, has made my peace, agreeably to my desire; and, therefore, I require that he and all of his following should have peace; and you will take care that the said archbishop, and that all of his people who on his account went

\* The significance of the royal kiss lasted to our own days. At the period when the ministry of 1829 had resolved upon bringing forward the measure of Catholic Emancipation, and George IV. withheld his consent, the Duke of Wellington and Mr. Peel, upon leaving the royal closet, stating that they must resign, received each the kiss of the king.



out of England, should have their possessions truly, and in peace, and honourably, as they had them three months before the said archbishop went out of England.\* Becket landed at Dover, on the 1st of December, 1170. He had previously sent before him letters of excommunication against the archbishop of York, and the bishops of London and Salisbury. The offence of these prelates was that they had performed the ceremony of consecrating prince Henry, and had thus usurped an office pertaining to the see of Canterbury. This proceeding was a sufficient indication that there was to be no oblivion of the past, and no peace for the future. He proceeded to Canterbury, where he was received with acclamations by the burgesses and the poor. But none of the nobles or dignified ecclesiastics came to meet him. He attempted to see prince Henry, his former pupil, at Woodstock; but was directed to remain within his own diocese. How far Becket had brought this treatment upon himself by his own violation of the amnesty of the meeting of Touraine, or to what extent the king himself was insincere in the reconciliation, is a question which those only need argue who regard this passage of history as zealous partizans. Becket certainly rushed upon his fate. He was a man of such ardent temperament, that he preferred death to indignity. Amidst an escort of poor people he returned to Canterbury, and on Christmas-day preached in the cathedral, from the text, "I come to die amongst you;" and afterwards resorted to his old weapon of excommunication. He had been, no doubt, treated with rueness; and, "after delivering a sermon to the people excommunicated Robert de Broc, who, the day before, had cut off the tail of one of his sumpter-horses."† The prelates, against whom Becket had borne letters of excommunication, had crossed to Normandy, to represent their grievances to the king. It was not likely he would hear them patiently, and quietly submit to the domination of the imperious man who had thus re-opened the old quarrel. There is no evidence that Henry gave his sanction to assassination, but it is clear that in his passion he exclaimed, "Is there no one to deliver me from this turbulent priest?" Four knights of Henry's court—"whose names were as follows—William de Tracy, Hugh de Morville, Richard Brito, and Reginald Fitz-Urse, men of family, conspicuous for eminence,"‡ crossed the sea, and arrived at Canterbury on the fifth day of the Nativity. They made their way

\* This letter, and many of the curious documents connected with this eventful story, are given in "Rymer's Fœdera," p. 26; ed. 1816.

† Hoveden.

‡ Ibid.

into the archbishop's chambers, and addressed him insolently. Threats were exchanged, and mutual revilings. The knights required the prelate to withdraw the excommunication of the bishops, and to do fealty to the king for his barony. John of Salisbury, his secretary, counselled peace. But Becket was unmoved by terror or by entreaty. He was ready to meet the death which appeared to be impending. He took no precautions against outrage, but resolved to go to vespers in the cathedral. As he came from the conventual buildings into the cloister—perhaps descending from that beautiful staircase upon which the eye of the tasteful antiquary still gazes with delight—there was heard the tramp of armed men mingling with the slow tread of the monks. Quietly he proceeded into the church, and stood before the altar of St. Bennet. "Where is the traitor? Where is the archbishop?" exclaimed Tracy. The courageous prelate answered, "Here am I, the archbishop, but no traitor." "Thou art a prisoner," said Tracy, and took him by the sleeve; but the old martial temper was roused, and the archbishop threw him off with violence. There are various accounts of Becket's deportment, some imputing to him the use of offensive language to his assailants, and others representing him as an angel of meekness. He refused to fly; or to make any submission. He was then struck at, and as the sword of Fitz-Urse was descending upon his head, his faithful cross-bearer, Edward Gryme, received the blow upon his arm. Becket was slightly wounded and fell. Another and another blow completed the murder.

The cause for which Becket had contended, with such uncompromising zeal, was never so near its complete triumph as when his skull had been shattered upon the stone pavement of Canterbury cathedral. After that atrocious deed came the miraculous relations which, however we may now refer them to priestly imposture, were implicitly believed by the great body of the people. Then came the canonisation; the pilgrimages to the shrine of Saint Thomas; the humiliation of the king himself before the tomb of his enemy, terrible even in death. But had Becket been permitted to live, his fanaticism would have been displayed in forms of more offensive violence, until the learning, the moderation, and the genuine religion of the Church would have been wholly arrayed against him. As it was, several of the most able of Becket's fellow-prelates took part with the king in their great quarrel, particularly Gilbert Foliot, bishop of Hereford, and afterwards of London—one of the most accomplished scholars of his



time. The more it became a personal contest between Henry and Becket, the more would the great statesman have subdued the passionate churchman to his will. For Henry was, unquestionably, one of those few men in the history of the world who have vindicated their claims to be the natural rulers of mankind. Becket, by his adroitness, his activity, his courage, was invaluable to Henry as his lay-minister; but, thrown upon his own resources, and tempted by his archiepiscopal elevation to challenge the regal power to a conflict for supremacy with the ecclesiastical, he became the fanatical upholder of one dominant idea. He must have been crushed in the contest, if it had been a mere intellectual battle between two men of ordinary ambition. Henry was in every mental quality of greatness the superior of Becket. He was not a man of shows, but of realities. Becket wore "coarse sackcloth made of goat's hair, from the arms to the knees, but his outer garments were remarkable for their splendour and extreme costliness, to the end that, thus deceiving human eyes, he might please the sight of God." Thus writes his panegyrist, Hoveden. Henry was utterly regardless of mere appearances. Though his passions were violent, and his private life open to reproach, he won the admiration of all who came in contact with him, by his talent and energy, by his affability and modesty, by his unremitting power of labour, by his knowledge of languages and of all graceful and useful learning, by his discernment in the enactment and administration of laws.\* With many of the faults of his age, he had a sense of duty which raised him far above the mere selfish temptations of his position. Had Becket not been so wickedly and rashly slain by the rude knights who saw but one way of terminating so violent a contention, the king must have triumphed, and the claims of ecclesiastical tyranny must have been reduced to moderate dimensions at an earlier period of our history. But the victory of the crown might, at this time, have also retarded, for a long season, that enfranchisement of the Commons from the feudal oppressions which was slowly but steadily advancing. In such a contest as this, the claims of the lowly make some progress; and thus every humble pilgrim, whose knees wore the stones on which he knelt at the shrine of Saint Thomas, entered his protest against the reign of brute violence, and prepared the way for a time when piety might be separated from superstition, and freedom from disorder.

\* See the character of Henry in the interesting Latin work "Gualteri Mapes de Nugis Curialium," published by the Camden Society, p. 227.

## CHAPTER XXI.

First Landing of Anglo-Normans in Ireland.—The Irish Nation.—Strongbow.—Henry in Ireland.—Rebellion of Henry's Sons.—Insurrection in England.—Henry at the Tomb of Becket.—Reforms in the Administration of Justice.—Mission from Jerusalem.—Rebellion of Richard.—Death of King Henry.—Coronation of Richard.—Massacre of the Jews.—Richard the Crusader.—Progress of the Crusaders.—Siege of Acre.—Massacre of Hostages.—March towards Jerusalem.

IN the reign of Henry II. commenced that direct connection of Ireland with the government of England which has lasted nearly seven hundred years—a connection which has involved as much oppression and misrule, revolt and misery, as ever belonged to a struggle between races and creeds, of which the natural evils were always heightened and perpetuated by selfishness and ignorance on every side. In May, 1169, the first landing in Ireland of the Anglo-Normans took place. For several centuries the inhabitants of Ireland had made hostile descents on England, to take part in the various contests between Saxon and Briton. The Norman kings appear to have occasionally contemplated the subjection of Ireland; and William Rufus is stated to have looked from a high rock in Wales upon the green island in the distance, and to have said, "With my ships I will make a bridge to invade that land." Early in the reign of Henry, Pope Adrian had given him a pretended authority to subdue Ireland, and to reform its barbarous people. Before the ninth century the Irish had schools of learning which were celebrated throughout Europe, and the Celtic tribes were gradually acquiring a taste for the advantages of civilised life. But the incursions of the fierce Northmen drove the great bulk of the people into a condition of semi-barbarism, living apart from the settlements on the coasts in wild forests and dreary morasses. Giraldus Cambrensis has left a description of the nation, amongst whom he travelled in the train of prince John, which, with some allowance for the partiality of the Welchman for his own race, does not place the Irish much lower than the people of Wales which he described. They had the same internal contests under separate chiefs; the same preference of pasturage to