

## THE MIRACLES OF THE HAND OF ST. JAMES

TRANSLATED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION

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BY far the most important of the many religious relics preserved at Reading Abbey in the middle ages was the Hand of St. James.<sup>2</sup> The early history of this relic and the circumstances of its arrival in Reading in the twelfth century are rather obscure and even less has been known about how the relic was used and what miracles or miraculous cures, if any, it worked. Hitherto, however, the existence of a manuscript account of miraculous cures resulting from devotion to St. James and his relic at Reading has gone largely unnoticed by scholars. This account forms part of a handsome early thirteenth-century volume now in the library of the Dean and Chapter of Gloucester, but perhaps deriving originally from Reading Abbey or its dependent priory at Leominster in Herefordshire.<sup>3</sup> Although it contains no specific reference to the monks' acquisition of the relic, there are clues as to when it came into their possession and, more importantly, the account contains a considerable amount of information concerning the type and extent of contemporary devotion to the relic, the means by which it was employed to invoke the apostle's power, and the kinds of illness which were cured thereby.

The manuscript account is clearly a fair copy written throughout in the same neat hand of c. 1200,<sup>4</sup> but no attempt seems to have been made to arrange the stories in any sort of order. Certainly there is no chronological or geographical arrangement. Twenty-eight miracles are described, all but two being miraculous cures. Many cannot be dated at all precisely, but thirteen (possibly fourteen) stories contain internal evidence which enables fairly limited dates to be supplied and one is actually dated to a particular year, 1127. This last is in fact the earliest of those miracles which can be dated, but it comes last in the manuscript. All the miracles for which dates can be obtained took place before the death of Henry II in 1189 and the general impression to be derived from the stories is that they were collected together round about 1190–1200. This would suggest that the surviving version was written shortly after the original compilation, and this is borne out by the apparent purity of the text and general absence of obviously corrupt passages.

There is a certain amount of scholarly disagreement regarding the abbey's acquisition of the Hand of St. James. The Reading cartularies

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Mr Denis Bethell of University College Dublin, formerly my colleague at Reading University, for much valuable assistance in the preparation of this translation. He is preparing an edition of the Latin text of the *Miracles*, translated below.

<sup>2</sup> A late twelfth-century list of relics at Reading is to be found in one of the abbey's cartularies, B. M. Egerton MS 3031, ff. 6v–8r.

<sup>3</sup> Gloucester, Dean and Chapter, MS 1, ff. 171v–175v. I am indebted to the Dean and Chapter, who kindly allowed me to study the manuscript and have generously consented to the translation and publication of these miracle stories. The volume is not listed as a Reading or Leominster

manuscript by N. R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*, 2nd ed. (London, 1964), but the fact that it came to Gloucester Cathedral by gift of a Herefordshire squire in the seventeenth century encourages a supposition of Leominster connections, while the other saints' lives and miracles which make up the volume indicate that it belonged to an English house with strong Cluniac and west country connections, which would fit Reading's or Leominster's position. At any rate, there can be no doubt that the original text of the *Miracles* of St. James derives from Reading.

<sup>4</sup> This hand is very closely similar to the main hand of the abbey cartulary, B. M. Egerton 3031.

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include the purported text of a charter by Henry I in which he gives the relic to the abbot and convent, instructing them to preserve it honourably and reverently in the abbey and stating that it has been brought to England from Germany by his daughter the Empress Matilda.<sup>5</sup> The text as it stands cannot be genuine, for the witness list is impossible, including as it does both Rannulf the Chancellor, who died in 1123, and Simon bishop of Worcester, who was not elected and consecrated until 1125, as well as Roger Bigod, the steward, who died in 1107, fourteen years before the foundation of Reading Abbey was begun. Some scholars have therefore dismissed the charter as a complete fabrication, but, even if one accepts such a point of view, it does not follow that the gift which it purports to record must also be regarded as an invention. It is quite possible that Henry I gave the Hand of St. James to Reading without an accompanying written document. Support for this hypothesis comes in the early thirteenth century, some three quarters of a century later (by which time it had become far more general to accompany grants of many kinds with written confirmations), for then, some time after 1204, King John gave Reading Abbey part of the skull of St. Philip without written confirmation of his gift—at least the monks did not see fit to keep a record of any charter the king may have

issued.<sup>6</sup> The admitted fabrication of Henry I's purported charter to Reading, therefore, proves only that the king did not grant that particular charter, and it may indicate that he did not issue a charter at all, but as to his alleged gift of the Hand it proves nothing.

Dr Hans Mayer, in an important paper, has recently advanced the view that the Hand did not in fact come to Reading until the beginning of Henry II's reign and he has demonstrated convincingly that the cult of St. James at Reading began to develop at that time.<sup>7</sup> He does not deny that it was the Empress Matilda who brought the Hand from Germany to England in 1126 after the death of her first husband, the Emperor Henry V, but he regards the story that at her request Henry I gave it to Reading as a fabrication of the second half of the twelfth century, when the popularity of the relic and the growth of the cult led the monks to manufacture a link between their possession of the Hand and their illustrious founder. He points out that the twelfth-century annals of Reading<sup>8</sup> note Matilda's return from Germany in 1126 but fail to mention any gift of the Hand, and he suggests that the notice in Matthew Paris that the Hand was restored to Reading in 1155<sup>9</sup> refers to what was in reality an original gift of the relic in that year, which, under the influence of the later twelfth-century myth, was

<sup>5</sup> B. M. Egerton 3031, f° 14r.—

'Henricus rex Anglie et dux Normannie abbatem et conventum de Rading(ia), salutem. Sciatis quod gloriosam manum sancti Jacobi apostoli quam Matill(is) filia mea imperatrix filia mea (sic) de Alemannia rediens mihi dedit, ipsius petitione vobis transmittit et in perpetuum ecclesie de Rading(ia) dono. Quare vobis mando quod eam cum omni veneratione suscipiatis, et tam vos quam posteri vestri quantum honoris et reverentie potestis sicut dignum est tantis tanti apostoli reliquiis iugiter in ecclesia de Rading(ia) exhibere curetis. Testibus: Will(elm)o Cant(uariensi) archiepiscopo, Matill(e) imperatrice filia mea, Simone Wigorn(ensi) episcopo, Rannulfo cancell(ario), Rob(erto) de Sigillo, Brientio filio Com(itis), Rog(er)o Bigot dapifero meo. Will(elm)o de Crevequer, apud Port.'

Calendared, *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, II, ed. C. Johnson and H. A. Cronne (Oxford, 1956), no. 1448.

<sup>6</sup> The King's gift is noted, B. M. Egerton 3031, f° 7r, as follows:

'Joh(ann)es rex Anglie dedit nobis caput Philippi apostoli venerandum, et nobis nundinas ipso die concessit habere.' King John's grant of the annual fair on the feast of SS Philip and James the Less is Ibid., f° 30v; also, *Rotuli Chartarum* . . . 1199–1216, ed. T. D. Hardy (Record Commission, 1837), p. 148.

<sup>7</sup> H. E. Mayer, 'Staufische Weltherrschaft? Zum Brief Heinrichs II. von England an Friedrich Barbarossa von 1157', *Festschrift Karl Pivec*, ed. A. Haidacher und H. E. Mayer (Innsbruck, 1966), especially pp. 270–278.

<sup>8</sup> *Annales Radingenses*, ed. F. Liebermann in *Ungedruckte Anglo-Normannische Geschichtsquellen* (Strassburg, 1879).

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. H. R. Luard (Rolls Series), II, 210.

represented as a restoration. Dr Mayer recognizes, however, that these arguments are not conclusive. What he says about the annals is true enough, but the annals are thin and sketchy in the extreme and omit many important events which took place in the abbey's history before the date of their last entry (the death of Henry II in 1189), including the dedication of the abbey church by Thomas Becket in 1164 and, if one were to accept Dr Mayer's suggestion, the 'gift' of the Hand in 1155.<sup>10</sup> Clearly an argument from silence in the annals is insufficient. His interpretation of Matthew Paris is even more difficult to justify, for earlier in the same chronicle, under the year 1136, there is an entry recording that the Hand was removed from Reading by Henry, bishop of Winchester.<sup>11</sup> Of this Dr Mayer makes no mention, but it helps to explain why there needed to be a restoration of the relic to the monks in 1155. The only medieval statement known to the present writer which supports Dr Mayer's view that the Hand came first to Reading in 1155 occurs in the Chronicle attributed to Peter of Ickham which was copied into the cartulary of Leominster Priory, the abbey's Herefordshire cell. This reads: *eodem anno [sc. 1156] delata fuit manus sancti Jacobi apud Redinges*.<sup>12</sup> However, this reference (at least in the form in which we have it) dates from the fourteenth century and is therefore far too late to be accepted without question.

Apart from this notice, medieval statements regarding the gift of the Hand to Reading attribute it to Henry I. The annals of Worcester report that it was he who sent the Hand to

Reading<sup>13</sup> and Roger of Howden, writing in the 1190s, even attributes the king's motive in founding the abbey to his devotion to the relic which he placed there.<sup>14</sup> In short, while there is a certain amount of evidence, admittedly not conclusive, to support the view that the relic was given by Henry I, there is little apart from the growth of the cult to support the contention that it did not arrive in the abbey for the first time until 1155. The evidence tends towards the conclusion that Henry I presented the Hand to his new abbey in or after 1126, possibly at this stage only as a temporary expedient and probably without an accompanying charter; that for some unknown reason it was removed from the abbey by Henry of Blois in 1136, i.e., not long after the original gift and at a time when his brother Stephen was king and possibly the abbacy was vacant;<sup>15</sup> and that it was returned to the monks in 1155, perhaps because of the high regard in which it was held by Henry II, as is apparent in some of the miracle stories of the Gloucester manuscript. It is true, as Dr Mayer shows, that the cult of St. James began to develop at Reading in the early years of Henry II, rather than under Henry I or Stephen, but if, as is here suggested, the monks had earlier been in possession of the Hand for a very few years only, there would hardly have been time for such a cult to become established. The charter of Henry I discussed above was no doubt forged, like some other supposedly early Reading charters, some time in Henry II's reign,<sup>16</sup> but this was done simply to provide documentary evidence for the abbey's rightful claim to the Hand which had been given origin-

<sup>10</sup> The only other surviving set of Reading Abbey annals, covering events between 1135 and 1264, also omits to note the gift of the Hand of St. James—'Annales Radingenses Posteriores, 1135-1264', ed. C. W. Previté-Orton, *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, xxxvii (1922), pp. 400-403.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Paris, *op. cit.*, II, 164.

<sup>12</sup> B. M. Cotton Domit. A iii, f° 31v. An identical statement found its way into the *Eulogium Historiarum*, ed. F. S. Haydon (Rolls Series), III, 68.

<sup>13</sup> *Annales Monastici*, ed. H. R. Luard (Rolls Series), IV, 378. The date given is 1133.

<sup>14</sup> Roger de Hovedon, *Chronica*, ed. W. Stubbs (Rolls Series), I, 181.

<sup>15</sup> Abbot Anscher of Reading died on 27th January, 1135, and his successor, Edward, was not made abbot until after the funeral of Henry I in the abbey in early January, 1136 (*Annales Radingenses*, p. 11). Henry, bishop of Winchester, was with his brother, King Stephen, at the time of the funeral—*Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, III, ed. H. A. Cronne and R. H. C. Davis (Oxford, 1968), no. 386.

<sup>16</sup> See C. Johnson, 'Some Charters of Henry I', *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait*, ed. T. G. Edwards and others (Manchester, 1933).

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ally by Henry I. If one can trust the omission of *dei gratia* in the royal style, the forgery can be dated before 1173 and may therefore have been made at the time of the relic's return to the abbey in 1155, in order to forestall any other attempt to remove it.

The survival of the miracle stories is a happy accident of fortune, for without them next to nothing would be known about the relic in the twelfth century beyond the facts that it was at Reading and was greatly prized by the monks. Apart from direct information on contemporary devotion to the Hand, the stories also throw up a good deal of incidental evidence on other aspects of the age. All but two of the miracles were miraculous cures, but no. XV involved the miraculous shifting of timber which had previously resisted efforts to move it, and no. XXV describes the fatal vengeance taken by St. James on a man who failed properly to observe his feast day. Not all the miracles were worked specifically by the Hand, but apart from no. XXV, all were related directly or indirectly to the Hand or to Reading where it was kept.

This is not the place to embark upon a full analysis of the importance of the stories, but some points can usefully be made. The largest number of cures resulted from the drinking by the invalid of 'water of St. James', which, as nos. XIV and XV make clear, was water in which the reliquary containing the Hand had been dipped.<sup>17</sup> This remedy cured two cases of hectic fever complicated by throat tumour and quinsy (nos. V and VI), two cases of fever (nos. XXIV and XXIVa), one case of an internal tumour (no. XXVI), one of a mother dying from failure to give birth (no. XXI), and two cases of unspecified illness (nos. I and VII). The apostle's water was either administered at Reading or sent to the victims, one of whom insisted on taking it at her local church (no. VII). Water of St. James was used in a different way in four other miracles, and probably also in a fifth (nos. IX, X, XIV, XV, and probably

VIII). In no. IX a head tumour was cured by signing the sufferer's head with the reliquary and binding it up with a linen cloth moistened with the apostle's water, while no. X resulted from bathing a withered arm with the water. In the two closely related miracles (nos. XIV, XV), a plague at Bucklebury ceased after the area had been sprinkled with water of St. James, and timber which was needed to erect a memorial of that miracle, but which could not be shifted by earthly agencies, was miraculously moved after the yoke of oxen, ropes, a cart and the timber had been sprinkled with some of the same water. The unpleasant case described in no. VIII of a girl's withered arm which had become attached to her abdomen, was cured by holding the reliquary containing the Hand over her arm and bathing it with water unspecified, which may have been water of St. James. Sight of the reliquary was effective in four cases, involving respectively unspecified plague, internal pain, crippled legs, and blindness resulting from failure to observe St. James's feast day (nos. IV, XI, XII, XVIII). A number of cures came about merely by the coming of the victims to the abbey to pray or offer a candle to the apostle, there being no indication that the Hand was directly involved at all. A woman suffering from dropsy (no. II), a dumb clerk (no. III), a spastic boy (no. XIII), a woman sick with fever (no. XVII), a girl with a withered left side (no. XX), and a young man with a broken arm (no. XXII) were all cured in this way. In the last but one of these (no. XX) the miracle was apparently worked by Christ. Even more easy were those cures which followed, usually immediately, the taking of a vow by the invalid to visit Reading. An abbot of Notley was cured of some kind of eye trouble in this way (no. XIX), as were a young man whose arm had broken (no. XXII), a crippled woman (no. XXIII—she was actually cured while on her journey to Reading), and a youth who was so close to death that his father made

<sup>17</sup> Compare the 'Water of St. Thomas', which figured in several miraculous cures worked by St. Thomas Becket and which was the very much watered-down blood of the martyr—J. C. Robertson,

*Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury* (Rolls Series), II, p. xxx.

the vow for him (no. XXVII). The subsequent fate of the young man with the broken arm pointed a salutary warning at those who made a vow of this kind and after being healed failed to fulfil it, for he neglected to perform his vow and promptly broke his other arm. In five of the stories the sick or disabled person was advised in a vision (usually of St. James, but sometimes unspecified) to go to Reading for a cure, and in one instance the advice was transmitted by a vision to a third party.

An analysis of the regions from which people came to be cured reveals something of the geographical extent of the relic's cult. Eleven of the miracles concerned Berkshire folk, including monks of Reading Abbey, and it is probable that two others concerned people who at least had Berkshire connections (nos. XXI, XXIV). Of the remaining invalids, two came from Oxfordshire, two came from Buckinghamshire (including an abbot of Notley), one each came from Essex, Herefordshire, Suffolk, Surrey (a canon of Merton), Sussex (or Kent) and Wiltshire, and finally there were the sheriff of Surrey (?*rectius* Sussex), the young man accompanying Prince John to Ireland in 1185, and the keeper of hounds who came from somewhere in the north of England.

As well as preserving a record of the miracles, the stories also served as splendid propaganda pieces. The writer lost few opportunities of advertising Reading Abbey as a goal of pilgrimage and a source of miraculous healing power. Possession of a wonder-working relic meant increased income from the offerings of pilgrims and at various points the present miracle stories include rather unsubtle reminders of this form of good works. For example, we are told that the sheriff who was cured in no. I promised to give the abbey 20s. per annum for the rest of his life and that he afterwards added to this an annual payment in salt. In their concern to promote the interest of Reading and its sacred relic the stories show traces of a certain rivalry with other pilgrimage centres. In the lengthy account of miracle XX, for instance, St. James, appearing in a vision to an

invalid at the shrine of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury, declares that she will not be cured at Canterbury or anywhere else, but only at Reading; while in no. XI, again in a vision, St. James tells a sick woman not to take her candle to Salisbury, as she had planned, but to Reading. Many of the stories contain quite horrific details of the illnesses or disabilities from which victims were suffering and one may perhaps detect here also another sign of the desire to advertise the relic's extraordinary powers—it is as though the writer were saying that, however awful and hopeless the affliction might seem, St. James could cure it.

The incidental information which can be gleaned from these accounts is considerable. As Dr Mayer has remarked, the Hand of St. James had no competitor for pilgrimages in England in the twelfth century before the canonization of Becket in 1173, and it is of the greatest interest to note in nos. XIV and XXVI that Henry II clearly valued its supernatural power so highly that he had it brought to him on at least two occasions, once because he did not care to venture upon the sea without its protective blessing. Miracle XI reveals that one of the earls of Gloucester with his wife and other nobles came to Reading in order to see and venerate the relic. If it were not for no. XVIII we should not know that Gilbert Foliot, bishop of London (1163–87), translated the sacred Hand from its old reliquary to a new one. No. I adds a little to our knowledge of the shadowy sheriff who was healed at Reading, and no. XXV gives a slightly different version of the death of the count of Boulogne in 1173 from that in Ralph de Diceto.<sup>18</sup> The plagues in Reading and Bucklebury in the twelfth century (nos. IV and XIV) are otherwise unknown and the sequel to the miraculous quelling of the Bucklebury pestilence (no. XV) helps to explain two charters of Jocelin, bishop of Salisbury, which survive in the Reading cartularies and have hitherto been difficult to interpret.<sup>19</sup> The references to the milking of sheep (no. VIII) and to Henry II sending to a woman in labour certain gems and precious stones which were

<sup>18</sup> See note to miracle XXV below.

<sup>19</sup> See note to miracle XV below.

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believed to possess helpful powers (no. XXI) are of great interest, not least because they are introduced in a completely incidental and casual fashion.

In this translation, the form and style of the original have been kept as far as was compatible with readable modern English, but no consistent attempt has been made to adhere to the

medieval punctuation. Proper names have been translated except in the case of a few place-names where no certain identification could be made. Wherever possible a date for each miracle has been added and where necessary explanatory notes have been supplied. No attempt has been made to identify the biblical and other quotations incorporated in the text.

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From the Lord's teaching we learn how the servant who preferred to wrap up his master's money in a cloth and bury it, rather than invest it for profit, not only lost the talent which he had, but also incurred a sentence of condemnation. Desiring, therefore, to avoid the danger of so frightful a sentence, we have thought fit to hand on to posterity, in what ways we can, the talent of divine bounty which we have received, or we know others have received, by the merits of the blessed James, so that not only the hopes of our hearers may be strengthened by what they hear, but also Christ may be glorified in his glorious apostle.

### MIRACLE I (1155-56)

A certain sheriff of Surrey, named Mauger Malcuvenant, came to Reading in the grip of a serious illness. As it got worse he seemed to be drawing ever nearer to the gates of death. In despair, therefore, and without hope of recovering the health of his body, he began to take steps for the cure of his soul. As the break-up of his body was almost in sight, it seemed to him better and more beneficial if, even at death, he renounced the world and the ways of the world as far as possible and assumed the habit of a monk. The monks of Reading, when approached and asked about it, would have granted his wish and request, but they were afraid that the royal officials would transfer to them claims in respect of his shrievalty and demand from them royal revenue which they had not received. Accordingly they used their abbot's absence as an excuse for delaying an answer to his request and promised him only this, that, if they saw that the point of death

was imminent, they would grant him the habit *ad succurendum*. That night, in fact, as he seemed to be in his final agony, the monks were again called in great haste in order that, even at death before the last breath left his body, they might give him the habit as they had promised. But, by divine will the monks had brought down with them an ampulla containing water in which the Hand of St. James had been dipped. And, although they were uncertain about the efficacy of the apostle's power when the danger of death was imminent, they seasoned their doubts with faith and poured a drop of the health-giving water into his mouth. He had previously been lying on the floor laid out in the manner of the dead and looking very much like a dead man, when, contrary to the expectation of all who were present, he swallowed the drop that had been poured. This happened a second and a third time and, wonderful to say, but more wonderful in its outcome, after this threefold taste of the sacred liquid, his limbs began to grow warm again, blood began to flow through his joints and his dead body began to revive. He was therefore lifted up from the floor and laid back on his bed, after which he began to sweat and fell asleep. After one or two hours he who had been an invalid awoke as though from a deep sleep, sprang from his bed and stood up. Those who had gathered and sat down around him to see his end were amazed when they saw the speed of his unexpected cure and said to one another, 'What can this mean?' And he who had been ill broke out in a voice of exulting faith, saying, 'Thanks be to God and to St. James, who has restored me to life and health'. For the apostle's power had appeared

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to him and had raised him up to perfect health. And so, as the day was dawning, with everyone praising God, he went devoutly to the church needing no support or prop from anyone and rendered due thanks to God and St. James. After mass he went into the chapter house and told how he had been healed, and his request that he might be received into confraternity with the convent was granted. And when he had obtained his wish, he offered to the convent 20 shillings for the love and honour of the blessed apostle who had snatched him from the jaws of death and he promised by a solemn oath to give them the same amount of money every year until he died. He fulfilled the object of his vow and as time passed he added to his devotional generosity by presenting annually a certain render of salt.

*Note* : Mauger Malcuvenant was sheriff of Sussex from Michaelmas 1155 to Michaelmas 1156 (*Pipe Roll 2 Henry II*, p. 60), but otherwise is unknown. Either the writer has misrepresented him as sheriff of Surrey (since, although later the two shires were held together, such was not the case in the twelfth century) or else he may possibly have acted as sheriff of Sussex during the reign of Stephen for which the exchequer pipe rolls are lost. Apart from this story, there is no other evidence for Mauger's gifts in money and kind to the monks of Reading.

### MIRACLE II (c. 1155)

At about the same time a certain woman in the village of Earley became swollen with the disease of dropsy. Believing that the blessed James would help her, she came to Reading on the eve of his nativity to call in her affliction upon God and the blessed apostle. At about the first vigil of the night, just as the monks were beginning matins, the aforesaid woman threw herself on the pavement of the presbytery and began to writhe and to have her inside stirred up from the very marrow for the sake of her health. Indeed, her very bowels were stirred up. She had passed some part of the night in this agony, when suddenly the pits of her stomach burst forth and the flood-gates of her bowels were opened. Again and again, she vomited up the poison which she had built up over a long

period and cleared out all the filth of harmful fluid. Before daybreak, before the night had run its full course, the mercy of the blessed James had been so efficacious that, when the woman's stomach was measured, to people's amazement it was found to be four handbreadths narrower than her own girdle. And so, restored to perfect health, she was eager to give thanks. The great crowd which had gathered for the feast day praised and glorified God for all the things which they had heard and seen.

*Note* : Earley lay just outside Reading to the east.

### MIRACLE III (c. 1155)

How fearful the Lord is in his purposes for the sons of men, the state of health of John the clerk bears witness. Suddenly and for some unknown reason he lost the power of speech and remained dumb for some long time. At the same celebration of the said apostle's feast, he came to Reading to entreat the creator of nature in respect of his own defect of nature. There, as he spent the night in prayer and carrying out of vigils, the chain of his tongue was loosed and he spoke normally, magnifying God. Afterwards the apostle's power was glorified by the inhabitants of Barking, for they knew that the aforesaid John had been dumb when he set out for Reading and yet on his return they heard him speak. And for many years afterwards in the abbess's chapel and in the guesthouse, where he was a servant, he used frequently to tell, in praise of the apostle, what happened to him and how he was healed.

*Note* : Barking, a house of Benedictine nuns re-founded in the tenth century, had no particular connection with Reading.

### MIRACLE IV

The Lord magnified his saint in many places and in many ways. In Reading there occurred at one time a disastrous and fatal plague which laid low young boys and girls as well as old folk and gathered a rich harvest of people with the daughters of its quiver.<sup>1</sup> And at that time,

<sup>1</sup> i.e., Arrows. The phrase is borrowed from Lamentations, iii, 13.

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within the space of one short year, thirteen monks of Reading Abbey were carried off and, of the rest, very many of the convent were exceedingly ill. And, since there was nobody to help them, they called upon the Lord to rescue them from their growing danger and to send a strong wind through the air. Accordingly an important decision was taken and it was decreed that a fast be proclaimed and the people be congregated in the church, when special litanies would be sung and they would perambulate the town in a well-ordered general procession in the hope of placating God by the protection of the blessed James whose hand they bore aloft. And this was done. The sick were laid out in the streets (the dead being kept indoors), so that they might look upon the reliquary which contained the sacred hand and be delivered from their infirmities. And indeed, as many can witness, almost everyone who saw it on that day was made well, whatever the sickness from which they were suffering, because power came forth from it and healed them all. On the same day and at the same hour the affliction ceased, the grief of the people was allayed, and the indignation of the Lord appeased. So, when all these things had been accomplished, each returned home joyfully and from that day onwards they have been free of that kind of plague.

*Note* : This is the only known reference to a twelfth-century plague in Reading.

### MIRACLE V

At the aforementioned time, when the Lord gathered a harvest of his people with the daughters of his quiver and decimated his sons, there was a man of Reading called Edward, surnamed Haver, who was overcome by a sickness and became very seriously ill, mainly with hectic fever. When the man had been suffering from this illness for some considerable time, sickness was added to sickness, pain to pain, and quinsy to fever. And since they came together they were particularly deleterious because they were linked to each other. The fever fed upon the wretched man's wretched

limbs and a serious blockage in his throat denied his body food and drink. The poor man could neither bring up nor swallow anything. But now the hardship of the earlier fever seemed light and moderate, compared with that of the quinsy which followed. Now his spirit disdained all food and he drew near to the gates of death. He passed several days in this agony before water of the blessed James was sent to him from the monastery of the monks of Reading and, filled with faith, he drank it down and, against all hope, took it into his body. The tumour in his throat at once went down, the blockage disappeared, and he recovered his voice, which had been all but stifled, and so through the wholesome antidote of the drink he came out in a sweat and after a short while was fully restored to health. He got up healthy and well and—something he had not done for a long time—he ate and drank, and gave worthy and due thanks to God and St. James.

*Note* : Edward Haver of Reading is otherwise unknown.

### MIRACLE VI

Some days later this man's daughter developed the same sickness as her father earlier. The father was anxious for his daughter on this account and was driven to have recourse to the remedy which he had tried previously. He therefore requested and obtained the aforesaid water of the aforesaid apostle and gave it to his daughter to drink. When she had drunk it all, she who had been sick very quickly regained her strength and was restored to health, and coming to the monastery along with her father she made votive offerings to St. James.

### MIRACLE VII

A certain woman named Goda, wife of a knight of Herefordshire called Hereward, grievously ill and almost without hope, sent to Reading for water of the blessed James. And when it had been brought, she had herself carried to church so that, in the house of the Lord and trusting in the Lord, she could



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somewhat more worthily drink the sanctifying liquid. And when she had been taken there, she prayed and received the antidote of the sacred liquid. Scarcely had the liquid touched and warmed her vitals, when it immediately brought about a cure within her. For the pain was removed, her body was revived and her spirit strengthened so that she got up healed, and, full of joy and praise, without anyone's assistance she returned on foot to her home from which she had shortly before been carried in the arms of bearers. Those who heard and saw these things gloriously performed in her gave praise to God.

*Note:* Both Goda and her husband have proved unidentifiable.

### MIRACLE VIII

A certain girl of Essex named Alice, daughter of a clerk, went to the sheepfold on Good Friday, just as day was breaking, to milk the sheep. On her way back there appeared in front of her a ghastly figure with a face like a man's and the appearance and form as though of a dead man prepared for his funeral and burial. When she saw it the damsel was terrified and began to tremble, and the blood froze round her heart. The phantom very quickly left her and disappeared. The damsel fled and ran away as fast as she could. Her hair stood on end and bristled, her senses were confused and she lost her reason. At length she got home and, catching sight of some fire, she threw it in her face. She became seriously disturbed, as though she had gone mad, and acted and moved very much like a mad woman. Eventually sleep came over her and put an end to these ravings. However, she slept with her left arm resting on her bare ribs below her breast. When she awoke and came to herself, the aforesaid arm had withered and had now become attached to her abdomen, in such a way that skin could not be parted from skin, nor flesh separated from flesh, and also one bone pressing on others caused her violent pain. Therefore, the aforesaid girl left home and went round the land seeking from

the shrines of saints a cure and aid to health. But after spending a great deal of time on this pilgrimage and deriving no benefit anywhere, she returned home worn out with grief and full of bitterness and gave up in despair. After a very short while the blessed James appeared to a certain matron of that region. 'Lady,' he said to her, 'Tell Alice to go to Reading, to the monastery of St. Mary, because there she will receive her health.' When she had seen this vision once and a second time and had neglected to do anything about it, he who had appeared twice appeared a third time, rebuking her sharply for her disobedience and commanding her under threat of punishment to inform the aforesaid girl of what she had seen. This done, the aforesaid girl, building up her hope of recovery set out for Reading. When she had spent six days there and had received no benefit, she lost heart and decided to return home the next day. At this point she was forestalled by the holy apostle and, advised to do so in a dream, she bought wax with the only coin she had and had a candle prepared for herself. Coming then to the church, she related her vision to the sacrist and was led in and admitted to the altar, where she heard mass and offered her candle. After mass, William, sub-prior of Reading, brought the reliquary in which the hand of St. James was kept and held it over the damsel's arm which had withered and become attached to her ribs, while the monk Nicholas poured water over and bathed her arm with it. Immediately the power of the apostle began to revive what had been dead, to loosen what had been bound and to separate what had been joined together. Now, as she began to recover, the pain became more intense, her agony more acute and her torment more grievous. But after about two or three hours, the arm came away from her side and fell into her lap and, as a sign and witness of the miracle, the skin had been torn from her ribs and was still hanging down from her arm. The arm still smelt and ached badly and became very swollen. But after she had spent some considerable time in the church, she completely recovered to perfect health, with no sign of her former

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infirmity and no trace of her disability remaining any longer on her. Accordingly, being grateful for the favours of the apostle, she devoted herself to his service. She washed the towels and other linen dressings of the church, receiving only the necessities for her body, and she gave devoted service to God and the apostle for quite a time, until she was seduced and abducted by a certain smith and became his wife, putting an end without leave to the praiseworthy intentions of her conscience.

*Note :* The dates of William, sub-prior of Reading, are unknown, but an Anselm occurs as sub-prior of Reading in a document dating probably from the 1180's (Egerton 3031, f<sup>o</sup> 38v) and a Simon occurs as sub-prior in a document of 1186×1213 (B. M. Cotton Vesp. E xxv, f<sup>o</sup> 193v).

### MIRACLE IX

There was a certain monk of Reading named Thomas, a native of those parts, who suddenly developed a tumour on his head which caused him very acute pain. This tumour grew bigger and bigger, adding tumour to tumour and reinforcing pain with pain. The swollen tumour spread down on to his cheeks and completely filled his face; his forehead joined up with his face and his cheeks came up to his eyebrows threatening to stop his sight. At length the tumour was checked for a time by the efforts of some doctor, but after a little while it revived and grew again, swelling very much more violently. His eyes itched so much that he would have pulled out his eyebrows, worn away his eyelids with scratching and picked out his eyes, if he had not kept his hand down by force and held the harmful urge in check. In this state, since there was no-one who could help, he called to the Lord and St. James to deliver him. Accordingly he called William, at that time sub-prior, asking and beseeching him to make a sign on his head with the sacred hand of St. James. For he said he believed and trusted in the merits of the apostle, so that, if it was right for him to live longer, he might be healed and receive full health from the good offices of so great a father. And so it turned out that, after the invalid's head had been signed

with the apostle's hand, he moistened a linen cloth with water of the blessed apostle and bound up his head with it, covering it all round. At once the itching began to subside, the pain began to ease and the tumour started to go down, growing less and withering away. After two days he was restored to perfect health and went in procession with the rest of the monks, showing no sign of his former sickness nor trace of the tumour which had disappeared.

*Note :* On William, the sub-prior, see note to miracle VIII.

### MIRACLE X

The hand of a certain monk of Reading named John had withered and had for the most part lost its power of movement. He could neither raise his hand nor keep hold of anything he might grasp. Coming therefore to the remedy which had been tried by many people, he bathed his withered hand with water of St. James and immediately, on that very day, his hand acquired its original movement and its habitual agility which he longed for.

### MIRACLE XI

At Collingborne there lived a certain woman who had been wasting away in long drawn out weariness from a frightful pain in her entrails. When she was asleep one night she saw the blessed James in a dream urging her, if she wished to recover her health, to go to Reading with her candle. And he who had appeared to her added that, if she came to Reading on the day which he appointed for her, she would see the sacred hand of the blessed James and obtain the cure which she desired. He also told her not to take the candle which she had made to Salisbury, as she had planned, but to Reading. In the morning she remembered her dream and set her face to go to Reading. Now, when she got to Reading she found the earl of Gloucester there with his wife and several great and powerful lords, who had obtained from the abbot permission to see and adore the hand of St. James. And so taking this opportunity, as had

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been foretold to her, she saw and adored the hand of St. James. And having secured the blessing of the sacred hand, the woman whose stomach had been diseased was cured and, after receiving her health, she openly told everyone what had happened to her and how it had come about as the result of a vision.

*Note :* It is uncertain whether this woman came from Collingbourne Ducis or Collingbourne Kingston, both in Wiltshire. The earl of Gloucester is unidentifiable.

### MIRACLE XII

A certain woman of Suffolk came to Reading with her daughter on the holy day of Whitsun. Now, nature had so condemned this girl from birth, that from her knees down she appeared to have no firm bones in her shins and could not bend or straighten her knees. For her shins were full of flesh and skin and could be folded over like gristle and pulled round with her arm. In the hope of recovering her health, her mother had taken her around the shrines of saints everywhere, in order that by the intervention of the saints the Lord might have mercy on her and deign to heal and raise her up. So then, when the girl saw in procession the reliquary in which the hand of the blessed James was kept, she felt the aid of divine power for her and the assistance of the apostle's presence. In fact her shins immediately began to harden and gain strength as firm bones, and as they did so her feet and the soles of her feet instantly hardened, with the result that in a short while she was very fully restored to health and acquired the power of walking.

### MIRACLE XIII

We have heard that a miracle very similar to this happened to a certain boy called William, a native of Reading; from his birth nature had so punished him by the awful laws of her indignation, that, with both legs shrunk, he was regarded as a spastic. Moreover, his legs were so thin that they appeared no thicker than a human thumb. On Christmas Eve,

however, the people had assembled in the church in their annual devotion and were listening to the divine mysteries, when the aforesaid boy was carried to the church and set down in front of the altar which the people have been accustomed to call the altar of St. James. He seemed to be cured from heaven and to receive strength in those limbs which had been seized by lameness. Indeed, the withered and shrunk sinews began to slacken and become moist, and his bones began to grow and harden. As a result, the boy stood upright supporting himself by the pillar standing to the right of the altar where he had lain. Hitherto he had been unaccustomed to standing upright and incapable of walking and so he was afraid to trust himself, because he lacked confidence in his ability and strength. After a little while he mastered the basic principles of walking and climbed up the steps to the altar, a difficult operation for the feet of a disabled person. And in order to show by whose merits he had been raised up, he stopped in front of the picture of the blessed James painted there and grasped the ends of the altar, as though he were giving thanks to his saviour or trying to embrace him. Throughout that night and Christmas Day he could not and would not be drawn away by any assault of the cold or any pang of hunger or thirst. On Christmas evening he went away healed and there remain no longer any signs of his lameness.

### MIRACLE XIV (1158-65)

In Bucklebury and in the villages around Bucklebury there had broken out a great plague which had infected men and beasts, sheep and oxen, and even the flocks in the field, with a deadly disease and had wiped out the greater part of them. But when it was getting a very strong hold and spreading without check, Roger, abbot of Reading, who had taken the hand of the blessed James to the king and had now brought it back with him, came to Bucklebury. And at the request of Peter, dean of Bucklebury, he celebrated mass there in honour of blessed James and, after mass, he blessed some water

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and dipped in it the reliquary containing the sacred hand. And with the apostle's hand held aloft he went out and came to a particular high spot and blessed the area suffering from the awful disaster, and gave instructions for the aforesaid water which had been blessed to be sprinkled on the homes and households. And this was done. On the same day and at that very hour the plague ceased and the cruel pestilence disappeared both among men and beasts.

*Note* : Bucklebury was a Berkshire manor belonging to Reading Abbey. This plague is otherwise unknown. The naming of Abbot Roger dates the miracle to 1158×65 and identifies the king as Henry II. The reference to Peter, dean of Bucklebury, is interesting. He is clearly the same as the monk who erected the memorial in the following story and, therefore, as a monk, cannot have been a rural dean. In all probability he was the monastic keeper of the abbey's Bucklebury estate and the designation 'dean' was derived no doubt from the Cluniac origins of Reading Abbey. Cf., B. M. Cott. Vesp. E xxv, f° 159v, f° 197v; and see my note on 'The Monastic dean of Leominster', *E.H.R.*, lxxxiii (1968).

### MIRACLE XV (1158-65)

Intent on preserving the memory of this miracle, the aforesaid monk proposed to erect a wooden cross on the hill where the above blessing had taken place. And when he had given the matter some thought, it came to him that in the wood of a certain knight, who was a neighbour and friend of his, there lay some felled timber just right for his project, which the knight had been unable, by any skill or effort of experts, to move from the spot where it had fallen. In fact, it had lain in the same place for two years. The monk persuaded him to give him the aforesaid timber, but when the timber had been loaded on to a cart and the oxen struggled to pull it, at the first try all the harnesses snapped like a spider's web. The ropes were twice repaired but both the second and third time they broke. When they saw this everyone was struck with amazement. At length the said monk, marking well the fact that the old enemy always hates the sign of the cross by which he was vanquished, sent someone at great speed to fetch him the water of blessed James to which

we referred above, and with it he sprinkled the yoke of the oxen, the ropes, timber, cart and oxen, and ordered the cart to be moved. At once, and with the greatest of ease, the oxen were able to move forward pulling the cart and experienced no further hindrance in their task. And now there was no need to threaten or goad the oxen, for, as though driven on by heaven, they hurried away to the appointed place. At this, those who were there hung back in amazement that they were undoubtedly witnessing a miracle and, following slowly a long way behind, they pondered on the way things had turned out. However, the oxen rushed on by themselves and arrived at the appointed place, where they stopped without anyone restraining them and refused to go any further. And at that spot a cross was constructed out of the wood and set up as a memorial of the miracle described above.

*Note* : This story helps to explain two charters of Jocelin, bishop of Salisbury (1142-84), in one of the Reading Abbey cartularies. In one of these (B. M. Egerton 3031, f° 6 or) the bishop grants an indulgence of 40 days to all of his diocese who, on the vigil or feast of St. Mary Magdalen, visit, and make an offering to, the holy place built in honour of God and St. Mary Magdalen at Bucklebury by the cross of St. James. In the other (*Ibid.*, f° 6or), the bishop grants an indulgence to those who visit the chapel of St. Mary Magdalen near (*iuxta*) Bucklebury and its graveyard, which he has dedicated. The cross of the first of these charters is obviously the one referred to in Miracle XV. There are good reasons for supposing that the chapel was in the manor of Marlston, held in the later twelfth century by Geoffrey Martel, for it is clear that the chapel on his manor was then in the parish of Bucklebury. (B. M. Add. Ch. 19610). It is not clear whether the chapel was built as a consequence of the quelling of the plague described in No. XIV, but, if that were the case, the dedication to St. Mary Magdalen might indicate that the plague had been one of leprosy, since her name was frequently associated with the disease and its cure. Cf. the foundation of a leper hospital dedicated to her in Reading Abbey by Abbot Anscher, 1130×35 (B. M. Egerton 3031, f° 11v).

### MIRACLE XVI (1158-65)

A few days later a man of Bradfield, bent up with shrinking of the sinews, was advised in a

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dream and had himself brought to the place where the cross had been set up. There he prayed for some time and gained the health and former fitness of his body.

*Note* : Bradfield is near Bucklebury, Berkshire.

### MIRACLE XVII (? before 1147)

In the village of Curridge a certain matron called Ysembela, wife of Sewal, the lord of the village, was overcome by a wretched illness. Her inside seemed so frozen that in the severity of her illness it was impossible to make it warm. In fact, with hardly a day's respite she growled and quaked, as though tormented beyond endurance by the severity of her fever, and was utterly at a loss to know what to do herself or what could be done for her. Like an epileptic she would fall half-dead to the ground and her face was that of a woman already about to breathe her last. She therefore consulted many physicians on several occasions, but failed to be cured by any of them. At length she returned home and, calling to mind the miracles which she had heard had been worked by blessed James, made a vow to God and blessed James. And she came to Reading to fulfil her vow and pray for her health. In the church she diligently observed the vigils she had promised and deservedly underwent a complete cure and, before she went away, recovered her original good health.

*Note* : Curridge is near Newbury (Berkshire). A certain Sewal held one hide of the King in Curridge and granted it to Waverley Abbey before 1147 (*Victoria County History, Berkshire*, IV, 60). The account of this miracle reads as though Sewal is still in possession of Curridge, but there is no conclusive evidence that the miracle dates from before 1147.

### MIRACLE XVIII (1163-87)

In the north of England there was a certain rich man's keeper of hounds named Gilbert, who was over-fond of the vanity of the chase and, drawing no distinction between one day and another, believed that vanity and pleasure were permitted on any day. On St. James' day

he cantered into the wood to hunt, paying no regard to the feast and failing to show due reverence to the apostle. And with his hounds he pursued a stag and, keeping on its heels for a good while, he eventually caught it. But when he proceeded to congratulate himself on his prize, the vengeance of the Lord came upon him, for salty perspiration seemed to run into his eyes and entirely cut off his vision. When he tried to wipe it away, he wiped away his sight as well. At length he just managed to grope his way to his horse and mounted, and, putting trust not in himself but in the intelligence of his steed, he attempted the journey home. Eventually, with difficulty and in pain, he got back, but for a long time he remained blind and, unable to be cured by ointments or remedies, he began to become a burden to those among whom he had previously been very popular. In his adversity he found few friends, in his poverty very few, and in his blindness scarcely any physicians, as in the saying, 'When you are successful you will number many friends; in bad times you will be alone'. Bound by poverty and grief he sat in darkness and in the shadow of death. Barely his wife alone had stayed with him to guide him and she took him everywhere round the shrines of saints, but in vain, for nowhere could he regain his sight. But after a long time it pleased the Lord to put an end to his affliction and provide a cure for his blindness. And so blessed James appeared to him in a dream and ordered him to go to Reading if he wished to receive the light of his eyes. In the morning the man arose and with his wife's guidance hastened to Reading in the hope which the dream had given him. Having arrived there he stayed for some considerable time, but experienced no improvement and, impatient at the wait and losing hope, he decided to go home blind. He therefore left Reading and got as far as Banbury, where, again in a dream, he was rebuked and urged to return to Reading, make himself a candle and await the promised cure on the approaching feast of the holy apostle. He was brought back again to Reading and with his candle was led into the monastery on the eve of blessed James. The

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following day the lord Gilbert, bishop of London, went up on to the screen and, as he transferred the hand of the most holy apostle from the old reliquary to a new one, he blessed the people with it. And when he lifted it up and gave the blessing, the aforesaid man's eyes began to smart keenly and to gleam. Moreover, tears of blood flowed from his eye-sockets and streamed down his cheeks. At that hour, in fact, and at that very moment his eyes were opened. He raised his head and, turning to look at his candle, saw that it had burned down as far as the knotted fold<sup>1</sup> and would go out at any moment. He quickly picked up the candle and, as he pulled up the wick, broke out in 'praise of most blessed James and announced that he had received his sight. The tears of blood which his eyes had shed were still sticking on the cheeks of the man who had received his sight, in witness of what had happened. Rejoicing then in the love and honour of the apostle, he served many years in the guesthouse at Reading, until, inspired inwardly by a stricter vow, he went to Jerusalem and rounded off his devotion laudably begun by a more renowned conclusion.

*Note* : Gilbert, bishop of London, is without doubt Gilbert Foliot (1163-87) and not Gilbert the Universal (1128-34). The reference to his having translated the Hand into a new reliquary is of great interest and it is unfortunate that one cannot date this act within limits narrower than those of his episcopate. It seems to show a certain bond between the bishop and Reading Abbey and it is worth noting in this respect that Abbot William of Reading was one of those who sent to the pope testimonials for Foliot in 1169 when the latter feared serious action against him by Thomas Becket and the pope (*Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, VI, 628-30).

### MIRACLE XIX (before 1189)

There was a man of a venerable way of life named Osbert, abbot of Notley, famous for his integrity and laudable in religion, who began to languish in the grip of a most grievous affliction of the eyes. Having tried ointments

and several medicines, he not only received no cure, but seemed rather to have grown very much worse and incurred great expense. He suffered more intense pain and more acute torment. If, for example, he happened to look at a ray of the sun or of any lamp, it seemed as if his head was suddenly being pierced and his eyeballs darkened. He spent sleepless nights and ever wakeful days. When he had been for some time in this pain and could find no rest for his head nor sleep for his eyes, on the advice of one of his canons, he vowed to go to Reading and honour St. James with the service of his pilgrimage. And no sooner had he uttered this vow with his mouth than his anguish started to ease and the pain began to go down, so that within three days he was able to sing mass, and so came to Reading as he had vowed fit and well. He presented a tall candle to the blessed apostle in fulfilment of his vow, light for light and praise for so speedy a dispensation.

*Note* : Osbert, abbot of Notley, occurs under Henry II, being succeeded by Robert, who occurs in 1189 (*Victoria County History, Buckinghamshire*, I, 379). Notley Abbey held the church of Caversham, near Reading, and deputed one of its canons to serve it as parish priest (D. Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales*, London, 1953, p. 133).

### MIRACLE XX (after Feb., 1173)

At *Estonie*, near *Seford*, there lived a girl named Ysembela, daughter of John the fisherman. By sleeping out in the open one summer time she disabled her body and lost her agility. In fact, her left side from the sole of her foot to her shoulder had withered and lost all living movement. Her hand was shrunken and paralysed and hung motionless from her side close to her back. Her foot was bent round and, incapable of acting as a foot, was so twisted that (? her main foot bones took the place of her heel, her toes were in the place of the bones, and the nails of her shoe were where her toes

<sup>1</sup> MS. *usque ad plicam condilatam*; i.e., the bulge at the base of the candle.

should have been).<sup>1</sup> And the girl, being thus made useless to herself and pitiable to others, was harrassed by her stepmother with many insults and taunted with abuse of various kinds. At length, inventing a hope of mercy, she was advised, or rather compelled, by her stepmother to see whether she could find a cure anywhere at the shrines of saints. But when, distressed at her own plight and eager for a cure, she had gone round many saints' shrines and derived no benefit, she returned to Canterbury hoping that by going back to the place which she had earlier been provoked into leaving she might obtain grace. She was worn out with effort and eaten up with pain when she got there and fell asleep. And in a dream she saw coming towards her St. James followed by a throng of saints in albs. He said to her, 'What are you waiting here for? What do you seek here?' 'I am in search of a cure,' she replied, 'and I am waiting for St. Thomas.' The aspotle answered, 'You will certainly not receive a cure here, but go to Reading, to my monastery, and there you will be healed.' 'But' she said, 'I have not seen Reading, nor do I know your monastery. And how can I go there when I am crippled and weak, ignorant of the way and penniless? No, I shall not go nor will I tire myself out any more to no purpose.' The aspotle insisted again and again, urging her to go to Reading and declaring without doubt that she would be healed there and nowhere else. But she rejected his advice and refused to believe his promises, seeing fit to argue with the apostle and to maintain that she would not go to Reading. Since she saw this vision many times and omitted to do what she was told, she certainly could not be cured at Canterbury, but after some time she went home completely destitute of all hope. And when her stepmother saw her, she was filled with spiteful hate and indignation, and said, 'Aha, you went away a cripple and, look, you have come back a cripple. Go away from me,' she said, 'and crawl where you will, for you shall certainly not stay under my

roof.' Full of shame, then, and wracked by a double pain, she turned aside to the home of one of her aunts. She was taken in there and, when she had told her aunt what she had heard, seen and endured, she came finally to the vision she had seen of St. James. When she heard this, her aunt exclaimed, 'Quick! Hurry as fast as you can and make haste to Reading. Take the only coin I have and when you get to Reading buy yourself a candle with it.' And so the girl left those parts on her journey to Reading and arrived there seven weeks later. She entered the church and, when she had lit her candle, the hand of the Lord came upon her and His spirit was troubled within her. And so it was that, stirred up for her cure, she threw herself on the pavement and, letting out the most piercing cries, screamed in all directions. She shook her hair about, banged her head and dashed her body against the stone with so little consideration for herself that one might have thought that she wished to destroy herself and extinguish what life was left in her. After about three hours it pleased the Lord to remedy her distress and put an end to her sickness. And so what she lacked in body and mind were restored to her. And when her lifeless limbs felt the motion of the senses and the sense of movement, they became alive again and recovered their natural fitness, and from a sprawling position resumed their proper place and function. When the girl had thus been made well and received the cure she had longed for, she was moved away from the place where she had fallen and taken to the alter of St. Mary Magdalen. There she laid herself down and, tired out after the agony of her struggle, fell asleep. Then she awoke and coughed up a bloody poison, in witness of the miracle and to round off the incomplete cure. After coughing she vomited up a great deal of blood. Again and again she vomited until the fluid which had harmed her, and could harm her again, seemed to be thoroughly cleared out, and thus she was made well and joyful. Accordingly she left for home completely cured,

<sup>1</sup> The bracketed passage is a suggested translation of an extremely awkward and probably corrupt passage in the original MS, where the full sentence

reads: *Pes circumflexus pedis officium diffitens ita pervertebatur ut calcis crates cratis articuli articulorum locum clavellata usurparent* (f° 174r).

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glorifying St. James in the Lord and the Lord in blessed James.

*Note : Estonie has not been identified. Seford' might be Seaford in Sussex, but the statement in this story that the girl returned to Canterbury, from which place she had earlier set out, suggests a place in Kent. The reference to St. Thomas of Canterbury dates the miracle after February 1173 when he was canonized.*

### MIRACLE XXI (1154-89)

Aquilina, daughter of Reginald de Courtenay and wife of Gilbert Basset, conceived and, after the normal period of pregnancy, came to the point of birth, but had not the strength to give birth. She was tormented by extreme agony of labour for some days and received no help or alleviation from the doctors she called nor from the medicines she tried. This was reported to Henry, king of England, at that time staying in those parts, and the king sent her as many gems and precious stones as he had which were believed to help those in labour. But these were applied and displayed in vain and every day, hour and minute, the longer she suffered, the more intense did the agony become. Therefore, when she had been in labour for four days and as many nights and had not given birth, only death seemed to remain and her end was thought to be rapidly approaching, chiefly because the fetus, being dead in her womb, had turned across her belly and made the mother's womb its own tomb, while one of its hands which had come out in birth continued to hang down for two days and could not be drawn back. In fact, it really looked like a dead body buried in a dying body, a corpse within a corpse, a child within its mother. Nevertheless, although she had lost hope and had no faith in midwives, water of St. James was brought to her from Reading and given to her to drink. This forestalled the onset of death and eased the agony of her labour, for immediately the sweetest sleep settled on her agonising torment and flowed over her anguish. And as she slept under its influence, unknowingly and feeling no pain, she gave birth and by the apostle's power escaped the jaws of death. Waking at length

from this healthgiving sleep and discovering that she had been delivered by St. James, she promised to visit and thank him at Reading. In fact, brooking no delay, she had a tall candle made and sent it to her deliverer. She herself followed, after the days of her purification, and performed the vow she had sworn, and in return for life which had been restored to her, she promised to pay annually fourpence from her chief manor.

*Note : Aquilina was the daughter of the Reginald de Courtenay of, *inter alia*, Sutton Courtenay (Berks), who died in 1194 (*Complete Peerage*, III, 465; IV, 317). As Egelina, she witnessed a charter by her husband, Gilbert Basset, to Bicester Priory in 1182 × 85 (*Monasticon Anglicanum*, VI, 434). In the later twelfth century Gilbert Basset held the manor of Ardington (Berks) and at the end of the century granted to Reading Abbey a perpetual lease of the demesne meadow of that manor (B. M. Egerton 3031, f° 95r).*

### MIRACLE XXII (1185)

As the king's son, John, was setting out for Ireland, one of the young men going with him broke his arm, I know not how. And when after a long time it failed to heal in response to physicians and plasters, he vowed to go to Reading and there fulfil his vow to St. James, if he might be healed by his merits and recover his health. And his arm was immediately healed and became sound. In due course this young man came to England, but he neglected to perform to St. James the vows which he had pronounced with his own lips and was shortly afterwards punished by an event of similar misfortune. This time his other arm was broken and he began inwardly to reflect on what he had suffered and the vows which he had made and not fulfilled. Remorsefully, therefore, he admitted the fault of his transgression, penitently had a wax arm with a hand made, and hurried to Reading. And so, when he had fulfilled his vow, his broken and fractured arm was healed and made completely sound. From this case one can see how much it pays to keep one's word and how dangerous it is to dissemble a vow.



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*Note*: The occasion of the first accident was the expedition of Henry II's youngest son, John, newly created Lord of Ireland, which set out from Milford Haven in 1185 (*Gesta Henrici Secundi*, ed. W. Stubbs (Rolls Series), I, 336).

### MIRACLE XXIII

There was a certain woman in the Oxford region who had been confined to bed for two years, bent up and shrunken. And she was advised in a dream to have herself taken to St. James at Reading. Her brother, therefore, set her in a two-wheeled carriage and she set out for Reading. And it happened that as she went she was cured. And from the place where she was healed she came with her brother to Reading on foot, without the vehicle, and, when she had made her votive offering, she and her brother told us what had happened to her and how she had been cured.

### MIRACLE XXIV

A certain knight named Robert of Stanford was overtaken and long afflicted by a very severe fever. He therefore came to Reading to pray for a cure and plead with the blessed apostle. And after prayer he asked that water of blessed James be given to him to drink for a little while. No sooner had he tasted it than it brought about a cure within him. He proceeded to vomit again and again until the harmful fluid was brought up and the feverish heat was reduced by the vomiting. Full of joy and praise he returned home cured.

*Note*: Robert of Stanford has proved unidentifiable.

### MIRACLE XXIVa<sup>1</sup>

In a similar way and by a similar remedy another knight named Ralph Gibuin was cured of a similar disease, as also were so many others, both men and women, that I cannot cover them all in this account.

*Note*: A Ralph Gibewin is found in possession of lands in Liscombe, Soulbury and Wavendon (Bucks)

<sup>1</sup> The MS does not make this a separate miracle.

in Richard I's reign (*Pipe Rolls 3 and 4 Richard I*, pp. 109, 111, 201, 203).

### MIRACLE XXV (1173)

Matthew, count of Boulogne, brother of Philip, count of Flanders, had laid siege to Driencourt with Henry III, King of England, and on St. James' day bullied the king to enter the castle and attempt to take it by storm. But the king and his magnates, showing honour to the blessed apostle, declared that they would in no way dare to take up arms that day. The aforesaid count was furious and indignant with them and demanded that he should be allowed to keep whatever booty and spoils he might take that day. When this was agreed many thousands of warriors joined with him and he advanced to storm the aforesaid castle. At the first attempt, however, a type of small arrow, commonly called a *pila*,<sup>1</sup> shot as it were from heaven, lodged under his knee-cap. At this injury the army began to fall back on all sides and abandon the assault. And he himself was carried back to his tent, in more and more acute pain as each moment passed, and was eventually seized by an evil spirit which tormented him for a considerable time. And in this way a fitting death punished the shameful audacity of his arrogance.

*Note*: This story is not directly related to the Hand of St. James or to Reading. The incident described took place during the serious rebellion against Henry II in 1173, the king mentioned here being the eldest son of Henry II, who was crowned king in his father's lifetime in 1170 and is frequently named in unofficial records of the later twelfth century as Henry III. He never became sole king, in fact, for he predeceased his father in 1183. Ralph de Diceto gives another account of the death of Matthew, count of Boulogne, which, oddly enough, mentions the Hand of St. James. According to him the count was mortally wounded on the feast of St. James (25th July), 1173, as an act of divine vengeance, chiefly because on the same feast five years earlier he had solemnly sworn fealty to Henry II in the presence of, and having touched, holy relics which included the Hand of St. James, and was now in rebellion against him.

<sup>1</sup> The translation of this word is uncertain—possibly either 'ball' or 'mortar',

## THE MIRACLES OF THE HAND OF ST. JAMES

Ralph de Diceto says that the wounding took place during an assault on the castle of Arches, immediately following the capitulation of the castle of Driencourt (*Opera Historica*, ed. W. Stubbs, (Rolls Series) I, 373).

### MIRACLE XXVI (1154-89)

A certain brother of the venerable house of canons at Merton, named Roger Hosatus, was stricken by a serious illness and began to grow weak. Indeed so extreme was his weakness that there was hardly any life left in him, only pain. His belly and vital parts ached with severe pain from a swollen tumour, but in addition his entire body was so affected in every part by the piercing agony of this fierce and intense disorder that there was no hope for him but the ultimate fate of death. However, when the long drawn out pain had engulfed him for a considerable time and his sickness, the forerunner of death, was not checked, a cure came to him from the king's throne. For there turned aside in order to find lodging two brothers of Reading carrying back the hand of blessed James which King Henry II had had brought to him as he was about to cross the Channel, that he might worship it in votive devotion and be fortified by the protection and blessing of the apostle's hand before he went upon the sea. The aforesaid Roger, who earlier seemed in despair and entirely without hope, was greatly encouraged by the arrival of so important a guest and, rejoicing in his heart (which he could not do in his body), he ran to meet the apostle's relics with his love (which he could not do with his feet), hoping to gain the help of faith and receive the rewards of hope. And because he knew that many people had been cured of many illnesses by a mere taste of the water of blessed James, doing what he could himself and where he had not the strength acting through intermediaries, that is to say, canons of the aforesaid house, he sought and obtained the health-giving water. When he had tasted a drop of it, his insides were stirred up and set in motion. He immediately vomited up the poison which had settled in a lump on his chest and heart and as soon as these organs were relieved he ate and drank,

as he had not done for a long time previously. And in this way, taking a little of the water on the following and on the third day, he vomited up from every part of his body all the filth of harmful fluid. And thus restored to perfect health by grace of the apostle, he came to Reading and performed the vows which he had promised orally to the apostle.

*Note:* Merton Priory, a house of Augustinian canons founded 1114, had no particular connection with Reading.

### MIRACLE XXVII (1127)

Richard de Leuns, a knight living in the village of *Wavercurt* near Banbury, brought his son, a young man called Peter, safely back from the jaws of death by invoking St. James. Being bound in special devotion to this apostle, he had twice visited the apostle's home in Galicia, accompanied on the second journey by the said boy as comrade and fellow traveller. But in the year of the Lord's incarnation 1127, about fifteen days before the feast of the apostle's passion, the aforesaid Peter in failing health lay dying at *Wavercurt*. Indeed, the use of physical faculties had gone from his exhausted body, weakness had replaced his natural fitness and (then) death had supplanted weakness, threatening the feeble life which barley yet remained. Meanwhile his father came quickly to him and, confident of the apostle's grace towards him, on account of his devotion to the apostle, promised that, if the youth might be restored to life out of the jaws of death by the apostle, he would take him to Reading, where the apostle's relics were kept, to render thanks. And the vow did not go unanswered. Immediately the chains of death gave way to life, the power of feeling came back to his senses, movement was restored to his limbs, and the colour of life reappeared in his face. His lifeless flesh bloomed again and of his own will the boy witnessed to the apostle's power. Not long after the feast of the apostle the father came to Reading to fulfil his vows on behalf of the young man's life and told of these things, with his wife's corroboration and with the above

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youth and other notable persons of both sexes as unimpeachable household witnesses, even though the father's noble character, his old age and floods of tears gave more than enough credibility to the story.

*Note: Wavercurt, near Banbury (Oxon), is unidentifiable. If one can accept the date 1127, this*

story is proof that the Hand was in Reading Abbey's possession in Henry I's reign, but the placing of this miracle at the end of the series and the fact that no other miracle is so precisely dated cannot but raise suspicions as to the authenticity of the date.

May therefore the mercies and wonders of the Lord bear witness of Him to the sons of men.