

# If all the swords in england by barbara willard

Literature



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The people always loved St Thomas Beckett and they use respectful language such as “ My lord ... Lord Thomas ... Good Lord Archbishop ... Your Grace” (p. 43-44) to show their appreciation of the gentleness of his manner towards them. When his ship is seen across the waves, the crowd welcome him with great shouts of joy, and the woman pass forward their children to be blessed by him (p. 110). The crowd also care about his welfare, for example when the woman named Matilda calls out “ Archbishop - Archbishop! Beware of the knife!” (p. 124).

An important aspect of the conflict between St Thomas Beckett and the king was the decision to write down some laws and make St Thomas Beckett sign his name to them (p. 14). The situation was made worse by the fact that other bishops had already signed this document. The King had perhaps assumed that their earlier friendship meant that St Thomas Beckett would co-operate with the King's plans once he took up the role of Archbishop. It is clear that becoming a priest and being committed to God was a higher calling than this friendship with the King. The King had been warned about this, but chose to ignore the warning and did not like to be reminded of it (p. 72). The real source of the difficulty between the Archbishop and the King was that the King had set himself up in a position that belonged only to God, and this forced Thomas Beckett to choose between the two.

The book very often describes the Archbishop and his household through the innocent eyes of Simon who admires the great man's daily humility. The image that is presented of the Archbishop at Montmirail is both strong and still, as for example when the weary crowd sees him “ sitting on his horse as he always did - with a splendid uprightness” (p. 79) This view symbolizes the <https://assignbuster.com/if-all-the-swords-in-england-by-barbara-willard/>

Archbishop's refusal to yield to evil pressures. Again and again he reacts with courage and politeness when he is accused of treason, or threatened with punishment, and he does not resort to accusations against the King or his supporters. Even in death the Archbishop's character was evident: "the mouth seemed almost to move in a slight smile that was full of contentment and sweetness" (p. 175).

This wonderful story of St Thomas Beckett during the last six years of his life gives a picture of why the people of England loved him, the events of the conflict with king Henry II, and the courage of Thomas Beckett during his final days. The quality that most impresses me is the Archbishop's moral strength. He stands up to political and military force with a quiet and steady faith. This attitude is exactly what is needed in a world torn by violence and oppression. Thomas Beckett stands out as a beacon through the ages, showing us how to speak up for what is right and resist evil in the world.

#### Reference

Willard, Barbara. *If all the swords in England*. Bathgate, ND: Bethlehem Books, 2nd edn. 2000, with an introduction by Francis Phillips.