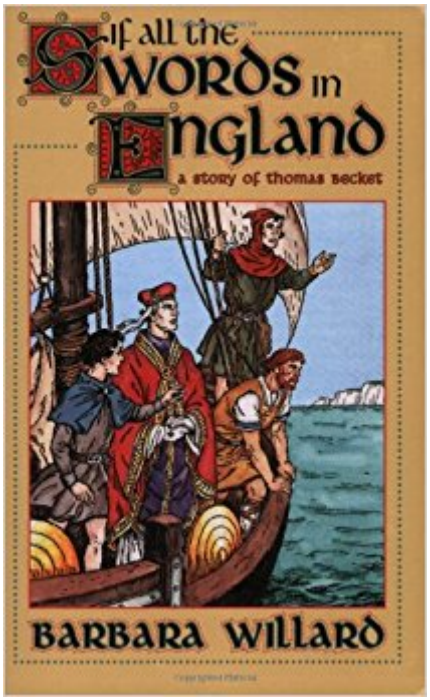
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If All The Swords In England: A Story Of Thomas Becket (Living History Library)



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Synopsis

Young Simon, recently and tragically orphaned, becomes a scribe in the following of the exiled Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket. The uncertainty of the tumultuous years leading to the infamous cathedral slaying is heightened by Simon's separation from his twin Edmund, who is in the service of King Henry II.

Book Information

Series: Living History Library

Paperback: 194 pages

Publisher: Bethlehem Books (May 1, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1883937493

ISBN-13: 978-1883937492

Product Dimensions: 8.5 x 5.6 x 0.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #415,617 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #113 inÃ Â Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Medieval #83693 inÃ Â Books > Religion & Spirituality

Age Range: 10 and up

Grade Level: 5 and up

Customer Reviews

Set in England and France and covering the last years of St. Thomas A Becket in his struggle against Henry II of England. Uses the characters of two brothers who become separated, one following the king and the other following the bishop, to examine both viewpoints. Moving story with good period flair.

Barbara Willard's If All the Swords in England, first published in 1961, makes a happy comeback in this quality paperback edition by Bethlehem Books.The drama unfolds during the turbulent years of the argument between King Henry II Plantagenet and Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, concerning juridical authority in church matters.After the tragic deaths of their parents, brothers Simon and Edmund Audemer are separated. Edmund becomes a page in the court of King Henry II, while Simon becomes a scribe in the household of Thomas Becket.Willard's use of the literary

device of the two brothers allows the reader a "first-hand" glimpse into both the characters of Thomas Becket and Henry II as well as into the climate of the times.The book is full of exciting episodes (including a miracle), and interesting characters. Barbara Willard's If All the Swords in England presents a timeless story of courage and conscience. It is also an excellent introduction to the heavier Becket by Anouilh and T.S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral. Grades 5-7.

I have enjoyed reading about Thomas Beckett, but my sons have been less enthusiastic about this book. It offers a view of what was going on in 1170 in England and France, but is a little hard to follow.

Even if you know what happens to Becket, Willard weaves a fascinating tale of drama and intrigue. Henry II and Thomas Becket are locked in a battle of the wills. Henry is determined to win, but will he? Henry II wants more power. Becket believes Henry's thirst for power has extended too far when he wants to include Church matters.Even though we learn about the raging battle between Henry II and Thomas Becket, the story centers around Simon and his twin brother Edmund. Tragically, Simon and Edmund are orphaned. Where will they go? Who will they live with? Sadly, they are unable to stay together. Simon eventually enters the household of Thomas Becket as a scribe. Edmund enters the service of Henry II as a page. They provide eye-witness accounts into the personalities of Henry and Thomas and their ongoing dispute.Willard not only outlines the facts of the case, she also engages the heart of the reader. We sympathize with Simon's suffering, the loss of his family and his inability to use his hand. In doing so, we also see gain compassion for Becket and his dilemma. Through Simon's compassion for others, we come to admire Simon's noble spirit.Willard expertly educates by entertaining the reader. We learn about Henry inflicting his impulsive, raging temper on innocent lives and the devastating impact it has on them through his whims and forced marches, resulting in death to many. Most people just know that Henry and Thomas disagreed, through this story we learn how far ranging the effect of his temper had on others.Willard accomplishes what few children's authors are able to do; She holds the interest of adults as well as children. She creates a story that holds the reader's attention, by developing a multilevel story that engages the heart and mind. We not only learn about Henry II and Thomas Becket, but we also learn about the greatness of the human heart, the strength of character to stay true to conscience, and the value of a loving family.

If All the Swords in England tells the well-known tale of St. Thomas Becket and King Henry II

through the eyes of two twin brothers, Simon and Edmund. Separated in their youth by the death of their parents, Simon, who is lame in one hand, becomes a servant to Becket the exiled Archbishop of Canterbury. He witnesses the sufferings of the Archbishop's household in France and the numerous attempts to bring about a reconciliation between the estranged churchman and his sovereign.Meanwhile, Edmund comes of age in the royal court. He sees first hand the rages of a king obsessed with protecting his royal power and extending it even into the realm of the Church. The King will not reconcile with his former friend due to Thomas's insistence on standing up for the honor of God.This book starts off slow but the climax is exceptionally well done--even if you know what's coming. In St. Thomas Becket, one can see a reflection of Christ, who fearlessly stood face-to-face with brutal, murderous men having nothing to defend himself with but the cross. All in all, this book is a fine introduction to the life of a very admirable man, and is easily read by young folks 12 and up.

The story was well told. It pointed out many of the traditions of the church at the time.

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